

This edition of Voices of Excellence from Barclay Damon's Major Markets and Albany offices focuses on the power of affinity groups and their importance for the individual member and for Barclay Damon's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion goals.

QUOTE OF THE QUARTER

"Diversity goes beyond race or gender. It's also about leveraging our unique experiences to deliver the most creative solutions for our clients."

—Blanca Vazquez de Castro, Associate,
Latham & Watkins LLP, Madrid

Affinity Groups FAQ

What is an affinity group?

An affinity group is a designated "safe space," where everyone in that group shares a particular identity. This identity can be based on race, gender, sexual orientation, language, nationality, physical or mental ability, socioeconomic status, family structure, religion, and more. Affinity groups can be a place for underrepresented people in a community to come together to feel less isolated and more connected. During affinity group meetings, participants might share and talk about their experiences or focus on working toward a particular mission or goal.

Who can be part of an affinity group?

Only people who identify with that particular group can be a part of it. This is so that affinity group members can safely express their experiences without having to worry about others not understanding their experience because they don't identify with that particular group.

Aren't affinity groups exclusive and divisive?

Affinity groups are intended to bring people together over a commonality. We all benefit from interactions with people who share common identities and experiences. When you are in the minority of a community, these bonding interactions may only occur during an affinity group meeting. Affinity groups are only "exclusive" in order to create a safe space for people who may not feel safe in the larger community because they are in the minority. During affinity group meetings, people can share freely and without inhibition about their experiences. These groups make individuals feel more visible and more included in their community and, in doing so, enhance our commitment to inclusivity.

Don't affinity groups promote segregation and not diversity?

Affinity groups are one aspect of creating a diverse and socially just world. They create the safe space needed for people to build strength and pride. Equally important are the collaborative efforts of different groups of people working toward creating equity for all. Allies are people who do not identify with a certain affinity group but want to support the equal rights of people from that group. Ally work and affinity work are both important aspects of creating social equity.

Barclay Damon's Affinity Groups



Black Employee Affinity Network

Barclay Damon's Black Employee Affinity Network (BEAN) serves as a resource open to all of the firm's Black and Black Latino attorneys and staff. BEAN is interested in fostering career success by sponsoring programming and other initiatives that promote business and career development, mentoring and support, recruitment and retention, and networking and relationship building. BEAN also aims to foster an environment at the firm that encourages participation in activities that are relevant to the Black legal community.

LGBTQIA+ Employee Affinity Network

The LGBTQIA+ Employee Affinity Network is Barclay Damon's newest employee affinity network and is open to attorneys and staff who have signed the consent statement on the HR Employee Information Form and self-identified as LGBTQIA+. The network held its first meeting in early January 2022. The goals of the network are: to serve as a resource for employee growth and development; to elevate voices of employees with a shared identity; to serve as an idea generating forum to advance and support an inclusive firm culture; to sustain a flow of ideas and conversations between employees and management; and to offer mentoring, coaching, networking, and professional and personal development and support.

If you are interested becoming a member of the LGBTQIA+ Employee Affinity Network, please contact [Sheila Gaddis](#), diversity partner.

Barclay Damon's Affinity Groups continued

Women's Forum

Barclay Damon's Women's Forum creates an environment that fosters meaningful interaction and mentoring opportunities for the firm's women attorneys to help them develop successful strategies regarding leadership, client, and professional development; marketing; and work-life balance. It is a forum for sharing information, experiences, and solutions in an inclusive setting. The Women's Forum also recognizes the importance of professional women supporting each other outside the office. To promote this initiative, the Women's Forum holds several all-women networking events most years which allow Barclay Damon women attorneys to connect with clients and guests across a range of industries and professions.

Perspectives on Internal and External Affinity Groups

Black Employee Affinity Network

By [Karen Francis](#), Senior Legal Assistant
As a member of BEAN, I have found the group's Microsoft Teams platform very informative in regard to workplace interaction, Barclay Damon programs, and current events in our community. It's also a great way for us to communicate with each other across Barclay Damon's platform of offices. I will continue to utilize BEAN as a valuable workplace resource and look forward to my continued membership. My membership in BEAN also presented the opportunity to contribute to Barclay Damon's [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion video](#).



Connecticut Italian-American Bar Association

By [Dan Elliott](#), Partner
I have been affiliated with the Connecticut Italian-American Bar Association (CIABA) in various capacities for over eight years. During this time, CIABA has worked together with other affinity groups in Connecticut, including the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association, the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association, and the South Asian Bar Association of Connecticut, on a number of events and initiatives. I can attest that these organizations are of critical importance to not only their members but to the bar at large. They give diverse attorneys—particularly young attorneys—invaluable opportunities to assume leadership roles at very early stages of their careers and also help diverse attorneys to grow their professional networks exponentially.



