# Corporate DEI Visibility

A case for increasing transparency of sustainable DEI practices

# Contents

The world changes quickly in many respects. Already, the 21st Century has seen significant and extraordinary advances in technology, science, and communication that often make us ask, "how can I realistically keep up?" Yet, when it comes to our systems of government and the centuries of historical oppression our country was founded on, change has been slow and painful for many in the U.S. The events of 2020 (e.g., the murder of George Floyd, COVID-19 Pandemic) pulled the curtain back, revealing for many of us blinded in privilege, the long-standing systemic inequities that have created deep disparities and barriers for Black and African Americans, our indigenous folx, the LGBTQIA+ community, and other excluded and marginalized identities, reigniting a fire for critical and lasting change.

Based on workplace statistics reported in a recent Built In article, updated for 2022, "groups formerly seen as 'minorities' will reach majority status by 2044."[1] Though we currently have the most diverse workforce in U.S. history with regard to age, race, and gender identity, the retention and advancement of employees who represent dimensions of difference remains problematic and has increasingly become part of the workplace culture conversation. Many companies are beginning to reflect on the bigger and more important questions that go beyond diverse representation, making an effort to infuse a sense of authentic belonging into their workplace cultures to achieve a more sustainable employee culture that centers justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as foundational corporate values. Whether this focus is rooted in a genuine desire to influence systemic change, stems from societal demands to leverage large corporate platforms for change, or both, we can see that it's an emerging trend across industries.

# what we're
# NOTICING

The trends we're seeing in higher education mirror the trends in corporate environments, with an increased focus beyond access to education through the recruitment of diverse students across disciplines, to a heightened emphasis on student retention, persistence, and job placement success where students of historically excluded and marginalized identities are concerned. With long-standing disparities and achievement gaps for many of these students and renewed strategic initiatives within the higher education world to close the outcomes gaps, college and university career services offices play a crucial role in ensuring that all students, and particularly marginalized student populations, are successful in securing competitive employment upon graduation.

> Career services holds a unique position as liaison between employers and students, with a responsibility to both in creating sustainable connections that lead to successful outcomes for students.
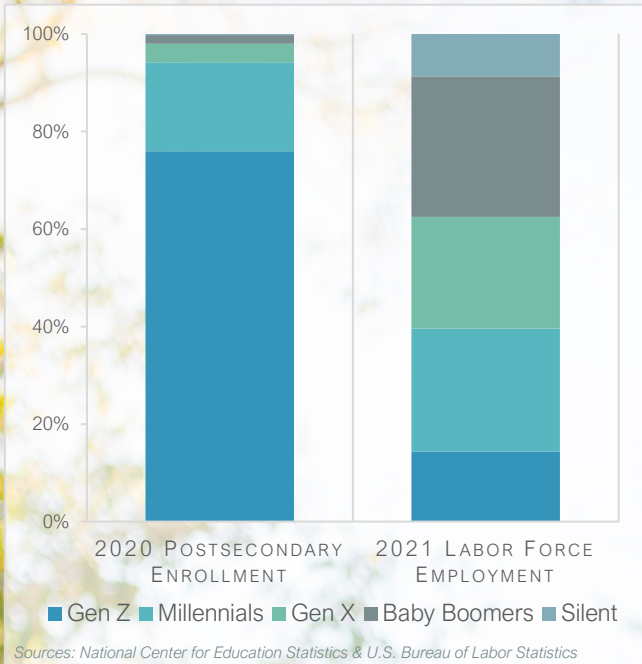
This includes educating and guiding students in company and organizational research to better understand roles, industries, and work culture that aligns with students' interests, strengths, and values. On the employer side, career services works to cultivate corporate recruiting relationships and define student engagement strategies which align with student talent and competencies, values, and career interests. We act as a bridge to connect shared goals which requires us to deeply understand the needs of two distinct constituents.

# Our Motivation & Purpose

Gen Z comprises the majority of students currently accessing higher education career services and is the newest generation entering the corporate world of work. According to a recent report released by Deloitte, Gen Z makes up over 24% of the U.S. population and "is the most ethnically and racially diverse generation in history," and has the broadest spectrum of gender identity among all generations in the workforce.[2] What we've observed of Gen Z as career services practitioners in the higher education setting is that their internal values are a key driver in their career decisions, particularly when it comes to choosing a company to begin their careers. Gen Z is purpose-driven and wants their work to make an impact, ranging from a personal level all the way to a global scale. The direct alignment of these individual values with the corporate values of the companies and organizations they're evaluating is a priority in Gen Z's career decision making process; more so than with previous generations of students we've worked with. With a strong desire to seek out environments where their identities are not only welcomed, but affirmed and centered, this generation of students is posing deeper questions in our career counseling sessions to understand whether they'll be able to authentically show up at work, or be expected to check their identities at the door and blend in with the privileged majority.



