Legal Industry 'Hackathon' Awards Ideas for Combating Bias, Promoting Diversity

By: Xiumei Dong

Teams of law firm leaders and in-house counsel were giving out candies, waving green flags, and even dressing up as Ghostbusters in San Francisco on Friday, hoping to win over judges and audience members at the second Diversity in Law Hackathon.

The 10 teams first got together in July in Chicago, where they were assigned specific diversity and inclusion challenges in the legal industry to address, such as fostering a healthy pipeline of diverse candidates, pay parity and leadership inequalities.

On Friday, they reconvened to pitch their ideas, or "hacks," at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law.

In the first diversity hackathon, which kicked off in February, judges at the July pitch event at Chicago's Northwestern Pritzker School of Law selected a diversity data

(Photo: Jason Doiy/ALM)

First place winners of the Diversity Lab hackathon held at Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. Left to right: Kelly Lefferts, Peter Werner, Jenny Deigloff and Amy Lucas.

tracking system and website as the winning idea.

Caren Ulrich Stacy, founder of the Diversity Lab, which organized the event, said the second session had to wait list about 50 law firms and legal departments.

"These are teams that are incredibility diverse individuals,"

Ulrich Stacy said. "The teams were purposefully put together with all these diverse thoughts and backgrounds in place because we knew that will create a better outcome."

The teams that gathered Friday in San Francisco pitched their ideas to a panel of judges that included Visa chief diversity

Diversity Lab hackathon held at Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco.

Team Spectra

officer Jolen Anderson; former Starbucks general counsel Paula Boggs; Bank of America associate general counsel Beth Ybarra Crean; former Morrison Foerster chair and managing director at Major, Lindsey & Africa Keith Wetmore; Northwestern Pritzker School of Law outgoing dean Daniel Rodriguez; Bloomberg BNA CEO Josh Eastright; and two judges from ALM: American Lawyer columnist Vivia Chen and Lisa Helem, editor-in-chief of The National Law Journal.

After a marathon session of pitches that lasted over five hours, the judges selected team Bias Busters' "microboosts" as the over winning idea. The team's app delivers small nudges—"low-cost and high-return" interventions—to interrupt implicit bias during the talent development cycle.

For example, the app will send the lawyers bias alerts before interviews and during recruiting, feedback and committee meetings.

The Bias Busters team consisted of Scoular associate general counsel Jenny Deitloff, Bloomin' Brands Inc. U.S. general counsel Kelly Lefferts, McDermott Will & Emery partner Todd Finger, O'Melveny & Myers partner Greta Lichtenbaum, Hunton Andrew Kurth partner Randy Parks; Cooley partner Peter Werner and UC Hastings Law student Amy Lucas.

The second place team, Gap Busters, aims to improve sponsorship programs such as OnTrack Sponsorship, a program that grew out of the Diversity Lab's 2016 Women in Law Hackathon. Fixes included improving selection and matching, increasing engagement, improved accountability

measures and a rewards structure. The third place winners, Legal Tender, created "Loopedin," a social platform that connects leaders and associates.

"There was so much interest in so many of the ideas, that it is likely that we are not going to just implement the five that won—it is likely that we are probably going implement closer to 10," said Ulrich Stacy.

She said Diversity Lab has set aside a quarter a of million dollars to develop the winning ideas. Giving the wealth of pitches, Ulrich Stacy said the Diversity Lab won't host a new hackathon next year but will instead focus on implementation. She added the participating organizations are planning to contribute $1 million more to fund the new ideas.

Besides the judges' picks, audience members also selected their favorite team. Tied for the

Team Legal Tender

Team Deliverables

(Photos: Jason Doiy/ALM)

Crowd Favorite award were Team Spectra's idea for an "inclusion rider" for clients to include in RFPs, allowing firm-to-firm comparisons on diversity metrics, and team Pay Parity's idea for a pay equity pledge that would see organizations share anonymous compensation data for analysis.

Ulrich Stacy said one of the reasons the diversity hackathons have been successful is that they allow lawyers to combine theory, experience and creativity.

"This provides a special access to people's personalities and people's fun side, and also the passion they bring to this topic," she said.

Xiumei Dong *covers the business of law from the West Coast. Contact her at xdong@alm.com. On Twitter: @XiumeiDong.*

(Center) Intel's Laurie Charrington at the Diversity Lab hackathon.
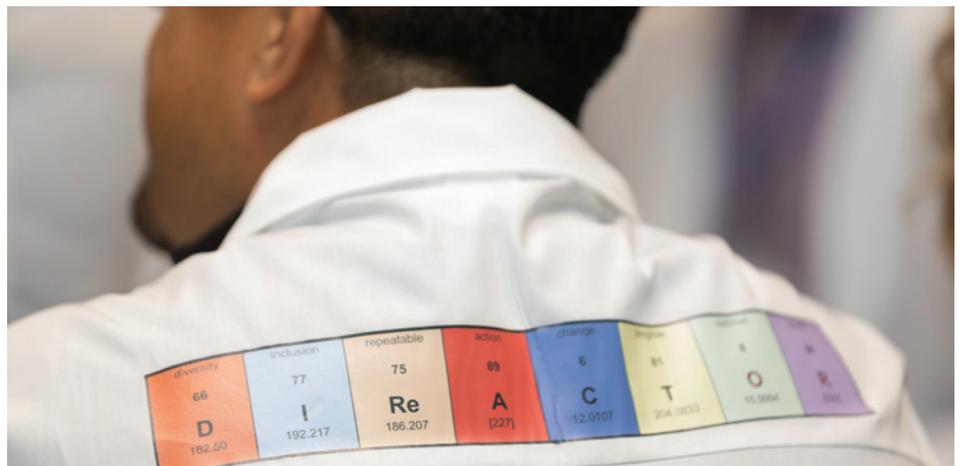
Team Deliverables at the Diversity Lab hackathon held at Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco.