

# Competing Interests III:

## Taking Action to Make Diversity & Inclusion a Reality





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There are many things that the legal profession can do to advance greater diversity and inclusion in its ranks. Here, however, we focus on those suggestions that will address situations where the value placed upon diversity and inclusion is forced into conflict with other, equally important values, and how the profession might find “win-win” solutions for the benefit of all.

## Recommendations for Action by Corporate Law Departments and Law Firms

The recommendations below presume that change starts at the top and that the commitment is real. To have real systemic change, General Counsel and Law Firm Chairs must actively lead and drive their organizations toward change. That said, even without leadership from the top, individual attorneys in corporate law departments and law firms can implement many of these recommendations in their own practices to effect change.

Some of these recommendations are new. Some, in one form or another, have been tested over time and are proven to work. Some only call for a modest change in behavior with no additional time commitment. They are included here because, taken as a whole, these action steps will substantially improve diversity and inclusion in the legal profession -- if they are implemented consistently, rigorously, and with accountability at all levels. With the minority population in the United States approaching 40%, the time has come for members of the legal profession to fully embrace diversity and inclusion.

Underlying these recommendations is the belief that responsibility for creating a truly diverse and inclusive legal profession is shared equally by corporate law departments and law firms. We are long past the time when it is okay for law firms to wait for their clients to insist they change (they have), or for law departments to say we’re doing our best but we can’t get involved in the management of our law firms (they are). Both are abdications of personal and professional responsibility especially where we have learned from studying convergence programs that the relationships between clients and law firms have become more intertwined and this trend will continue.

These recommendations also recognize the importance that personal relationships and trust play when in-house counsel is engaging outside counsel.<sup>1</sup> We have considered the (i) potential reluctance of in-house counsel to lose control over their selection of outside counsel, (ii) concerns of in-house counsel using outside counsel not well known to them, and (iii) tendency of companies to use certain “known” attorneys or law firms in certain cases because they provide “coverage” if anything goes wrong. Thus, we focus on developing the relationship between in-house counsel and law firm attorneys (a) in an effort to address the potential for implicit and unconscious bias, and (b) to structure opportunities for interactions whereby in-house counsel will become more familiar with the talent and abilities of outside counsel.

Creating a successful diversity & inclusion program requires:

- Honest analysis of how diverse and inclusive the law department or law firm is now;
- Clear goals as to where it wants to be within desired timeframes;
- A plan to achieve those goals;
- Someone to own the plan within the organization; and

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1. Altman Weil, Inc. conducts Chief Legal Officer Surveys. <http://www.altmanweil.com/index.cfm/fa/home/home/home.cfm> In 2011, based upon 176 responses it concluded that “Personal Contacts” ranked number one when evaluating the “Effectiveness of Law Firm Marketing.” In 2012, based upon 204 responses it concluded that “Recommendations from Colleagues” ranked number two, and “Personal contacts” number three as “Law Firm Selection Influencer” behind “Understanding the Business/Industry” as number one.

When creating or implementing any new procedure, protocol or policy in your organization, take the time to consider any potential inadvertent negative impact it might have on your organization's diversity and inclusion success.

- Understanding and agreement from members of the organization that the person selected to own the plan is charged with being a change agent.

The “plan” is the key to change. It must:

- Address the improvements required to the organization's diversity and inclusion culture and infrastructure, and the manner in which they will be implemented.
- Create a leadership structure with the authority to ensure compliance with the plan.
- Have clear and measurable goals for the organization as a whole, and for attorneys within the organization with timeframes and methods for measurement (for law departments this includes both internal and outside counsel goals).
- Require accountability from all participants within the organization, which for law departments includes accountability from their primary law firms.
- Require recognition for those who meet or exceed goals, and negative consequences for those who do not.
- Be consistently monitored and evaluated for compliance and effectiveness, and adjusted where necessary.

### **Two Recommendations for Everyone – Awareness is Critical**

1. Make an effort to recognize and understand how your own implicit and unconscious biases, and those of others, play out in your organization and in your own practice. Consider ways you can help combat it. When you believe bias played a role in decision-making, find productive ways to raise your concerns. Silence is complicity.
2. When creating or implementing any new procedure, protocol or policy in your organization, take the time to consider any potential inadvertent negative impact it might have on your organization's diversity and inclusion success. Include a diverse group in the decision-making process to avoid having to deal with unintended consequences.

