

## A New (and Unexpected) Tool for Improving Diversity and Inclusion – Legal Project Management

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on January 26, 2021

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Legal project management (LPM) can enhance client relationships, increase law firm profitability, provide transparency into law department budgeting, and boost matter team morale. But that's not all. LPM also has the potential to be a powerful tool for improving diversity and inclusion.

LPM is a process for defining, planning and managing legal matters. In a nutshell, it increases transparency, objectivity, and accountability on legal matters by actually tracking – among other things – who does what when, how they do it, and whether they do so efficiently. Although LPM is usually discussed in the context of giving in-house counsel metrics for matter success or reducing write-downs and write-offs for law firms, the information collected as part of LPM can and often does encompass team member roles and contributions.

Why is this important? Attorney attrition, especially among diverse lawyers, is a critical issue facing the legal profession. Through better management of the opportunities that lawyers receive and the contributions they make, your firm can make more equitable decisions and improve its diversity.

In the first of a series of articles, we will explore the issues of diversity and attrition, and how LPM can be used to increase retention and raise job satisfaction among your lawyers to create an attractive and equitable environment where diversity thrives.

### **Losing Diversity Through Attrition**

Prior to Covid-19 there were many causes for persistent attrition rates, but two of the significant and recurring themes continue to be:

- Lack of opportunities at work; and
- Lack of credit attribution for work performed.

Many believe that both problems, in part, are caused by the absence of transparency and accountability in the assignment of work, the assessment of job performance and the reward for performance. These issues plague the legal profession and drive traditionally non-status holding individuals out of the field.

A major study by the Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia Initiative on Advancement and Retention of Women in 2006 showed that the assignment process could be used to increase equity in the development of women lawyers. The study recommended centralized assignment systems. This was before legal project management was a topic of conversation in all but a few firms.

Fast forward to 2021. Fifteen years later, the issue of equity looms larger than ever. Yet the answer is clear: increase transparency and objectivity in the assignment of work and evaluation of performance. This leads to more equitable attribution of credit, awarding of bonuses, and granting of promotions. This is where Legal Project Management comes in. LPM creates transparency of roles and responsibilities across the matter team allowing for a more objective assessment of performance.

### **How LPM Helps (Build and Maintain) Diversity and Reduce Attrition**

Diversity and inclusion advocates recommend using efficiency metrics that are both objective and transparent, which we'll expound upon in a future article. It's the best way to monitor whether or not diversity is inculcated into your processes. LPM provides the means to this end. The implementation of LPM is not only good for the firm's bottom line, a legal department's efficiency metrics and client relations but also—*perhaps more importantly*—could be an actionable tool for improving diversity and inclusion with immediately measurable impact.

One of the important ways LPM can be used to improve D&I is where firms employ legal project managers who assist in actively managing the organization's legal matters. The legal project manager on a matter will be involved not only in the upfront scoping of the work but also in the planning of the staffing, the tasks to be completed and more. The legal project manager can help ensure that the assignments are fairly allocated and can play a role in gathering performance feedback on the work.

LPM is critical for law firms, particularly those concerned with improving retention of diverse lawyers. It isn't solely about attracting more women and people of color. It's about creating an inclusive and respectful environment for all through more proactive management of the work and opportunities.

### **About the Authors:**

Susan Lambreth, JD, MBA, has over 25 years of experience as a consultant to the legal profession. Susan assists firms in implementing effective legal project management initiatives and trains legal professionals in LPM skills. Along with a colleague, Ms. Lambreth co-created the first legal project management certification program in 2010 and launched the first online eLearning courses in legal project management (LPM LaunchPad™ and LPMAware courses). Susan has also helped implement effective practice group management at almost 100 firms, including nearly half of the largest firms in the U.S. Ms. Lambreth is the author of three books on legal project management, as well as three on practice group management.

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