

# Chambers USA: The Pandemic and the Process

For those who have invested time and energy on *Chambers USA* submissions: This year's preeminent legal rankings guide will be released on May 20, 2021. Many firm attorneys and consultants who worked to provide submissions eagerly await its release to learn the feedback from general counsel and determine comparisons against competitors.

Not unexpectedly, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected Chambers and Partners operations. We all experienced unprecedented disruption during the pandemic, with thousands of law firms and law courts transitioning overnight to remote operations, which led to necessary changes in the research process.

Jaffe spoke with Kushraj Cheema, *Chambers USA* Head of US Research and Development, who is based in the New York office, and Toby Eccleshall, *Chambers USA* Editor, about how they navigated the pandemic's impact, what to expect from the *Chambers USA 2021* guide and updates to the 2022 submission process.

## But first: What is Chambers USA and why should my firm pay attention to its rankings?

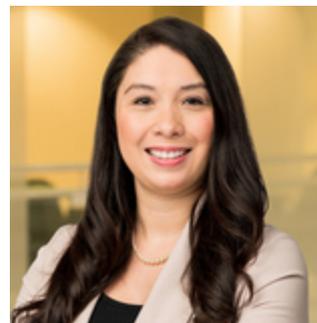
*Chambers USA* is the world's leading research and analytics firm for the legal profession and provides rankings of the top lawyers and law firms across the United States.

*Chambers USA* is the definitive and most-comprehensive resource in the country for businesses seeking information about external legal counsel, with in-depth research carried out through a combination of detailed interviews with clients and third parties and analyzing recent activity.

The *Chambers USA 2021* guide highlights the US legal market's outstanding practitioners in all 50 states and territories. Nationally, this year's edition includes more than **8,000 firm rankings** and almost **22,000 attorney rankings** in **more than 2,000** commercial, civil and regulatory practice areas. The *Chambers USA 2021* guide is the product of in-depth research with law firms, clients and third parties, and reviews of **more than 10,000** submissions.

## With so many variables in the last year, were there any big changes to the research process or results for the 2021 guide?

According to Cheema, "Internally, the pandemic and related lockdowns transformed USA 2021 research almost overnight. This guide is the first to have been researched almost



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completely remotely, while we also pushed back the start of research by a month to accommodate firms that may have had their operations disrupted in the run-up to our start date. Most importantly, we worked with firms and clients to be as flexible and accommodating as possible regarding deadlines and interviews, to avoid causing unnecessary strain on legal departments that were already stretched thin by the pandemic.

“Thankfully, due to the incredible levels of cooperation and flexibility of our law firm partners, their clients and our researchers, the impact of the pandemic on the results themselves was negligible,” Eccleshall said. “Over the course of the seven months of research, we were still able to dive deeply into the USA’s legal market in all 50 states, D.C. and nationwide; obtain nearly 35,000 market responses; and produce the new guide. Indeed, we actually saw an increase in the number of submissions we received and the amount of interviews we carried out.”

## What is new this year?

There are significant areas of new coverage, including new tables for leading SPAC capital-raising leaders, attorneys assisting clients who have experienced high-profile data breaches, and both firms and individuals advising clients about enforcing international arbitration judgments.

## With the 2022 *Chambers USA Guide* submission deadlines available, are any changes to the research process or submission document expected for the guide?

“Last year, we focused significant attention on revamping existing areas of research and expanding practice area coverage into new jurisdictions, resulting in the creation of 37 new practice areas available for submission this year, including six new Immigration tables, two new Life Sciences tables and six new plaintiff-side Litigation tables,” said Cheema.

A number of nationwide research sections will no longer accept referees. The researchers found that a majority of clients referred for these sections have already been spoken to for state-specific research and, given that these nationwide categories are typically researched toward the end of the cycle, they can make best use of all of the statewide research already done and apply it to nationwide rankings.

## How is Chambers addressing diversity and inclusion?

The guide works to [promote Diversity and Inclusion](#) in the legal field and be reflective of the current state and future of the industry. The *Chambers USA 2021* guide includes 572 new Up-and-Coming rankings, which represents a 79% growth from last year, and 220 new Associate rankings, a 182% growth from last year. Women lawyers now comprise 45% of all Up-and-Comers and 50% of all Associates ranked.

“Ranking opportunities for small firms, women and young lawyers, and attorneys from

underrepresented backgrounds have increased annually,” said Eccleshall. “Our inclusive approach to research and rankings has seen significant numbers of women attorneys, younger partners and associates earn recognition as the research team spoke to an ever-more diverse range of sources and encouraged equal gender representation among references. Going forward, we will continue to put diversity and inclusion at the core of our research operations.”

Cheema said, “We made small tweaks to the submission document for 2022, including a link to a voluntary firmwide diversity survey, and allowing firms to indicate whether attorneys have part-time working arrangements.”

## **Let’s finish by tackling the issue for those disappointed or confused by their rankings and the results of their hard work. What are the recommendations for those with questions related to the guide?**

Cheema reminded us that “it is often difficult to achieve a ranking or a major promotion over the course of a single research section. We typically look for consistency in performance and client satisfaction, so it is often worth it to at least send in submissions over two consecutive research periods.”

He added, “Please do engage with us and our researchers if there are issues you believe may have been overlooked or if you have questions regarding practice area-specific issues. Our Editorial Team is always available to explain what we’re looking for or to help firms to navigate the Chambers research process.”

*Chambers USA* has put together a number of resources to assist firms with best practices, including submissions guidelines, practice area definitions and referee-contacting [FAQs](#). They will also host a [webinar](#) on June 8 featuring guidance on the *Chambers USA* process and answering questions from the audience.

Would you like to talk more about your *Chambers USA* strategy and submissions for 2022? Need help getting started or with submission guidance or review, or want help garnering feedback from researchers about 2021 results? Reach out to Evyan O’Keefe at [eokeefe@jaffepr.com](mailto:eokeefe@jaffepr.com) or 347.213.7656.