## Specific Recommendations for Corporate Law Departments

### Review & Improve Your Law Department's Diversity & Inclusion.

- Do you have diverse attorneys at all levels, including in senior management? If no, develop a plan and time frame in which to change that internally, and communicate that plan within the law department.
- Do you have an agreed pipeline program with your preferred law firms?
- Do you hire diverse attorneys working in government and/or at regulatory organizations?
- Do you have a training program to educate diverse attorneys where needed to insure they have the required skills to succeed in your organization?
- Make sure all senior managers know the attorneys in the law department. Some simple steps to help those who are different feel included, and give senior managers an opportunity to spot talent they might otherwise overlook:
  - In your location and when visiting other law department offices, take time to meet those you don't know – stop by someone's office to introduce yourself and find out what they do, or invite a diverse group for coffee.
  - Require that every senior manager, on a quarterly basis, invite 1 or 2 attorneys they don't know from diverse backgrounds to lunch.

**2. Diversity Leadership.** Establish a law department 'Diversity Leader' position as part of the law department's management team charged with (i) responsibility for implementing the diversity & inclusion program, and (ii) the authority to take the steps required to get it done.

- Assign a senior law department attorney to this position, either working individually in partnership with the GC or as the head of a group of law department members.
- Make this position responsible for issue spotting diversity and inclusion concerns, and accountable for overseeing and implementing processes and solutions to the identified concerns.
- Make the law department's diversity and inclusion goals the primary job description for this position; do not simply add this work onto an already full plate of legal work.

Make sure all senior managers know the attorneys in the law department. . . . Require that every senior manager, on a quarterly basis, invite 1 or 2 attorneys they don't know from diverse backgrounds to lunch.

Every law department attorney who engages outside counsel should take steps to know the diverse attorneys in their practice areas who work in the law department's primary firms.

- Provide sufficient support for this position, including budget and IT resources. An unfunded and unsupported initiative is bound to fail.
- Have the law department's diversity committee report to this position.

### 3. Know and Support the Diverse Attorneys in the Law Department's Primary Law Firms.

- Actions by Individual In- House Attorneys. Every law department attorney who engages outside counsel should take steps to know the diverse attorneys in their practice areas who work in the law department's primary firms.
  - Review Law Firm Bios. If the law department collects attorney bios, review them so you know diverse attorneys who can work on a matter in advance of engaging outside counsel.
  - Law Firm Visits. If you are at one of your primary law firms, use the opportunity to meet diverse attorneys in that office – whether for coffee, over lunch, or just stopping by an attorney's office to introduce yourself.
  - Invite Your Law Firm Attorneys to Meet Your Team. Invite the outside counsel teams that work on your matters to come to your office for a 1-hour meeting with your team, whether simply to meet or to discuss key legal issues of concern to your business. Be clear in the invitation that you want the entire team, and expect they will include young and diverse attorneys. Bring your diverse team to the meeting.
  - Informal Mentoring. Informally mentor those who show promise handling your company's matters. Work with them directly; teach them the business, the company's risk tolerance and other key issues that will enable them to be more efficient and effective.
- Actions by the Law Department. Schedule activities and take other actions to facilitate law department attorneys getting to know the diverse lawyers in your primary law firms. Many of the suggested activities are considered "de-biasing activities" as they break down implicit and unconscious biases by providing diverse attorneys with opportunities to demonstrate their talent and abilities, thus allowing in-house counsel to see them as attorneys and not just diverse attorneys.
  - Diverse Attorney Bios. Require that your primary law firms provide short bios of their diverse attorneys in electronic form, to include the attorney's primary practice areas, and something about the attorney that may help establish a personal connection with in-house counsel, e.g., hometown, college, law school, interests. Make the bios available to all attorneys in the law department in an efficient, easy-to-access manner, searchable by geography and practice areas.

- *Host Webinars or Conference Calls For Your Law Firms About Your Business.* These can cover the ABC's of your business, or specific hot legal topics of high concern. Specifically invite the diverse attorneys you use or are considering using to attend.
- *CLE Seminars.* Invite a diverse attorney individually or together with another firm attorney to come to the law department and present a CLE session on a legal Issue of Importance to your company.
- *Host a Diversity Conference.* Periodically invite your primary law firms and new law firms you want to get to know to meet with your law department to (1) share information about your company's business and corporate culture, and (2) provide time for in-house counsel and their law firm attorneys to begin to create, or reinforce existing, relationships. In the invitations, explicitly require attendance by at least one diverse attorney. Ask for a diverse attorney by name if there's someone you specifically want to attend.

