

BigLaw 'Returnship' Program For Female Attys Expands

By **Andrew Strickler**

Law360, New York (September 22, 2014, 12:02 PM ET) -- BigLaw's first fellowship program to bring women who took breaks from legal careers back to law firm jobs is set for a major expansion, the program founder announced Monday.

After launching in the spring with women fellows placed at four firms, the OnRamp Fellowship says 11 additional firms have committed to filling more than 50 positions in Chicago, Miami, Dallas, Nashville and several other cities.

Applying lawyers are required to have three years of professional experience and have been on hiatus for at least two years. Each firm pays their fellows' stipend — \$125,000 with benefits in most markets, or \$85,000 in some smaller markets — on a one-year contract.

“By participating in the first ‘returnship’ ever launched in the legal field, these 15 law firms are trailblazers,” OnRamp founder Caren Ulrich Stacy said in a statement. “They are benefiting the profession as well as their own firms by forging a new pathway back for women lawyers who took a break and want to return.”

The four original firms — Baker Botts LLP, Cooley LLP, Hogan Lovells, and Sidley Austin LLP — already placed nine OnRamp fellows this year, and will continue to participate in the expanded pilot program.

The new additions are Akerman LLP, Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz PC, Blank Rome LLP, Crowell & Moring LLP, Fenwick & West LLP, Fish & Richardson PC, Fried Frank Harris Shriver & Jacobson LLP, Jenner & Block LLP, K&L Gates LLP, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP and White & Case LLP.

“As a firm that is committed to the progression of women at all levels, Cooley is excited to see the momentum being generated by the OnRamp Fellowship,” said Cooley CEO Joe Conroy. “We are proud to have been one of the pioneering firms to support the fellowship, and we wish it every success as the program expands into its second phase.”

The program was modeled after "returnships" offered at companies like Goldman Sachs & Co. and is intended to provide re-entry to women who took time off for family or other obligations, and to seek out applicants with firm leadership potential.

Fellowship administrators conduct an "organizational culture analysis" and study high-performers at

participating firms as part of the matching process.

Applicants also complete a personality and skills assessment and a writing exam, among other tests. Once placed, fellows are provided a partner adviser, a career counselor and unlimited continuing legal education, as well as training in areas like social media.

The original fellow practice areas have expanded from corporate, litigation, trademark, finance and real estate to include emerging companies, U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulatory, employment, securities and tax.

--Editing by Kat Laskowski.

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