Vault Law Firm Culture & Inclusion Questionnaire

Firm Information

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

Banner Witcoff

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.

Katie Laatsch Fink, President
Elizabeth Almeter, Board Member
Louis DiSanto, Board Member
Erik Maurer, Board Member
Frederic Meeker, Board Member
Chunhsi Andy Mu, Board Member

- **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.

The firm does not have a designated professional leading the firm's inclusion initiatives. Rather, the firm has a Diversity Committee that is co-chaired by attorneys Janet Lee and Sonia Okolie.

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

No, the firm is not women-owned, minority-owned, or LGBTQ+-owned.

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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?

Banner Witcoff internally maintains an active Women's Alliance, as well as a Veteran's Affinity Group. Both groups are open to all individuals identifying with the missions of each respective group, and are open to all employees at the firm. Banner Witcoff also maintains networks with local and national organizations such as the Chicago Women in Intellectual Property, Leadership Counsil on Legal Diversity, National Association of Women Lawyers, American Bar Foundation, Asian American Bar Association, Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms, ChIPs, National LGBTQ+ Bar Association, and South Asian Bar Association. Banner Witcoff supports these organizations in several ways, such as through sponsorship, funding, pipeline programming, fellowship opportunities, and other meaningful ways of contribution.

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

Banner Witcoff supports attorneys and their networks through sponsoring participation in activities that promote professional development – including through industry conferences, speaking opportunities, and professional outreach. Banner Witcoff aims to encourage Shareholders to promote continued development and community engagement with Associates. Internally, the firm plans and implements programs and initiatives that foster an inclusive and collaborative work environment for people of all identities and backgrounds to succeed. Some of these initiatives include showcasing cultural traditions and perspectives within events, such as celebrating Lunar New Year; curating programming that address aspects of inclusion such as psychological safety, neurodiversity, and generational differences; and supporting organizations such as Soldier's Angels which support active soldiers and/or veterans.

- **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.)?

The firm commemorates important dates honoring different cultures of employees internally within the firm and aims to do so through an educational lens. The firm receives feedback on heritage months that are of importance to employees of the firm. Each month is then celebrated by showcasing a locally owned restaurant/bakery owned by individuals who identify with that heritage, to foster cultural understanding and community support. The firm also provides access to curated reading materials that highlight the histories, perspectives, and contributions recognized during heritage months.

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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.

1. Maintaining equitable hiring, compensation, promotion, and performance evaluation practices designed to support equal opportunity and reduce bias.
2. Providing anti-harassment and inclusion training for all employees and managers.
3. Offering flexible work arrangements, including remote and hybrid work options, to help employees balance professional and personal responsibilities.
4. Supporting parents and caregivers through leave policies, flexibility for family obligations, and an understanding, team-oriented culture.
5. Ensuring reasonable accommodations are available for employees with disabilities and engaging in an interactive process to support individual needs.
6. Encouraging open communication and collaboration across all levels of the organization, with leadership committed to maintaining a respectful and inclusive environment.
7. Promoting mentorship, professional development, and advancement opportunities for employees from diverse backgrounds.
8. Reviewing workplace policies and practices on an ongoing basis to ensure they align with the firm's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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.

Yes, Banner Witcoff has a longstanding "Mentoring & Retention Committee" which is responsible for assigning mentors to new attorneys and implementing firm mechanisms to improve ongoing education (internal and external), the dissemination of firm information, and support in all aspects of practice. Mentors range from junior associates to senior shareholders depending on similar office locations, practice areas, and technical experience. The Committee also assists integrating new hires with the firm through socialization, professional growth, profitability and efficiency, and communication with management.

- **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?

Similar to the above, Banner Witcoff's formal mentor pairings are intended to be two-sided and encourage mentors and mentees to foster a mutually beneficial mentor/mentee relationship where junior attorneys can be guided by senior attorneys, and senior attorneys can similarly guided by junior attorneys. Recently, the firm formalized mentorship by senior attorneys by assigning both a principal shareholder and non-principal shareholder as formal mentors to each new full-time associate. Senior attorneys also provide informal mentorship to junior attorneys.

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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.

Yes, Banner Witcoff has an associate committee. Although there are no formal procedures in place governing communication between the committee and the partnership, the firm encourages associates to raise any issues or ideas with the partnership and generally maintains an open, ongoing dialogue between the partners and associates. The associate committee also hosts several events throughout the year, many of which focus on associate development and may involve members of the partnership.

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

Yes, we do offer professional development for our junior attorneys. Our New Attorney Training Committee meets regularly and arranges training, both in-house and with external vendors, for associates who are in their first few years of practice. The training agenda covers the basics of our practice, including topics such as basics of drafting patent applications and responding to typical rejections in U.S. Patent Office responses; legal standards underlying the main types of rejections that a patent applicant may face; the general arc and logistics of a typical litigation, pre-suit investigations, drafting pleadings such as complaints and discovery requests/responses; and depositions. As I write this, the Committee is preparing materials for several in-person training exercises, including a mock deposition for a simulated litigation, and a mock oral argument for a simulated appeal to the Patent Trademark and Appeals Board. Associates from both our Chicago and DC offices will be gathered together for these in-person exercises at one of our office locations.

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.)?

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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?

Banner Witcoff has historically awarded the Donald W. Banner Diversity Fellowship to support diversity in the field of intellectual property law. To date, the fellowship has awarded more than $250,000 to law students for law school tuition and other school-related expenses. The fellowship is available to people who possess attributes unique in the field of IP law or demonstrate a commitment to enabling opportunities for, and engagement with, individuals who possess identities or backgrounds unique in the field of IP law. Some recipients of our Diversity Fellowship have joined Banner Witcoff as full-time attorneys following law school.

- **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.

The firm supports fair work allocation practices, objective performance review processes, transparent promotion criteria, and regular feedback. We support attorney development through mentoring, training, and leadership opportunities designed to help all attorneys progress and succeed regardless of background.

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

Yes, the firm does offer a multi-tiered partnership. Attorneys become Class B shareholder eligible 4.5 years after graduation. Class A shareholder eligibility begins 7 years after graduation.

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

For attorneys that are on a non-partner track, we offer an "Of Counsel" 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 considers requests for reduced hours and flex-time options on a case by case basis.

- **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.

We don't offer formal credit. That said, non-billable work including recruiting, business development, and internal committees is acknowledged and reflected in year-end compensation.

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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?

Banner Witcoff takes great care in fostering inclusion by prioritizing programs that provide financial impact, education, and/or professional development for all. Banner Witcoff's Diversity Committee collaborates with the firm's other committees to ensure that all programs are inclusive and address multiple aspects of firm life.

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

Banner Witcoff is committed to empowering attorneys and staff with the resources, support, and opportunities needed to excel. By investing in this growth, Banner Witcoff is able to foster a culture of service, collaboration, and community engagement. The D&I Committee helps lead the firm's social action efforts. Our plans continue to evolve over time as we listen, learn, and seek out opportunities for meaningful ways to contribute as a law 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?

Prioritize pursuing employment in an inclusive work environment. Be the change that you are seeking. Firms are often receptive to individuals to lead the changes and promote inclusivity at the firm. Ask about the firm's recent initiatives that promote inclusion. Ask if the firm is a member of any organizations that promote diversity and inclusion.

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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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