#### 4. Address Diversity Head-On When Engaging or Not Engaging Law Firms.

- If lack of diversity is a reason a law firm is not hired for a specific matter, or is not included as a primary firm under a convergence program, tell that to the firm. Be explicit, e.g., "your firm [or specific practice area in the firm] lacks the diversity we need and expect from our outside legal counsel".
- If a law firm receives work, or is included as a primary firm under a convergence program, in part because of its diversity success or efforts, tell the firm explicitly that its diversity record was part of the engagement decision.
- Communicate this in writing, in an engagement letter or a separate communication. For convergence programs, this is most effective if communicated by the GC to the firm's senior management.

**5. Rate your law firms.** Measure and track the numbers and percentages of the diverse lawyers working on your matters in the law firms you use. Consider how the firm supports diversity and inclusion internally and externally. Then communicate the outcomes to each firm. Consider factors such as:

- The percentage of diverse attorneys working on the company's matters based upon overall billable hours, and the percentage of that work by diverse attorneys by level within the firm (associate, counsel, income partner, and partner).
- The level of the diverse attorneys working on your matters, with greater weight given to diverse partners and the least weight given to first year diverse associates.

If lack of diversity is a reason a law firm is not hired for a specific matter, or is not included as a primary firm under a convergence program, tell that to the firm.



- The firm’s record of promoting diverse attorneys to partnership, and including diverse attorneys on key management committees.
- The firm’s efficiency and timeliness in responding to all billing and diversity and inclusion requests from the company.
- The level of the firm’s participation in the company’s diversity and inclusion events and those held by diversity organizations.
- Articles written, and training given, by diverse attorneys in the firm on key industry issues of importance to the company.

**6. Diversity Progress Meetings with Primary Law Firms.** Hold annual meetings with your primary law firms, attended by law department senior managers, and the firm’s senior management and key relationship partners, to address the following.

- **Diversity Rating Review.** Review the firm’s diversity and inclusion rating, how it compares with its peers, its progress or lack thereof, and the steps you expect it to take in order to continue getting business from your company. Assess the percentage of work on your matters handled by diverse attorneys by level (associate, counsel, income partner, partner) and award higher ratings for work handled by partners so as to encourage partnership diversity. Set explicit goals and timeframes for the law firm. Be prepared to fire a firm that does not meet, or at least take concrete, measurable steps to meet, its goals, and let the firm know you will do this.



Treat and value convergence policies and programs with the same focus on diversity and inclusion as you do everything else.

- **Relationship Partner Succession Planning.** Proactively raise succession planning with the law firm for all relationship partners well in advance of any departure that you can foresee. It is an excellent opportunity to reinforce the value your company places on diversity and inclusion. Require the firm to actively consider a diverse slate of candidates, and not just anoint the ‘favorite’ of the partner who may leave. If there’s someone you think would be good, and would allow the firm to retain your business, tell the firm. If the firm truly does not have the right diverse attorney successor, and cannot recruit the right person to join the firm, consider requiring that the firm appoint someone who is an active diversity and inclusion proponent, with a clear goal of finding and developing a diverse attorney as his/her successor.

**7. Addressing Convergence (Preferred Provider) Programs.** Treat and value convergence policies and programs with the same focus on diversity and inclusion as you do everything else. Once established, do not presume things will remain the same. Continually review the impact and effectiveness of each preferred provider firm in all respects, and make adjustments with a firm where appropriate, fire a clearly non-conforming firm, and create exceptions to policy in order to further all the company’s business goals.

- On a regular basis review the law department’s preferred provider law firms. If a firm is not meeting the law department’s diversity and inclusion goals, set explicit goals and timeframes for the law firm to correct the problem. Be prepared to fire a firm that does not meet or at least take concrete, measurable steps to meet its goals, and let the firm know you will do this.
- Offer the firm an opportunity to develop a customized diversity and inclusion plan that takes that firm’s location and demographics into consideration, and then hold them strictly accountable for meeting the goals it selects and prioritizes.
- Consider and ways to expand the preferred provider lists in order to increase the company’s base of highly qualified diverse attorneys to hire.
- Solicit suggestions from the law department attorneys as to other firms that have great diversity in unique or specialty legal areas, whether majority-owned or women and/or minority-owned, and add them to your primary law firm list.
- If the law department puts out an RFP or REQ, seek out and include diverse attorneys in other firms to participate as a way to get to know them better.
- Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Do you want to continue doing business with and supporting a firm financially or otherwise that does not demonstrate through its actions that they share the same commitment to diversity and inclusion as your company?

