

Your Bar: Your Voice

Membership Survey Results Summary



Background

In 2020, the South Carolina Bar Board of Governors adopted a Five-Year Strategic Diversity Plan that outlines goals and action items to help the Bar and judiciary ultimately reflect the rich diversity of South Carolina's citizenry.

A key part of the plan included a comprehensive survey to better understand Bar members' diversity and the climate regarding the state of diversity and inclusion within the profession. The SC Bar's leadership partnered with Spring International, an independent research organization, to conduct an all-member survey in May 2021.

All active SC Bar members were invited to take the online, confidential Membership Survey. A total of 2,960 members responded to the survey, representing 22 percent of active members. The sample is representative at the 99 percent confidence level. What follows is a **summary** of the results and **insights** and **recommendations** on **opportunities** for improvement by the researchers at Spring International.

Thank you to all SC Bar members who took time to complete the survey and offer their feedback and experiences. By understanding your experience today, we can continuously improve and map a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive future for the legal profession in South Carolina.

Who We Are—Member Demographics

The SC Bar has approximately 14,000 active members (this includes in-state and out-of-state members but does not include retired or inactive members).

- ▶ **83 percent** of the survey respondents identified themselves as white.
- ▶ **7 percent** of respondents identified themselves as African American/Black.
- ▶ **1 percent** identified themselves as Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish origin.
- ▶ **1 percent** identified themselves Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian.
- ▶ **2 percent** identified with two or more races.
- ▶ **1 percent** identified themselves as other.
- ▶ **5 percent** preferred not to answer.
- ▶ **Female** attorneys make up **42 percent** of the survey respondents.
- ▶ **Less than 1 percent** of attorneys who responded identify as non-binary, gender fluid, or transgender.
- ▶ **Four percent** of the respondents identify their orientation as a category other than heterosexual.
- ▶ **Six percent** of respondents identify as having a disability.



There is an opportunity to increase the diversity of the legal profession in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and disability. Efforts to enhance diversity need to begin before law school in the earlier education of young people in the state.

Where We Work

 **Most attorneys who responded work in the private sector. One in three work in firms with less than 30 attorneys.**

One in five respondents work as solo practitioners (22 percent). The largest share, **36 percent** work in private law firms of less than 30 attorneys. Government sector employment represents 15 percent, and only 3 percent work in non-profit settings. The results show that there are demographic differences by practice setting. Highlights include:

- ▶ Male attorneys are more likely to work in private practices and be solo practitioners. Female attorneys are more likely to work the government sector, public sector/in-house counsel, and non-profits.
- ▶ Attorneys of color are more likely to work in the public sector/in-house counsel, local/state or federal government, or non-profit environments.
- ▶ The roles of law clerk, judge, government agency head, or staff attorney appear to have the greatest ethnic diversity.



Given the largest proportion of attorneys work in the private sector, this sector provides the greatest opportunities and responsibilities for recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing attorneys that reflect the state's diversity.

Member Experience and Perspectives

 **Attorneys of color and female attorneys are less likely to feel included and engaged in the SC Bar.**

South Carolina Bar members were asked to share their membership experience in the Bar related to communications, opportunity, fairness, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- ▶ Younger attorneys, female attorneys, and attorneys of color perceive they are treated less fairly in the Bar than their male, older, and white colleagues.
- ▶ Female attorneys perceive the commitment to diversity and equal opportunities significantly lower than male attorneys.
- ▶ Attorneys of color and female attorneys are less likely to feel as if they have a voice, are included, or engaged throughout their career in the SC Bar.
- ▶ Attorneys of color and female attorneys do not perceive that mentoring exists to bring diverse members into leadership positions.
- ▶ Younger attorneys and attorneys of color do not feel as if communications from the SC Bar address issues that are important to them.



There is room for improvement across all aspects of the member experience regardless of race, age, and gender. The largest of which are with respect to opportunities for greater involvement in activities, service, and leadership at the SC Bar.



Opportunities exist to create stronger 'moments that matter' for diverse attorneys— from feeling welcomed, mentored for leadership positions, fair treatment and increased involvement throughout their careers.

Awareness and Involvement



Less than a third of respondents are currently involved in SC Bar activities.

Members were asked to share their level of awareness of SC Bar leadership, programs, and services and their involvement with divisions, sections, and committees.

- ▶ Less than half (46 percent) of the respondents are familiar with Bar leadership. Younger attorneys, those under age 36, and associates are the least familiar.
- ▶ 30 percent of attorneys are currently active in Bar functions, committees, and events – attorneys aged 56+ are the least likely to be active.
- ▶ Associates, government agency heads, or staff attorneys are the most likely to report never being active in the SC Bar.
- ▶ The most well attended activities include the Solo and Small Firm Section, Family Law Section, Children’s Law Committee, and Diversity Committee. Female attorneys are significantly more likely to attend a committee meeting or event than male attorneys.
- ▶ Those who do not participate reported lack of time, inconvenient meeting locations, and lack of awareness as top reasons for not being involved.



The SC Bar has an opportunity to enhance communications, raise awareness, and extend more personal outreach to members to engage them in activities. Offering a wider range of meeting locations may also attract more members.

Experiences of Bias, Harassment, or Discrimination



One in three respondents have experienced bias, harassment, or discrimination during their professional life.

Bar members were asked to share if they had ever experienced or witnessed bias, harassment, or discrimination in their professional life as a practicing lawyer.

- ▶ The most common types of bias, harassment, or discrimination were on the basis of sex, age, and race.
 - Of those who experienced bias or harassment on the basis of sex, **91 percent were female**.
 - **57 percent** of respondents had **witnessed** bias, harassment, or discrimination on the basis of sex – **60 percent** were female.
- ▶ Age and race discrimination were most likely to be experienced or witnessed by younger attorneys and attorneys of color, respectively.
- ▶ Respondents were most likely to experience or witness issues during interactions with other attorneys outside of where they practice, in the courtroom and in their place of employment.

Conclusion

 *The SC Bar is uniquely positioned to enhance diversity of the legal profession through member outreach, education, mentoring, and communications.*

Many South Carolina Bar members spent valuable time providing feedback and sharing their experiences as part of the member survey. The baseline report has shown that younger attorneys, female attorneys, and attorneys of color are less likely to feel included, perceive opportunities, or feel heard in the Bar.

The SC Bar has the opportunity to enhance its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion through improved communications, extending outreach, raising awareness, and providing mentoring to younger attorneys, female attorneys, and attorneys of color. It is recommended that the SC Bar continue to track and monitor its progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion on an annual basis.

About the SC Bar

The South Carolina Bar is a statewide organization dedicated to improving the legal profession, the law, and the administration of justice for all South Carolinians. It serves more than 17,000 lawyer members (active and inactive) and provides resources to educators and citizens of the Palmetto State. All lawyers who practice in South Carolina are members of the SC Bar and may engage with the organization in a variety of ways. Learn more at www.scbbar.org.

About Spring International

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