Vault Law Firm Culture & Inclusion Questionnaire

Firm Information

- **Firm Name:** Please provide the full name of your firm.

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

Leadership

- **Head(s) of Firm:** Please provide the name and title of the head(s) of the firm (e.g., Chair, CEO, Managing Partner). Enter information for more than one individual, if applicable.

Abid Qureshi, Partner & Co-Chair Dan Walsh, Partner & Co-Chair

- **Inclusion Professional(s):** Does the firm have a Chief Diversity Officer, Director of Inclusion, or other professional(s) leading the firm's inclusion initiatives? If so, please provide the name and title of the inclusion professional. Enter information for more than one individual, if applicable.

Renauld Clarke, Director of Inclusion

- **Ownership:** Is the firm women-owned, minority-owned, and/or LGBTQ+-owned? If so, please note any related certifications (e.g., NAMWOLF).

N/A

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Culture and Community

- **Affinity Groups:** Does the firm have internal affinity groups or networks (open to all employees)? What affinity groups or networks does the firm have? What kind of support does the firm provide for these affinity groups or networks?

Open to all of firm personnel, Akin maintains the following Firmwide Resource Groups ("FRGs"): Asian FRG, Black FRG, Disability & Neurodiversity FRG, First Generation Lawyers and Social Mobility FRG, LatinX FRG, Middle Eastern and North African FRG, Native American and Indigenous Peoples FRG, Out & Allied FRG, Parents and Caregivers FRG, Veterans FRG, Women's FRG.

Each FRG has a leadership structure that includes one or more Partner chairs and at least one Associate or Counsel Vice Chair. All of these FRGs are supported administratively by the Inclusion Team, and provided an annual budget for events and other activities.

- **Culture and Inclusion Events:** Does the firm host culture and inclusion retreats or conferences? If so, please describe these events.

While the firm does not host inclusion-related retreats or conferences, Akin engages with and sponsors a number of national, regional and local affinity-related bar associations and other organizations that host retreats and conferences.

Throughout the year, the firm supports and encourages all of our lawyers to participate in these organizations and their events.

- **Cultural Awareness:** How does the firm commemorate important dates honoring different cultures of employees within the firm (e.g., Black History Month, Women's History Month, Pride Month, etc.)?

Every year, the firm welcomes a wide range of distinguished speakers to celebrate history and heritage months. These events are typically conducted virtually to ensure access across our geographical footprint. For example, in honor of Women's History Month last year, we hosted award-winning journalist and author Elizabeth Weitzman who explored how film and television have shaped perceptions of women in law. For MENA Heritage Month, Egyptian musician and folk artist Karim Nagi shared his expertise in Arabic percussion and cultural performance. We celebrated Juneteenth with Pulitzer Prize winner Isabel Wilkerson, who discussed her books Caste and The Warmth of Other Suns. This year, we hosted NYU Professor Tejaswini Ganti who presented on the global popularity, importance and relevance of the Hindi film industry (or Bollywood) in the creation of South Asian American identity in recognition of AANHPI Heritage Month. The aim of this programming is to broaden cultural awareness at the firm, celebrate the breadth of experiences of our lawyers and business services professionals, and provide learning opportunities for all.

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- **Inclusiveness:** Please describe steps the firm has taken to create an inclusive environment for women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and parents/caregivers.

Akin's commitment to an inclusive firm culture informs all aspects of the employee experience. Every effort is made to ensure that our people are afforded equitable access to opportunities and the support needed to thrive professionally. In addition to maintaining FRGs as described above, we also have firmwide and local Opportunity & Inclusion councils that promote a breadth of experiences and perspectives across the firm, and have been instrumental in Akin's offerings of flexible work arrangements and holistic wellness benefits.

Networking, Mentoring, and Professional Development

- **Mentoring & Sponsorship:** Does the firm offer a mentorship or sponsorship program that connects junior attorneys with senior leadership? If so, please describe.