- Why would you continue to employ a law firm that enjoys the financial upside of your relationship but ignores the ethical, intellectual, moral or social calling to become more diverse and inclusive?

**8. Institute a Formal Process to Vet New Diverse Attorneys** met at bar association and other organizational conferences and networking events.

- Establish a process and use it consistently within the law department to assess the suitability of lawyers seeking work as outside counsel.
- Assign responsibility to the Diversity Leader or his/her staff in collaboration with the law department attorney who met the prospect to determine whether the prospect is qualified to do the company's work and to make sure the appropriate person within the law department:
  - Responds to qualified prospective attorneys and coordinates next steps;
  - Responds to prospects who are less than ideal attorneys, and explains the reasons why, e.g., correctable weaknesses or shortcomings that need improvement;
  - Notifies attorneys unlikely to be hired, with reasons why if appropriate, so those attorneys can focus their efforts elsewhere.
- Use this process to create and develop a pipeline of diverse attorneys.





## 9. Use Your External Diversity Resources.

- Actively promote, and encourage involvement with, the diversity organizations of which the law department is a member. The Diversity Leader or someone on his/her staff should be responsible for making this information available, and distributing it within the law department (not simply posted in an obscure place on an internal diversity website).
- Many legal diversity organizations maintain readily accessible databases of diverse attorneys by practice area, geography and law firm. The leaders of these organizations also have a tremendous network of lawyers. Use these databases and seek out these leaders knowledge when seeking new diverse counsel to do your company's work

## Specific Recommendations for Law Firms

### 1. Review & Improve Your Law Firm's Diversity & Inclusion.

- Do you have diverse attorneys at all levels, including on key committees, e.g., executive, compensation, hiring? If no, develop a plan and time frame in which to change that internally, and communicate that plan within the firm.
- Make sure all senior partners know the attorneys in the firm. Some simple steps to help those who are different feel included, and give senior partners an opportunity to spot talent they might otherwise miss:
  - In your location & when visiting other firm offices, take time to meet those you don't know – stop by someone's office to introduce yourself & find out what they do, or invite a diverse group for coffee.
  - Require that every senior partner, on a quarterly basis, invite 2 or 3 attorneys they don't know from diverse backgrounds to lunch.
- Have members of the firm's leadership group select and mentor young attorneys who are different from them. Make certain the group of mentees reflects the diversity that exists in your firm.
- Work with a diverse partner and/or associate to market your services to a potential or existing client, and make sure that diverse attorney works on matters obtained from those marketing efforts.

**2. Review and Realign Internal Law Firm Budgets.** Recognize that marketing and business development, professional development, recruitment, and diversity and inclusion are separate but equally important areas, and budget appropriately for each. By not diluting true 'diversity' dollars, the firm can more effectively measure the value of its marketing, business development, professional development, and recruiting activities.

- The diversity budget should be directed toward efforts to support and promote diversity and inclusion within and outside the firm, such as internal diversity conferences, honoraria for speakers brought in to educate the firm about different facets of diversity, and charitable diversity efforts. The diversity budget reflects the firm's longer-term view; it's an investment in the firm's future well-being.
- Allocate all business development and marketing efforts to the firm's business development and/or marketing budgets. This includes attendance at 'diversity' conferences when the primary focus is on business development.

- Allocate all professional development activities to the firm's professional development budget. This includes things such as attendance bar association conferences that focus on professional development or participation in leadership programs, whether held by mainstream, specialty or diversity organizations, and consultants hired to coach individual attorneys.
- Allocate all recruitment activities to the firm's recruitment or hiring budget. The goal is to hire the best, most talented attorneys. Having a diverse pool of candidates from which to hire is not a 'diversity' issue; it's the best way to achieve that goal.

### **3. Respect Your Client.**

- If you know a client or potential client cares about diversity and inclusion, be proactive. Bring the client a diverse team before they ask. Don't show up at a client meeting without a diverse team.
- Don't be afraid or fearful of inquiring of a client whether it has a diversity and inclusion plan or program, and how you can be helpful.
- If you bring a diverse attorney on a client pitch and get the business, make sure that attorney is given meaningful work on that matter. Wherever possible, encourage that attorney to communicate directly with the client to further develop his/her and the firm's client relationship.

