



Virginia G. Essandoh

Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, [Ballard Spahr, LLP](#)

Tell us about your firm or business including history, specialization, and years in business.

With more than 600 attorneys in 15 offices, we can respond wherever and whenever our clients need us. We provide results-driven counsel and exceptional service in Business and Transactions, Finance, Intellectual Property, Litigation, and Real Estate.

What's an interesting fact about you or your firm that most people don't know?

In 2011, twelve years ago, at a time when less than a handful of big law firms had a C-level executive in a full-time professional role, Ballard Spahr had a Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer.

What's a favorite moment of your career so far?

When we started to actually see the results of our commitment and strategy relating to diversity, equity and inclusion in terms of demographics at the firm. Our national averages for associates of color rose from 11% to 23%, women equity partners rose from 25% to 30%, and associates self-identifying as LBGTQIA+ rose from 4% to 10%. These dramatic increases in firm wide demographics have been important and monumental to me.

What challenge are you most proud of overcoming?

I am very proud of the “no’s” that were turned into “yeses.” Timing is everything. For example, a decade ago, the firm said, “no, not now” to transgender inclusive benefits, but in only a matter of years I didn’t even have to ask the question and the firm implemented those benefits on its own. There are so many things like that. I’ve learned that a “no” is really a no for now, not a no – not ever! If I’m disappointed in a decision that happened last month, my experience has shown that change will come, and we’ll get what we ask for at some point.

Tell us about a recent professional accomplishment of yours.

I’m very proud of Ballard growing and expanding diversity, equity and inclusion at the firm. It’s a department, just like accounting and finance are departments at the firm. We are a team of five, and it’s rare to see that in a firm of our size. When we were 400 and 500 attorneys, we still had a team. I consider that an accomplishment because we are rising to client expectation and to the needs of the firm.

Tell us about a recent personal accomplishment of yours.

I’ve had the opportunity to train legal diversity professionals who have come through our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion department who have moved on to higher positions and advanced their careers in this work. I’m very proud of this.

How can you help other Women Owned Law members improve their businesses?

I’ve presented to WOL, in panels and other programs, on how to incorporate a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as part of your business strategy. What does inclusive leadership look like going forward? How will growing and recruiting for your firm look different to foster inclusion? You need to be able to attract all of the best talent out there, and all of the diverse clients out there, for the sustainability and growth of your business.

How has Women Owned Law been of value to you and your career?

The members of this organization have been a resource that I’ve been able to call upon to help me in my role in the firm. I’ve posted requests from Ballard lawyers on the WOL listserv, and our attorneys have been able to partner with WOL attorneys. I’ve used WOL member coaches and other professionals for presentations to our lawyers on time management, self-evaluations, and more. The wealth, depth and breadth of the WOL membership has been so helpful to the work that I do.

About Women Owned Law

Women Owned Law is a ground-breaking group created to connect and advance women legal entrepreneurs. WOL supports its members and other women entrepreneurs in the law in their business endeavors at every point in the business lifecycle. We advocate on behalf of women legal entrepreneurs and have been instrumental in raising the profile of women entrepreneurs in the law.

For additional information about Women Owned Law visit <http://www.womenownedlaw.org>