We provide our lawyers with a formal, structured firmwide program called Akin Advisors. The Akin Advisor program is a practice-based mentoring program: a dedicated partner offers individualized guidance to our lawyers as they progress through their career. All Associates and Counsel have an Akin Advisor. Each Akin Advisor is paired with specific associates or counsel within their practice group, although Advisors may be paired with someone outside of their group or office. Advisors coach Advisees, provide practical tips for self-evaluation and participate in the year-end performance conference. Akin Advisor meetings typically occur quarterly and cover a wide range of topics. Topics of discussion may include professional career goals, business development, staffing and training opportunities and pursuing development goals as guided by the ACE Framework. Akin Advisors can also help with connections around the firm, both within and across practice groups, and in the broader legal and business community.

- **Reverse Mentoring:** Does the firm pair senior attorneys with junior attorneys to help bridge generational or cultural gaps, share perspectives and skills, and foster a more inclusive culture?

We do not have a program specifically for reverse mentoring, but every formal mentoring relationship established at the firm is designed to be a two-way channel for learning and sharing perspectives and skills and generally supporting our goal of creating an inclusive culture at the firm.

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- **Associate Committee:** Does the firm have an associate committee that consults with the partnership? If so, please describe how that committee engages with the partnership.

The firm Associates and Counsel Committee meets regularly with the Co-Chairs to provide feedback and ideas on how to improve the experience of associates and counsel at the firm, and to discuss opportunities that can enhance the development of our associates and counsel. Each office also has a local Associates Committee to address more specific concerns and provide an additional avenue for engaging with firm leadership.

- **Professional Development:** Does the firm offer professional development programs specifically for junior attorneys? Please elaborate on the professional development programs available to junior attorneys.

Our lawyers attend Akin's flagship in-person academies at key inflection points in their careers, sharpen their practice skills at hands-on trainings and have access to a wealth of learning resources. The fall associate, mid-level associate, and new counsel academies are multi-day, live training programs held in one of the firm's offices. Newly promoted counsel attend the New Counsel Academy in the spring in which they are promoted. The firm also has a formal advisor program, Akin Advisors (discussed above), that offers our lawyers formal and informal feedback, in-house career coaching and a dedicated partner advisor who offers individualized guidance throughout their careers at Akin. The Akin Client Excellence (ACE) Framework also outlines the core skills that our associates and counsel are expected to achieve at each stage of their careers—junior, mid-level and counsel—to provide exemplary service to our clients and to build a successful career as a lawyer. The ACE Framework is a modern expression of the way in which Akin lawyers have always practiced law. The ACE Framework complements our practice group specific benchmarks that provide an overview of the practice skills that lawyers should aim to develop at each experience level – junior, mid-level and counsel. Benchmarks help our lawyers craft a career path that aligns with their interest, strengths and the needs of the practice.

Recruitment, Promotion, and Advancement

- **Recruitment Process:** What steps has the firm taken to build a more inclusive recruitment process (e.g., interview training, behavioral interview questions, blind resume review, etc.)?

We are committed to broadly recruiting exceptional talent at all levels and to fostering an inclusive culture that values collaboration and different perspectives. Each year we participate in hundreds of recruiting events to broaden our reach at law schools. These events include partnerships with a range of law student groups[MS3.1], career service offices and law reviews, networking events, and panels.

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- **Fellowship/Scholarship:** Does the firm offer any scholarships, fellowships, or internships? If so, describe those programs. How many of the law students who participated in the firm's most recent 2L summer associate program were hired through such a program?

Akin offers a two-year Pro Bono Scholars (PBS) Program that allows 1Ls to work on pro bono projects at the firm and at a public interest organization during their first summer, and return to join the general summer program as a 2L. Participants in this program receive their summer associate salary and an additional payment after completing the full program and joining the firm as first year associates. This opportunity is available to all qualified applicants, regardless of background. Our 2026 summer associate class includes 9 pro bono scholars.

- **Advancement:** Describe any firm initiatives to create equal opportunities for all attorneys with respect to work allocation, performance reviews and upward reviews, and/or promotions.