### **4. Efficiently Use the Firm's Diversity Resources and Dollars.**

- Actively promote, and encourage involvement with, the diversity organizations of which the firm is a member. Assign someone within the firm the responsibility for making this information available, and distributing it within the firm (not simply posted in an obscure place on the firm's website).
- Save money by ceasing to duplicate programs that already exist and are available to your attorneys. Before embarking on any new diversity and inclusion endeavor, determine if another organization has a program that will meet the firm's goals. Partner with the diversity organizations to which you belong. "Doing it yourself" is mostly viewed as marketing, but does little to further the firm's diversity and inclusion.
- When assessing the financial or other costs of a diversity program or initiative, or even just supporting the professional development of a diverse attorney with whom you work, consider the dollar amount you are being asked to underwrite against the potential cost of losing that attorney from your organization.

## **Conclusion**

Taking the outlined action steps requires leadership, discipline, and commitment. As they say, if it was easy, everyone would do it. We are confident that these actions steps will make your organization more diverse and inclusive, and your actions will encourage others to follow.

# About IILP

The Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession (“IILP”) is a 501 (c) (3) organization that believes that the legal profession must be diverse and inclusive. Through its programs, projects, research, and collaborations, it seeks real change, now, and offers a new model of inclusion to achieve it. IILP asks the hard questions, gets the data, talks about what is really on people’s minds, no matter how sensitive, and invents and tests methodologies that will lead to change. For more information about IILP, visit [www.TheIILP.com](http://www.TheIILP.com).

# About “Competing Interests”

Each year, IILP presents Symposia on the State of Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession around the US, based in large part on our *Review* of the State of Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession. These symposia have given us a unique opportunity to observe geographic differences in attitudes toward and perspectives on diversity and inclusion within the legal profession. As a result, we’ve seen firsthand that where one stands has profound impact upon one’s perspective. The *Review* and Symposia are different from traditional diversity and inclusion publications and programs in that they bring together a cross-section of diversity issues which allows us to challenge preconceived notions about diversity and to offer an examination of intersectionality and diversity within diversity and inclusion.

Adding yet another dimension to our thought processes was our joint program with the Chicago Bar Association, “Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in a Global Legal Profession” which we presented in Lausanne, Switzerland in March, 2016. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first conference devoted to discussing diversity, equality and inclusion in the profession to be held outside the U.S. or the U.K. There, we found ourselves engrossed in conversations among our American and European participants that when synthesized resulted in a basic question: Given competing demands, declining resources, institutional barriers, implicit biases, and outright prejudices, are we as diverse a profession as we can ever hope to be? If the answer is, “no,” then can anything still be done? If so, what? When? And by whom? The discussions were thought-provoking to say the least.

Publications like the *IILP Review* and programs like the symposia and the Switzerland conference afford IILP a non-traditional perspective because we do not look at or think about diversity and inclusion issues from only one vantage point. We consider race and ethnicity, gender, disability and LGBT status as well as generational, religious, and geographic concerns. This creates unique opportunities and perspectives from which to examine and think about diversity and inclusion. The three “Competing Interests” papers are an example of that.

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# Contributor Biographies



## **E. Macey Russell**

E. Macey Russell is a partner at Choate Hall & Stewart LLP, where he practices in the area of complex commercial litigation and is listed in Best Lawyers in America. He is a member of the firm's Hiring and Diversity Committees. Russell is a member of the Trial Lawyer Honorary Society of the Litigation Counsel of America and The Fellows of the American Bar Foundation. He serves on the Boston Lawyers Group's executive committee. Advisory Board of the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession. He is a nationally recognized speaker on diversity and inclusion in corporate law firms. From 2011 until 2014, Russell served as chair of the Massachusetts Judicial Nominating Commission. His honors and awards include: the 2011 Burton Award for Exceptional Legal Writing from The Burton Foundation and the Library of Congress for his co-authored article "Developing Great Minority Lawyers for the Next Generation." In 2009, he was named "Diversity Hero" by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly. Before joining the Board, he served on the dean's advisory committee for Suffolk University Law School. Russell received a JD from Suffolk University Law School in 1983 and a BA from Trinity College.