LeGaL

By [Janice Grubin](#), Partner
I am the vice president of LeGaL, the LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York, and also serve as co-chair of the association's Judiciary Committee. After I introduced [Ray McCabe](#) and [Bridget Steele](#) to LeGaL, they were retained to review and update LeGaL's corporate bylaws and the bylaws of its affiliated foundation and advise on related corporate governance issues. Barclay Damon was able to leverage its upstate platform and rate structure to provide a "lo-bono" bid to LeGaL that beat out a bid from a major downstate firm prominent in representing not-for-profits. While securing fees comparable to standard upstate rates, the engagement allows Barclay Damon to assist a leader in LGBTQ+ advocacy whose impact far exceeds the size of its almost 500-member organization. [Click here](#) to learn more about LeGaL and the LeGaL Foundation.

Q&A With Katarina Parise

Katarina Parise is a third-year law student at Albany Law School and the current president of OUTLaw, the school's LGBTQ+ and allied student organization. Katarina is also a 3L senator to the Student Bar Association and a 3L representative to the Criminal Law Society. Dena DeFazio spoke with Katarina to get her take on the importance of law school affinity groups and how her involvement in OUTLaw has impacted her future career goals.

Why did you choose to become involved in the leadership of your law school's affinity group?

I have been a member of OUTLaw since my first year of law school. I attended every event and eagerly brought new members to participate in events to show their support for the LGBTQ+ community. It has been an organization of people who make me feel safe and at home. So, when a leadership position

became available, I wanted to be a part of this organization to try and continue its tradition of inclusion and support to members and allies. I wanted to be a friendly face to anyone who wanted to join or needed support but was too afraid to reach out. I wanted to hold a leadership position because I remembered how important this organization was to me as a new law student. OUTLaw is a safe and inviting place for everyone, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

How important has your affinity group involvement been to your law school experience?

My involvement with OUTLaw has been an important part of my law school experience because it has made me feel connected to a group of people within my law school community who share similar perspectives, life experiences, and challenges. Being a part of the OUTLaw community at Albany Law School has made my law school experience more meaningful. For me, being a

part of not only OUTLaw but also other affinity groups has created a space where I feel supported and have the tools necessary to succeed.

How will your affinity group experiences impact your future career goals and selection of an employer?

Due to my involvement in affinity groups, I have become connected with alumni and student mentors who have aided me in my journey to achieving my career goals. When searching for an employer, I reached out to my mentors for help with choosing one that would be inclusive and support diversity. I am thankful that I have

secured future employment at this time. The interview process was extensive, and diversity was something I discussed in every single interview. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I needed to feel safe in not only my future employment office but also the geographic location where the office would be located. Therefore, I had to do more extensive research in my employment search as well as discuss that I am a member of the LGBTQ+ community with each employer. I believe my involvement in OUTLaw has made me feel comfortable enough to do this. I think when selecting an employer, it is important to know prior to starting employment whether you will be comfortable and accepted there.

Pro Bono Corner

Barclay Damon has a number of approved community pro bono partners, which are organizations that provide pro bono opportunities with already-approved matter numbers. The American Bar Association's Free Legal Answers is one, the Connecticut Bar Association also has one, as does the Rochester Bar Association.

Barclay Damon's major market offices have gained another approved community pro bono partner, appropriately named Pro Bono Partnership. The organization provided two sessions in July for all timekeepers—lawyers **and** paralegals—to explain their mission, which is to enhance the quality of life in communities in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York by representing 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organizations in connection with their business legal needs and making it as easy as possible for lawyers and support staff to volunteer to assist these not-for-profits. Pro Bono Partnership's presentation is available to Barclay Damon attorneys and paralegals on the pro bono page under the DEI tab on the firm's intranet. Pro Bono Partnership circulates a list of volunteer opportunities every two weeks. [Jen Leonardi](#) will assist in connecting interested parties to the appropriate pro bono program manager.



Jen Leonardi
*Partner
and Pro Bono at Large*

Office Updates

ALBANY

Barclay Damon Receives Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York Distinguished Service Award

On December 7, 2021, Barclay Damon was honored with the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York's (LASNNY) Distinguished Service Award. Lillian Moy, executive director of LASNNY, presented the award to [David Cost](#), who accepted the award on the firm's behalf. Upon remarks about Barclay Damon's mandatory pro bono requirement, the room gave a round of applause.



2021 LASNNY Justice for All Kickoff
[David Cost](#) was a speaker at the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York's Justice for All Campaign as co-chair of the drive that raises money to help indigent individuals to access to legal services in the Capital Region.

Albany Law School Diversity Mentorship Program

In October 2021, the Albany office began its annual Diversity Mentorship Program with Albany Law School. As part of the program, Barclay Damon attorneys mentor Albany Law School

students from groups underrepresented in the legal profession. Thanks to [Ben Wilkinson](#), [Jen Cruz](#), [Naresh Kannan](#), [David Solimeno](#), [Brad Gallagher](#), [George Pond](#), [Meaghan Murphy](#), [Oksana Ludd](#), [Brian Culnan](#), [Amanda Miller](#), [Jamie Dughi Hogenkamp](#), [Michael Murphy](#), and [Dena DeFazio](#) for volunteering to be mentors!