Our inclusive leadership trainings and other resources provide guidance on the actions partners and firm leaders can take to manage teams in an inclusive manner. The work assignments process is one of the most important paths to enhance the retention and advancement of our associates. We are focused on assignment processes in our practices that are not random or left up to each partner and have steadily increased the use of assignment partners and non-lawyer practice managers who are charged with overseeing how assignments are managed. With greater oversight, we have created paths for associates to have greater opportunities with a wider range of partners.
The firm also has a Partner Upward Feedback Program. The goals of the program are to: 1) create a platform for our non-partner lawyers and advisors to provide feedback to partners anonymously; 2) enable partners to understand how they are seen by our non-partner lawyers/advisors; and 3) gather and share specific feedback that partners can use to understand what they do well and what they can do to enhance their leadership and management skills. The Partner Upward Feedback Program covers Leadership, People Management and Project Management. This program is separate from the firm's lawyer/advisor evaluation process. Feedback is delivered to partners in an aggregated and anonymized report and is not accessible on an attributable basis.

- **Multitiered Partnership:** Does the firm offer a multitiered partnership? If so, please describe.

N/A

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- **Alternatives to Partnership:** Does the firm offer a non-partner track alternative for attorneys? If so, please describe.

Senior counsel are specialists with experience and expertise in demand by clients and internally. The title is for senior lawyers who have a unique role within their practice group, are essential to a practice, and who are doing work that cannot be done by more junior lawyers. Senior counsel is not generally a partnership-track position.

- **Reduced Hours and Flex-Time Options:** Does the firm offer reduced hours and/or flex-time options? If so, please describe and explain how working an alternative schedule might affect an associate's path to partnership.

The firm's reduced schedule policy specifically provides that lawyers who work reduced schedules remain on track for partnership and other promotional opportunities. We have a significant track record of promotions of attorneys who have availed themselves of the policy.

- **Credit for Work Other Than Client Billable:** Does the firm provide hours credit for work not pertaining to clients, such as recruiting, business development, knowledge management, or inclusion efforts? Note that this does not include pro bono projects. If so, describe the policy for such work.

Yes, the firm does have a policy to recognize the contributions of lawyers outside of time spent on billable client matters. Year-end bonuses are based upon an assessment of each lawyer's overall performance as determined in the evaluation process, including work quality, demonstration of progress through the core competencies, productivity, contribution to the practice group, cross-collaboration, and pro bono efforts. Our firm also values the time spent by our lawyers on firm citizenship which includes recruiting, firm innovation, service on firm committees, and formal teaching within the firm. Accordingly, up to 100 hours of time spent on firm citizenship will be considered bonus eligible time. In addition to year-end merit bonuses, the firm also awards exceptional bonuses to those who had exceptional performance over the year, including very high productivity. Additionally, the lock-step compensation for each level is published.

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Successes and Priorities

- What are the firm's top three accomplishments or areas in which the firm has had its greatest success with respect to fostering inclusion within the firm?

- What are the firm's top three priorities for advancing inclusion within the firm?

Advice to Candidates

- What advice do you have for candidates who are looking for an inclusive work environment? What questions should they ask when interviewing to help them assess the extent of a firm's commitment to inclusion?

Do the research. One way to assess a work environment is by researching information available on the firm's website or through other resources. Candidates may find it helpful to review overall firm information, as well as information specific to a particular office and/or practice area. In addition, it's essential to explore the firm's programs and initiatives. For example, does the firm offer internal resource groups to help lawyers connect? Are there formal mentoring programs? How are work assignments allocated to ensure opportunities for all? Every law firm approaches inclusion differently, and workplace culture can vary significantly. Candidates should focus on identifying what is most important to them and look for examples of how that does or does not align with various firms.

Connect and ask questions. Once a candidate has done preliminary research on a firm to ensure it meets their criteria, the next step is to learn more about the firm from individuals who can speak first-hand about what it's like to work there. One way to do this is to connect with other students who may have experience interviewing and/or working at a firm. Students are also encouraged to leverage their school's alumni network to build relationships with attorneys and hear their perspectives. Candidates may also contact their law school Career Services Office to learn about when firms are hosting events on-campus and sign-up to attend. This is a great way to connect 1:1 with attorneys and learn more about individual experiences first-hand. Additionally, law firms often host programs for students at their offices, which provides an opportunity to see the action and learn more about the firm, its culture, practices, and people.

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Additional Response Space

Please use this page for information that did not fit in the spaces provided. If this is a continuation of a prior answer, please indicate which question(s) are being addressed.

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