## **Marci Rubin**

Marci Rubin has a long history of diversity advocacy within and outside the legal profession. From December 2009 through July 2015, she served as Executive Director of the California Minority Counsel Program. In 2013, Marci was named one of the National Diversity Council's Most Powerful & Influential Women in California.

Prior to joining CMCP, Marci was Deputy General Counsel at Wells Fargo where she practiced law for 29 years & managed the company's commercial credit legal work. While at Wells, Marci served on the CMCP Steering Committee from 1998-2005, & 2 terms on the California State Bar, Business Law Section UCC Committee. She has been, and continues to be, an active speaker for a wide variety of organizations on diversity, inclusion & women's issues in the legal profession.

Marci currently is on the California Bar Foundation Board of Directors, The Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession Advisory Committee, and the Beyond Law Advisory Board. She is a past Board member & Board Chair, and current Emeritus Director, of Equal Rights Advocates, Inc. fighting for economic equality & justice for women & girls, and the Freight & Salvage traditional music venue in Berkeley.



### **David Douglass**

David Douglass is a partner in Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton's Washington, D.C. office. He is an experienced trial attorney who has won trials as a prosecutor, plaintiff, and defense counsel. David has represented numerous companies and individuals in criminal and civil, investigations and litigation. A large portion of David's practice consists of representing companies and individuals in criminal and civil fraud investigations and litigation, including False Claims Act litigation.

A distinguishing feature of his practice has been working on behalf of the government, as well as private companies. In 2013, David was appointed by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana as the deputy federal monitor over the New Orleans Police Department. David has also led two high-profile government investigations. In 1994, he served as executive director of the White House Security Review, which resulted in the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. In 1993 he served as assistant director of the Treasury Department's investigation of the raid on the David Koresh compound in Waco, Texas.

David earned his J.D. from Harvard Law School, 1985, cum laude and his B.A. from Yale University, 1981. He is admitted in the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.



### **Martin Greene**

Martin Greene has represented many private and public corporations in a variety of matters including: employment law, civil rights, municipal law, commercial and contract litigation, construction litigation and contract negotiations. He has extensive experience trying federal cases, especially employment discrimination cases. Martin served as a member of the presidential transition team for President-Elect Ronald Reagan and on the transition team for Chicago Mayor-Elect Harold Washington. Included among the awards he has received are: 2016 NAMWOLF Yolanda Coly Advocacy Award, 2015 Leading Lawyer - Leading Lawyers Magazine, Saint Ignatius College Prep Alumni Award for Excellence in the Field of Law 2014, Listed in the 2006 inaugural edition of Who's Who in Black Chicago, and Recipient of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition Scales of Justice Award, 2001



## Sandra S. Yamate

Sandra S. Yamate is the CEO of the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession. Previously, she spent ten years as the Director of the American Bar Association's Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession. She was the first Executive Director of the Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms. Prior to that, Sandra was a litigator in Chicago for ten years.

Outside the legal profession, Sandra is best known for her interest in multicultural children's literature. She and her husband are the founders of Polychrome Publishing Corporation, the only company in the country dedicated to producing children's books by and about Asian Americans. Sandra authored Polychrome's first two books, *Char Siu Bao Boy* and *Ashok By Any Other Name*. Polychrome books have been described as exemplary examples of anti-bias children's literature by *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*, a publication of the Southern Poverty Law Institute, and are included in the Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference Program bibliography of recommended children's books.

Sandra was a founding member of the Asian American Bar Association of the Greater Chicago Area and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, where she served as the first Central Region Governor. She is a former president of the Japanese American Service Committee, the oldest Asian American social service agency in the Midwest and the Harvard Law Society of Illinois. She is a former member of the boards of the Japanese American Citizens League, the Asian American Institute, the National Women's Political Caucus of Metropolitan Chicago, the Girl Scouts of Chicago, Friends of the Chicago Public Library, the Asian Pacific American Women's Leadership Institute, and Asian Americans for Inclusive Education. Sandra is a member of the Board of Trustees of The National Judicial College, an organization that offers courses to improve judicial productivity, challenge current perceptions of justice and inspire judges to achieve judicial excellence. She has written and spoken extensively on diversity in the legal profession and on multicultural children's literature.

Sandra earned her AB in Political Science (cum laude) and History (magna cum laude) from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She received her JD from Harvard Law School.

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