



FORMALIZING YOUR FULL-TIME FLEX PROGRAM

As supported by findings in the Alliance's *Law Firm Flexibility Benchmarking Survey Report*¹ and other industry sources, most major law firms make reduced hours schedules available to their attorneys, and many have a formal written policy reflecting this commitment. While many of these organizations recognize the need to have different types of flexible work options to meet the myriad needs of a diverse workforce, fewer have written policies for telecommuting and other full time flexibility, such as flexible start/end times and annualized hours. Some do not see a need and others have concerns about policies being too rigid, but the Alliance recommends putting your organization's full-time flexible work options in writing for three key reasons:

- **Promote Collective Understanding:** Having a formal, written policy provides an opportunity to clearly define the types of full-time flexible work the organization provides, as well as expectations for lawyers and staff who work those schedules. Flexibility in any form must work for both the individual working flexibly and his or her organization, and having a written policy provides organizations an opportunity to articulate the importance of flexibility being 'two-way street', especially in client service professions. Further, formalizing full-time flex allows organizations to be thoughtful about and set appropriate boundaries that reflect real business needs. For example, while a firm may support telecommuting, it may or may not be okay with a lawyer doing it every day; formalizing a telecommuting policy gives a firm the platform to communicate legitimate business reasons for setting how often a lawyer can work remotely.
- **Demonstrate Significance:** As law school classes shrink, the war for talent is expected to intensify, and demands for flexibility are high among the millennials who dominate the talent pool in the legal profession. Without a formal policy, organizations cannot credibly communicate about the types of full-time flexibility available for their lawyers, much less account for those utilizing flexible work, both of which are important features in attracting talent. Further, one of the ways legal employers distinguish themselves is through the awards and recognition they receive. A formal policy for

¹ The Executive Summary is available on our website, www.dfalliance.com under *Research*; Alliance members can access the entire report through the Member Portal on our website.

full-time flex provides a foundation for organizations to be recognized for their efforts to advance work-life control.

- **Reduce Uneven Application:** Some firms argue that there is no need for formalizing full-time flex options because their lawyers are professionals and therefore, can freely decide when to work from home, when to come in and leave, and whether to take vacation or focus on non-billables during slower times. While this may be true in a firm where there is a true culture of non-stigmatized flexibility, our experience shows us that there are inconsistencies around who can and who cannot avail themselves of full-time flexible work without repercussions in most firms. A formal full-time flex policy encourages consistency among practice groups and offices and provides a standard to hold supervisors accountable for supporting the firm's commitment to flexibility for its lawyers.

The Diversity & Flexibility Alliance (the Alliance) is a think tank dedicated to creating work environments centered on inclusion and innovative thought leadership. We provide practical solutions, increase organizational effectiveness, and create high performance cultures leveraging diversity and flexibility. Our firsthand experience in law firms and corporations drives us to make a difference. Using our collective expertise and skills, we create strategic approaches and conduct critical research that bridges the gap between policy and practice. Visit us at: www.dfalliance.com to learn more or contact the Alliance's President & CEO, Manar Morales at: manar@dfalliance.com.