



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

DEI movement faces critical juncture

In our Thought Leadership Roundtable, executives at the ACLU of Indiana and the Damien Center discuss the state of the DEI movement and best practices for companies that are committed to a diverse, equitable workplace.

Q: How would you characterize the health of the DEI movement today, specifically in the state of Indiana, and how do you expect it to evolve over the next two years?

Tarah Reid: The DEI movement is novel to many and engrained into the fabric of daily operations for others. Specifically in the state of Indiana, it is getting its legs and beginning to walk upright in a forward direction. The next two years are going to be pivotal and will set the tone for decades to come. What happens during this time will reveal if ad campaigns, statements of support, and corporate

contributions were genuine or just self-preservation during periods of public outcry and civil unrest. As the workplace evolves over the next decade, we should be able to measure the outcomes of implementing effective DEI initiatives and/or the costs of sitting on the sidelines.

DyNishia Miller: DEI is a long-term movement, and I hope it continues to strengthen and evolve. It is still energized, but there are areas of concern. Across the country, DEI and elements related to it are being attacked. The State of Indiana is one of the few state administrations with a Chief Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity Officer, which is admirable and showcases that our

government takes DEI seriously. Damien Center is a member of the Diversity Roundtable of Central Indiana, and community-based groups such as the DRTCI do great work in further supporting and fostering DEI work locally. However, the health of DEI could be threatened if we do not continue to have state support and if further legislation continues to be passed that negatively impacts diverse communities in our state.

Q: What policies should Indiana be considering to better support Indiana businesses' DEI efforts?

DyNishia Miller: Indiana should consider additional policies that reduce barriers for diverse communities rather than creating additional barriers. Continue policies and programs that increase the number of minority- and locally owned businesses and provide pathways to entrepreneurship for these groups. Encouraging businesses to create or strengthen supplier diversity programs can make a big impact on the diversity of the local business-to-business economy.

Tarah Reid: Indiana should absolutely be working to preserve DEI efforts in our schools and businesses by legislative means. We cannot close the book on all the work our predecessors have done to educate our citizens and to shed light on the systems of injustice this country was established upon and which continue to perpetuate social, economic, and legal advantages for some while simultaneously promoting violence against and hardship for others. The efforts that some of our fellow states have enacted are a brazen declaration to do just that. We simply cannot allow policies that threaten the lives, rights, health, and dignity of people in Indiana, especially if we want to attain and retain talent.

Q: What are integral components of successful, sustainable DEI programs within companies?

Tarah Reid: Successful, sustainable DEI programs explicitly describe organization objectives, identify gaps, and map out clear action plans. Successful, sustainable DEI programs are not static and aren't represented by obscure language buried in employee handbooks or marketing materials targeting end users or customers. Genuine DEI programs should address

hiring, advancement, retention, and how a sense of belonging drives employee satisfaction.

DyNishia Miller: The most integral components are leadership support, staff buy-in, and funding. If an organization's leadership doesn't understand, value, and advocate for DEI, the efforts will be an uphill battle. Staff also need to value DEI and buy into DEI efforts. Everyone may not be at the same level of understanding, but they need to be willing to learn and grow. Finally, dedicated funding is essential; it may come by way of budgets for roles dedicated to DEI work, consultants, training, events, or other initiatives. Without funding, the impact of DEI programs will be limited. All these elements also need to have some alignment with a company's strategic plan, goals, mission, and values to remain sustainable.

Q: DEI means different things to different people. How should organizations go about arriving at a definition that's right for them?

DyNishia Miller: An organization's work—particularly from the nonprofit perspective—will always come back to mission, vision, goals, and values; look to those first to find your core areas of DEI alignment. One of Damien Center's values is equity: "we prioritize increasing access to services and eliminating barriers to care by meeting the unique needs of diverse communities and being a safe, welcoming place for all people." This guides what DEI should mean for us. If your mission, vision, goals, and values don't provide as much guidance, the first step is to define what diversity means for your organization; that will lead you to what equity and inclusion mean. Damien Center's definition of diversity is people-centered: we believe that diversity includes all visible and invisible differences among people. I once worked for an organization in which diversity meant agricultural diversity. Since Damien's definition is people-centered, the definitions of equity and inclusion should also be people-centered.

Tarah Reid: Because it is so new to many organizations and because it means different things to different people, it is paramount that we simply ASK the members of our organizations what DEI means to them before making sweeping changes.



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Q: Discuss the importance of company leadership being involved in DEI initiatives.

Tarah Reid: One of the many goals of leadership is to bring out the best in people and to serve people in a way that cares, respects, and provides continual support of their individual selves and communities. DEI initiatives keep these goals within view. Involvement should detail leadership commitments. In addition, involvement should include professional development programs specifically designed to support the advancement and leadership of underrepresented staff.

