



DEI, ESQ: Expanding the Call for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Cultural Competence



Historically, in-house counsel's efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been focused primarily in three areas:

1. The make-up of our company;
2. The composition of our outside counsel teams; and
3. The legal profession at large, from law schools, law firms, to our judiciary.

These are all important spaces, and there is an imperative call for DEI in each.

But why stop here? If all the whys of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging ring true, then there is a moral justification, a business justification, and significant value in having diverse representation.

So, why haven't we looked beyond what's right in front of us?

Look to your suppliers

In all fairness, some companies have looked beyond these spaces, and have done so for a long time. For example, Toyota has been committed for over 30 years to building a more inclusive supplier base that not only reflects the diversity of its team members and customers, but also the communities it serves.

Toyota initiatives

- Hosting supplier development conferences with networking, educational sessions, and professional development sessions, where certified diverse companies are invited to attend free of charge;
- Intentionally increasing opportunities for women and minority-owned dealers; and

- Spending at least US\$1 billion with minority and women-owned suppliers annually.

But what about our own “supply chain” as in-house counsel and legal departments? How can we take what we learn from our business clients and incorporate that into our world?

Beyond the law firms we use as outside counsel, there are myriad of services we touch and can influence, from investigators, mediators, arbitrators, expert witnesses, consultants, deposition services, translation services, and the huge legal technology industry — just to name a few.

Shouldn’t our intentionality and allyship also apply to these often-forgotten partners? Certainly, when we stop to think about it, our “legal” industry is more expansive than we may realize.

What could this look like? If the whys are the same, then let’s address the next barrier which is usually the how.

Start small

As we have [previously advocated](#), there’s no need to go big or go home. Rather, start small.

[Learn how the ACC Maturity Model can help you](#)

Make a list

Begin by creating a list of traditionally underrepresented direct suppliers you use, such as investigators or mediators. Reach out to your network of other in-house counsel or your outside law firms for referrals and recommendations. Your local bar association may keep a list as well.

Having a list ready makes it easier when the time comes to retain someone. Don’t forget to consult this list a part of your standard operating procedure.

Network

For those vendors you do not hire directly but could influence, such as expert witnesses, deposition services, or eDiscovery vendors, reach out to the decision-makers — whether that is your legal operations department or your outside counsel. Have those conversations to see if you can get some buy-in and make the ask for diverse representation, and of course, follow up.

Celebrate

When you do work with someone exceptional, take a moment to sing their praises to your colleagues, on LinkedIn, or with your in-house network. Help them by increasing the likelihood that they will grow their business.

Share

Spread this message. Encourage other in-house counsel to consider expanding their reach and influence when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion in these spaces.

When we realize that we can expand our call for diversity, equity, and inclusion to our companies' suppliers, vendors, and legal services, our ability to make positive change expands significantly.

It just takes a bit of intentionality and small actions.

[DEI, Esq.](#) is comprised of in-house counsel who share a deep passion for diversity, equity, and inclusion. While the members, Jane Howard-Martin, Connie Almond, Olesja Cormney, Jennifer N. Jones, and Meyling Ly Ortiz, work as employment counsel at Toyota Motor North America, Inc., their views and the thought-leadership expressed are their own and not necessarily the views of their employer.

[Jane Howard-Martin](#)



Vice President and Assistant General Counsel

Toyota Motor North America, Inc.

Jane Howard-Martin is vice president and assistant general counsel for Toyota Motor North America, Inc. (TMNA) and manages the Labor, Employment, Immigration, Benefits and Trade Secrets practice. Howard-Martin leads the labor and employment practice group that is responsible for providing legal advice and counsel and managing litigation and labor matters for a workforce of 33,993 based in our North America affiliates, including the nine North American Manufacturing Centers (NAMCs), R&D, Finance, and Headquarters functions.

Prior to joining Toyota in 2003, Howard-Martin was a partner with Morgan, Lewis and Bockius, LLP in their Los Angeles and Pittsburgh offices, and previously was a partner at Kirkpatrick & Lockhart in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Howard-Martin has been featured in a number of publications and symposiums. She authored a column on employment issues for USA Today.com, a treatise on Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act and served on the Editorial Review Board of the Pennsylvania Labor Letter. Howard-Martin also appeared as a panelist on MSNBC's "Today in America" on the issue of harassment. She is a frequent speaker on employment law topics at various conferences including those held by the ABA, the National Employment Law Council, and the American Employment Law Council. In November 2020, Howard-Martin received the ABA Honorable Bernice B. Donald Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession Award. She is the past President (2009) and currently serves on the board of directors of the California Employment Law Council and is also a board member of the American Employment Law Council. She is also a fellow with the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers.

Howard-Martin earned a BA from Harvard University in 1979 and received her juris doctorate degree from Harvard Law School in 1982.

She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Gus Martin, who is on the faculty at California State University, Dominguez Hills. In her free time, she enjoys ballroom and hip-hop dancing, trying international recipes, writing historical fiction, and travel.

[Connie Almond](#)



Managing Counsel, Labor and Employment

Toyota Motor North America, Inc.

Connie Almond is managing counsel in the labor and employment law group for Toyota Motor North America, Inc., a mobility company headquartered in Plano, TX.

[Olesja Cormney](#)



Managing Counsel, Labor and Employment

Toyota Motor North America, Inc.

Olesja Cormney is managing counsel in the labor and employment group for Toyota Motor North America, Inc., a mobility company headquartered in Plano, TX. She is a strategic counsel and a proactive problem solver, offering an innovative perspective and an agile approach based on her prior business experience. Cormney is honored to be on the board of the ACC Dallas Fort-Worth Chapter.

Jennifer N. Jones



Managing Counsel, Labor and Employment

Toyota Motor North America, Inc.

Jennifer Jones is managing counsel in the labor and employment group at Toyota Motor North America, Inc. She has over a decade of experience counseling employers on a broad range of labor and employment law issues. As one of the founding members of DEI, Esq., she has a deep passion for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and has authored many articles and participated in many panels on the subject. She also sits on the board of two nonprofit organizations, both with a mission of ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to quality secondary and post-secondary education. In her free time, Jones strives to be a “fun mom” for her two small children.

while keeping up with the latest and greatest in interior design.

[Meyling "Mey" Ly Ortiz](#)



Managing Counsel, Labor and Employment

Toyota Motor North America, Inc.

Meyling "Mey" Ly Ortiz is managing counsel of employment at Toyota Motor North America, Inc. Her passions include mentoring, championing diversity and inclusion and a personal blog: TheMeybe.com. At home, you can find her doing her best to be a "fun" mom to a toddler and a preschooler and chasing her best self on her Peloton. You can follow her on [LinkedIn](#). And you knew this was coming: her opinions are hers alone.

