

By *William-Arthur Haynes*

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SAN FRANCISCO - Three minority-owned legal recruiting firms have been tapped by the California Minority Counsel Program to provide a more diverse pool of job candidates to law firms and corporations.

The San Francisco-based nonprofit works to facilitate connections between corporate counsel and law firms and attorneys of color. Its membership includes corporations, public utilities and the city attorney's offices of Oakland, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The California Minority Counsel Program was launched in 1989 and has nearly 300 members, including the Clorox Co., Microsoft and Sony Computer Entertainment America.

As part of its Diversity Recruiting Initiative, which aims to maximize job prospects for attorneys of color, the program selected the Oakland-based Grisham Group, Hughes Consultants in Atlanta and Chicago's Winston & Green.

Each firm was chosen based on a perceived ability to provide a panel of diverse applicants to law firms and corporations seeking to fill legal positions, said Mark Zemelman, assistant general counsel at Kaiser Foundation Health Plan Inc. and a member of the California Minority Counsel Program's steering committee.

"Our goal is to increase diversity in the legal profession. Right now, it's lacking," Zemelman said. "To do effective minority recruiting, you need good connections into the minority community, and you need recruiters committed to minority recruiting."

The three recruiting firms will be introduced at the California Minority Counsel Program's 17th annual Business Development Conference, scheduled for Sept. 13-14 at San Francisco's Hotel Nikko.

The two-day Annual Business Development Conference is designed to generate discussion focused on diversity in the legal profession. It will feature continuing legal education programs, skill development seminars and Corporate Connections, a brief pre-scheduled interview between recruits and outside and in-house counsel of program members.

Tania Shah, executive director of the California Minority Counsel Program, said more than 600 member representatives are expected to attend.

According to Zemelman, members are free to choose how they will use the recruiters, either exclusively or in tandem with other recruiting firms.

"We're not trying to tell them how to use them, just to check them out," Zemelman said.

Larry Green, name partner at Winston & Green, said that law firms and corporate in-house counsels nationwide are increasingly looking for minority candidates.

Corporations are pressuring outside counsel to diversify, he said. At the same time, the companies attempting to influence diversification within law firms that represent them are also trying to diversify their own in-house staff.

"The mission is to get the firms and corporations to give us a shot when they have openings," he said. "At a minimum, we can give them that diverse slate of candidates."

Shah said the Diversity Recruiting Initiative creates a concrete mechanism that would undermine any validity to the oft-used excuse that good minority candidates are hard to

find.

"We're solely focused on making sure we get a diverse candidate pool and that's a big challenge," Zemelman said.

Of the several nationwide minority-owned recruiting firms screened by the initiative's steering committee, 12 were selected for the interview process.

"We're excited to be a part of this," said Kristine Grisham Holliman of the Grisham Group. "It gives us entry into those firms and companies that are highly regarded."