New York Capital Region Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Fiesta4

The Albany office was a sponsor of the New York Capital Region Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Fiesta4, which raises money for education programs for Hispanic individuals and for opportunities for Hispanic-owned businesses in the Capital Region.

In Our Own Voices Unity Through Diversity: The Power of Unity 2021 Conference

[Dena DeFazio](#) was selected to be a speaker at Unity Through Diversity: The Power of Unity 2021 conference sponsored by In Our Own Voices. Her presentation was "Legal Considerations in LGBTQAI+ Health Care."

BUFFALO

Victory Sports Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

[Heidi Ruchala](#) serves on the board of Victory Sports Global Outreach, Inc., which had a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of its new location in Eastern Hills Mall in Williamsville, New York, on November 9, 2021. [Click here](#) to see a photo gallery from the ceremony.

Office Updates continued



Buffalo Community Day

On October 26, 2021, Barclay Damon's Buffalo office partnered with FeedMore WNY for Community Day. Volunteers spent the afternoon working at the FeedMore WNY warehouse, packaging food to be distributed to local school children in need.

FeedMore WNY is a combination of the Food Bank and Meals on Wheels programs in Western New York. Within the past year, their programs have distributed more than 16 million meals to homebound neighbors and through nearly 300 pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, and other hunger-relief agencies throughout Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua Counties.

Minority Bar Foundation Virtual Scholarship and Awards Program

October 26, 2021, members of Barclay Damon attended the Minority Bar Foundation's Virtual Scholarship and Awards Program. Barclay Damon was also a sponsor of the event. This program recognized individuals in the Western New York legal community who have demonstrated a significant commitment to effectuating changes within the legal system that address the needs of the minority community and who have exemplified high standards of the profession by virtue of scholastic achievement and leadership.

2021 United Way Campaign

The Barclay Damon team of [Ali Fatmi](#), [Samantha Podlas](#), and [Nancy Smith](#) headed the 2021 Barclay Damon United Way Campaign, which raised over \$17,300 for the United Way! All donations to the United Way help those in our community, including helping children reach their full potential, families achieve financial stability, and people live healthier lives. Thank you to everyone that participated.

MAJOR MARKETS

Join LEAP in Creating a New Haven for Our Children

Leadership, Education, and Athletics in Partnership, Inc. (LEAP) was founded in 1992 by educators, students, and community activists to address the historic disinvestment in young people of color in New Haven. College and high school student counselors provide LEAP's direct services to younger children. They help with homework, provide emotional support, lead classroom literacy instruction, and teach swim lessons, cooking classes, and computer science. The neighborhoods served by LEAP have child poverty rates ranging from 35 to 58 percent, more than three times the Connecticut average of 15 percent. LEAP has recently been engaged to manage the newly reopened Dixwell Community House (Q House) and to operate the programs that will run there. In November 2021, LEAP participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony reopening the refurbished Q House. The original Q House was formed in 1924 and had a New Haven legacy firm member on its board until it closed almost 20 years ago. [Ilan Markus](#) provided pro bono bankruptcy representation at that time. Additionally, at the request of Barclay Damon's Major Markets Diversity Leadership Team led by [Penny Mason](#), Barclay Damon is sponsoring LEAP'S annual fundraising gala, the LEAP Year Event, which will take place on February 24, 2022.

New Haven County Bar Association

Toys for Tots

In partnership with the New Haven County Bar Association, Barclay Damon participated in the Toys for Tots drive.



ROCHESTER

Bivona Holiday Lights Tour

This year, Barclay Damon once again sponsored the Bivona Holiday Lights Tour. The Bivona Child Advocacy Center partnered with some of the brightest and most festively decorated homes in the Rochester area to bring attendees a fun, socially distant and family-centered Bivona Holiday Lights Tour. Bivona offered a Sleigh Box, which included maps with routes of decorated homes, holiday treats, and festive family activities.



Rochester Community Day

The Rochester office completed their Community Day at Conkey Corner Park. Their efforts focused on a variety of tasks to clean the park. They had a great turnout and their efforts made an immediate, visible

impact. Will Macaluso, the Genesee Land Trust coordinator, was very appreciative of the Rochester office's efforts, successfully prepping the park for Harvest Fest.

Z-Code Zones for EnCompass



[Patrick Burke](#) volunteered with EnCompass, which Barclay Damon partnered with for the Book Fairies Drive earlier in 2021. Patrick helped put together their Z-Code Zones—student-designed spaces that have a specific focus—in which students can work on developing skills to prepare for their future. He unpacked supply boxes; assembled desks, shelves, chairs, and furniture; set up wall hangings; and cut vinyl to place over their older windows.

SYRACUSE

Syracuse Annual Share the Warmth From Head to Toe Holiday Drive

Throughout the month of December 2021, [Margaret Talt](#), who led the Syracuse Diversity Leadership Team in organizing the Share the Warmth From Head to Toe Holiday Drive, and [John Sindoni](#) collected over 50 items from the Syracuse office that were then donated to the Samaritan Center. John is a board member of the Samaritan Center. Here Margaret and John are pictured with Mary Beth Frey, the executive director of the Samaritan Center.