DyNishia Miller: It is incredibly important for a company's leadership to be involved with DEI initiatives, because staff want to know that their leaders take it seriously. DEI should be incorporated into the decision-making process and overall company culture, which is the responsibility of the leadership team. Involvement looks like advocating for people and bringing others to the table, particularly those who do not have the same access and opportunity a leader does but whose voices and input are necessary. Showing up also goes a long way. This means helping to plan or execute events and initiatives, putting those events on your calendar, and attending them to learn and show support. DEI is not just the job of a DEI Officer, a DEI Manager, or a DEI Committee. DEI is everyone's job.

Q: What metrics are helpful for companies that want to measure the success of their DEI efforts?

DyNishia Miller: DEI can be difficult to measure, but having metrics for DEI efforts is critical to sustainability. For employees, it's helpful to track demographic data for hiring, retention, promotion, and turnover. I

recommend collecting demographic data of other stakeholders, as well, such as board members, suppliers, customers, clients, patients, and volunteers. When you have that demographic data, you can also measure outcomes from those varying demographics, such as improved health, improved customer satisfaction, or sales. It is also important to measure the percentage of staff, clients, and customers responding favorably to DEI-related questions on satisfaction surveys.

Tarah Reid: DEI success cannot be understood by a simple set of metrics. We have to look holistically at the current makeup of an organization and what that organization strives to be. We all know it is critical to have a diverse candidate pool when hiring new team members, but we can't stop there. We must examine the makeup of our current staff, especially our leadership teams and boards.

If an organization is attracting a diverse candidate pool but your team is still not diverse, you need to look at other factors. Is there a bias in your hiring process? Is a lack of leadership diversity affecting hiring decisions? Are people of color leaving your organization at a higher rate? If so, is your organization living its values and ensuring that people of all backgrounds feel comfortable?

Q: What examples can you give of corporate DEI initiatives that have led to tangible successes?

Tarah Reid: One of the most poignant DEI initiatives that I have been involved with is the revision of the organization employee value proposition. Doing so allows employees and leadership to periodically audit programs and performance and avoid mission drift. Establishing mentorship and community programs for

underrepresented groups has also demonstrated tangible results. I am also a proponent of diverse hiring panels, team equity audits, and restorative inclusion. For those organizations new to DEI initiatives and unsure where to start, even something as simple as recognizing and celebrating diverse holidays is a great start.

DyNishia Miller: Anecdotally, Damien Center has seen many larger local corporations pursue DEI initiatives through Employee Resource Groups. ERGs can be an effective way to give employees ownership over their own DEI concerns and priorities, while also fostering a sense of community and support. This is why we implemented them on a smaller scale in our organization. We have also seen more corporations and foundations emphasize DEI in their charitable giving, which has a tangible impact on organizations like Damien Center. We have received grants that help us reach out to specific communities—such as trans and nonbinary youth or Latin people at risk for HIV—and address the concerns of those individuals.

Q: How can organizations successfully implement supplier diversity programs?

DyNishia Miller: First, it is important to get an accurate understanding of diversity among your current

suppliers and vendors. For the sake of consistency, I recommend creating a supplier diversity form, sending it to your current vendors, and requesting that they fill it out. Once you establish a baseline, you will better understand the areas where your organization is excelling and where work can be done. Take these insights and develop policies encouraging staff to look beyond the suppliers that they've always patronized. If a vendor doesn't check diversity boxes on your survey, that does not mean you eliminate them as a service provider. The goal of this is not to base your decision fully on diversity but to allow diverse businesses, which tend to be overshadowed and underutilized, greater access to opportunity within the community.

Tarah Reid: Do your research, engage, and connect. Spend the time to thoroughly understand supplier values. There are a number of great DEI vendor surveys available as resources; however sometimes an old-fashioned phone call or meeting gives us the best insight. It is easy to find a company through a simple internet search, but we've really got to slow it down and get to know the companies that we support economically. The power of economics is very real, and we can no longer afford to incentivize systems and thought patterns that are contrary to the advancement of our causes. ●



DyNishia Miller has been Damien Center's inaugural Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer since June of 2021. Her background includes work in international education, nonprofits, and state government. She holds a master's degree in international relations and a bachelor's degree in communications, both from the University of Indianapolis.




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Tarah Reid is the Director of Finance & Operations at the ACLU of Indiana and an Indiana University Kelley School of Business graduate. Tarah is dedicated to applying her passions for economic solutions to the ACLU's mission of defending individual rights and preserving civil liberties across the state. She has a professional niche in servicing non-profit organizations.





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