

Making a Difference for Men (and Women) of Color

The Leadership Council on Legal Diversity

Robert J. Grey Jr.

Share this:



LCLD was founded to provide organizations with a steady source of bright, talented leaders for the future.

GettyImages

When the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) was founded in 2009, its organizational DNA was different from other nonprofit organizations devoted to diversity.

For one thing, we were founded by the general counsel of America's largest corporations and the managing partners of major US law firms—all of whom pledged to collaborate closely on this issue. For another: Each of these members made a personal commitment to advancing diversity in their organizations through actions, not words.



“The legal profession had been talking for years about how to address its diversity problem and nothing ever changed,” recalls Rick Palmore, former executive vice president and general counsel of General Mills. Frustrated by the status quo, Palmore authored the clarion “Call to Action” letter in 2004 that was signed by more than 100 general counsel, many of whom later became founding members of LCLD under Palmore’s leadership as chair of the LCLD board.

As the new organization coalesced around the leaders of law firms and corporations, it soon became clear that LCLD’s action orientation required direct engagement with the next generation of leaders in the law.

In 2011, LCLD inaugurated a national law school mentoring program and a summer internship initiative, the LCLD IL Scholars program, for students working at member organizations after their first year in law school.

That same year, the organization launched its most ambitious initiative—the LCLD fellows program, a rigorous, year-long curriculum designed to provide diverse, mid-career attorneys with leadership training and the opportunity to build a national network of peers. Each class of fellows attends three in-person meetings along with numerous other learning opportunities over the course of their fellowship. (A similar initiative for associate-level attorneys, the Pathfinder program, was launched in 2015.)

Since 2011 the fellows program has grown larger every year, from 118 participants in 2011 to 326 in the class of 2019. Graduates of the fellows program also went on to organize a robust alumni association in 2012, building on the momentum of their fellows year. Now numbering more than

1,500, the fellows alumni meet once a year for a national Leadership Symposium and gather regionally on a regular basis.

Leading the fellows alumni this year is Corey Lee, a partner at the Miami office of Hunton Andrews Kurth. Lee, who is African American, was nominated by Hunton to the fellows program in 2012, and found it to be an exhilarating experience.

“I remember my first meeting as a fellow, and walking into a room full of total strangers,” says Lee. “That was daunting. But within a few hours I realized how lucky I was. These were incredible people with interesting careers. LCLD connected me to a community of people facing similar challenges who were there to make one another better. It was a place where being genuine was valued, and that led to getting to know people very quickly.”

“There were also presentations that caused me to rethink my career and become more proactive about shaping it. Talking to others clarified my goals and what it would take to reach them. LCLD helped me find sponsors, mentors, and allies from outside of my firm—people who became my network, both professionally and personally.

Lee added, “today I can see a dramatic difference in how I lead and manage teams in my legal practice and elsewhere, and a lot of that has to do with other fellows. It truly is a group where people are not looking out for themselves first. Instead, it’s a place where you invest in one another’s success.”

Lee is a great example of why LCLD was founded in the first place—to make a difference in the lives of individuals and to provide their organizations with a steady source of bright, talented leaders for the future.

LCLD is on track this year, through its various programs, to have touched the lives of 10,000 young people, ranging from first-year law students to senior attorneys in positions of leadership, including several dozen fellows alumni who’ve ascended to judgeships or to positions as the general counsel of companies or top management of their law firms.

We’re working now with our members to make their organizations as inclusive as possible, by encouraging innovation, finding what works for LCLD members, and making those ideas easily applicable to other member organizations. We do this so that Corey Lee and thousands of other attorneys like him can achieve their full potential in a profession that is as diverse as the country it serves.

“I believe in the people I’ve met through LCLD,” says Lee, “and in the future, we’re building together.”

I couldn’t have said it better myself.

ENTITY:

YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION

TOPIC:

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, LEGAL EDUCATION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Authors



ABA American Bar Association |

/content/aba-cms-dotorg/en/groups/young_lawyers/publications/tyl/topics/professional-development/making-difference-men-and-women-of-color-leadership-council-legal-diversity