# Frost Brown Todd Doubles Down on DEI as Law Firm Grows

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**Categories:**

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging

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Frost Brown Todd is coming off a year of tremendous growth that has refocused and emboldened our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. We merged with one of the oldest minority-owned firms in the state of California, having found common ground in our firms' shared commitments to DEI. Change of this magnitude compelled us to take stock of the progress we've made on our DEI journey and where we needed to devote more resources to deliver on our commitments in meaningful *and* measurable ways.

First, we chose to lean harder into *equity* by connecting our DEI strategy with the kind of data infrastructure that helps our firm be more intentional about staffing client matters with representative diversity, while identifying where we may have gaps and opportunities to create more inclusive teams. Clients have responded favorably to our efforts to provide greater transparency. It's opened the door to constructive conversations, allowed for more knowledge-sharing around our DEI successes and pain points, and given us a better understanding of our clients' needs and expectations as they navigate an increasingly intersectional economy.

To be clear, we make no pretenses to having all the pieces of the DEI puzzle figured out at Frost Brown Todd. Recognizing that education and conversation are necessary ingredients for change, our firm has made a significant investment in micro-learning opportunities through regular programming supplemented by a series of required online learning modules—all meant to deepen DEI acumen and accountability across all levels of the firm. This new approach to learning and development is equipping our team with the knowledge to more deftly and empathetically navigate differences and challenges in our workplaces. And not just in our workplaces. Soft skills like cultural competency and inclusive


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communication are leading to tangible improvements in Frost Brown Todd's service to clients. They enable our attorneys to better understand an issue from the client's vantage point and be more responsive to their needs and service expectations.

Equity and cultural competency were not the only things Frost Brown Todd doubled down on within the past year. We also introduced our fourth pillar, *belonging,* rebranding our DEI efforts with new nomenclature: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Belonging (IDEB). With *belonging* as a new point of emphasis, Frost Brown Todd became one of the first in the legal industry to formalize efforts with the express intent to mobilize the whole of our firm in the responsibility we have to elevate the systems and structures supporting employee engagement, well-being, and active allyship in the workplace.

Our firm has long adhered to the tenet that people do better work when they feel better about the work they do—when they feel seen, connected, and valued by their coworkers and leaders: the truest definition of *belonging* in the workplace. Putting a premium on belonging demands more intentionality and education to promote a culture of affirmation that amplifies the best in each of us to get the best results for our clients.

And what we've been able to accomplish in a relatively short period is promising. Engagement is up, attendance at our inclusion workshops is up, and turnover is trending downward.

## Frost Brown Todd's Community Engagement Efforts in Indiana

The examples above reflect broader changes at Frost Brown Todd, but it's also important to zoom in and talk practically about how our firmwide IDEB initiatives tie in with the work Frost Brown Todd is doing in Indiana and how it impacts the local community. Our Indianapolis office team truly walks the talk when it comes to promoting economic inclusion and educational equity in the region.

Our Indy office has long-supported Teachers' Treasures, a local nonprofit that obtains and distributes school supplies to Marion County teachers working with students in need. Frost Brown Todd


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recently became one of five founding sponsors for Teachers' Treasures' Global Language Library, which gives bilingual students and teachers access to books in languages such as Arabic, Spanish, Swahili, French, and German. We are also collaborating with a client to purchase an assortment of books on the organization's wish list. As we know, the pandemic took a substantial toll on student learning, with minority students being among the most disparately impacted. The Global Language Library will help foster a sense of belonging for ELL students, instilling confidence and leading to better learning outcomes.

Furthermore, to help build a more diverse pipeline locally, Frost Brown Todd participates in diversity job fairs and receptions hosted by the Indianapolis Bar Association and Notre Dame Law School, among others. Our Indy office, in collaboration with a long-time client, established an annual diversity scholarship that provides $5,000 in financial assistance to students participating in the IndyBar Diversity Job Fair. This is in addition to the more than $70,000 our firm has awarded to date through the FBT Zenobia Harris Bivens Diversity Scholarship, which is national in scope but has been given to a number of students either from or enrolled at law schools in Indiana.

Similarly, Frost Brown Todd's summer and first-year associate programs have helped bolster diversity at our firm. In 2022, our summer and first-year cohorts comprised 78% women, people of color, and/or LGBTQ+ associates, making them among the most diverse associate classes in firm history. Outside of the firm's associate hires, Frost Brown Todd's Indy office has also made significant strides with lateral recruiting. Since 2021, over 50% of the firm's lateral hires in Indiana were women, attorneys of color, and/or LGBTQ+ attorneys.

While these numbers reflect our measurable commitments, they will never fully capture what is the heart and muscle behind Frost Brown Todd's IDEB efforts: our people. Core values and directives can be communicated from the top, but the real drivers are often the ones with boots firmly on the ground. This was literally the case when our Indy office came together in June to march in the Indianapolis Pride Parade, and hosted a hydration station where more than 500


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bottles of water were handed out to fellow marchers. This collaborative ethos was very “on brand” for our Indy team, which invariably seeks out opportunities to do more, give more, in a concerted effort to reach and impact more people.

It’s because of such efforts, undertaken at the local level by our various offices, that IDEB at Frost Brown Todd adds up to something much greater than the sum of its parts. And for organizations like ours that continue to grow, this is especially important: You have to trust and rely on your local IDEB champions to be good stewards of those core values that serve as the “glue” for the entire enterprise.

Here, our Indianapolis office is in many ways a standard bearer for how Frost Brown Todd has been able to increase our firm’s overall impact by letting our local IDEB champions lead the charge.

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Learn more about IDEB @ FBT

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