2020 Postsecondary Enrollment / 2021 Labor Force Employment
■ Gen Z ■ Millennials ■ Gen X ■ Baby Boomers ■ Silent

*Sources: National Center for Education Statistics & U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*

What we've discovered when witnessing conversations between students and corporate recruiters is that students will express a general value for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), asking companies about their culture and their values. According to the 2021 Recruiter Nation Report released by Jobvite, "49% of recruiters report that job seekers are inquiring about D&I initiatives more than they did in the previous year—up 16 percentage points from 2020."[5] More often than not, we hear recruiters responding with broad, sweeping statements related to their corporate commitment to DEI efforts, leaving students with the burden of digging for more substantial evidence of sustainable DEI practices. As career services professionals, we know that there are many companies out there leading the way in prioritizing their DEI initiatives, yet we see students struggle to uncover meaningful evidence of sustainable DEI efforts in their company research. So, we sought answers to the following questions:

# 49%

**of recruiters report that job seekers are inquiring about D&I initiatives more than they did the previous year.**[5]

**"What are the key indicators of sustainable DEI practices?"**

**"How can we in career services help lessen the burden on our students to find the answers to their questions about how a company genuinely lives their values around justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging?"**

To better understand the key indicators of sustainable DEI practices within the corporate world, we consulted leading sources in the DEI space including the Human Rights Campaign, Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, Alliance for Global Inclusion, DiversityInc, and others who have identified metrics for evaluating the reputation of and sustainable commitments to equitable and inclusive practices. This research led to the identification of six indicators that will help students draw better conclusions about a company's deeper commitment to sustainable DEI practices. These are by no means the only indicators of a company's value for DEI, but they are ones which reflect a more sustainable commitment with the potential to create lasting systemic impact, and are indicators which have the potential to be accessible and transparent to the public.

**6 indicators**
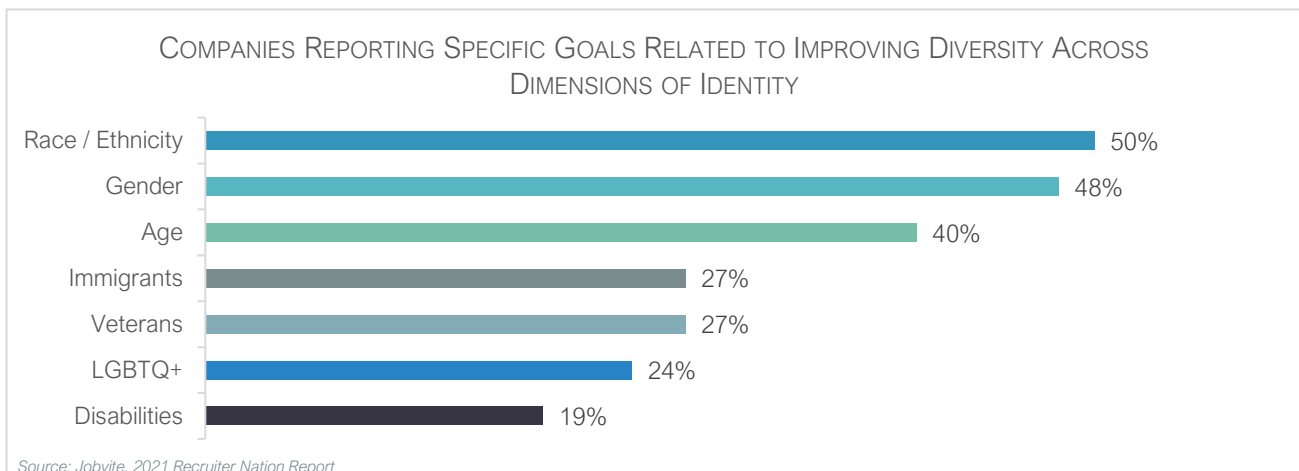
# The DEI Visibility Indicators

# The company engages in inclusive recruiting practices to cultivate a diverse workforce.

Historically, there are many laws focused on the prevention of discrimination in the recruitment and hiring process. However, it's not until recently that we've seen an intentional focus on eliminating both conscious and unconscious bias while also proactively promoting opportunities in a way that sources a diverse applicant pool for companies and organizations. Many have realized that recruiting efforts must go beyond posting a position broadly, crossing fingers and hoping for a diverse pool of candidates, then giving a shoulder shrug when the pool is anything but diverse and saying, "Well, we tried!"

**If companies can't build a reliable, diverse pipeline into their organization, they're not likely to accomplish or make much progress on many of their other diversity-related goals.**

According to the 2021 Recruiter Nation Report released by Jobvite, 44% of recruiters surveyed said, "candidates have turned down an interview or job offer due to a lack of diversity in [an organization]."[5] Among other competing priorities we're seeing related to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in companies and organizations, improving diversity in recruiting and talent acquisition has moved to the top. If companies can't build a reliable, diverse pipeline into their organization, they're not likely to accomplish or make much progress on many of their other diversity-related goals. We've heard from many of our corporate partners that their companies have identified robust strategic goals for improving diverse representation and retention efforts across race and ethnicity, gender, age, LGBTQ+, and disability status, however few are able to address complex questions on *how* they're planning to accomplish these goals or address deeper systemic issues that contribute to antiquated hiring practices that persist in many companies and organizations.

COMPANIES REPORTING SPECIFIC GOALS RELATED TO IMPROVING DIVERSITY ACROSS DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY

| Dimension | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Race / Ethnicity | 50% |
| Gender | 48% |
| Age | 40% |
| Immigrants | 27% |
| Veterans | 27% |
| LGBTQ+ | 24% |
| Disabilities | 19% |

*Source: Jobvite, 2021 Recruiter Nation Report*

In an effort to attract more diverse candidates to applicant pools, we've seen subtle changes in the way job descriptions are written with an increase in inclusive language, attempting to neutralize gender-bias when describing positions and/or discussing attributes and characteristics desired for certain roles. Over time, many words in the English language have acquired either male or female associations that trigger unconscious bias. For example, companies and organizations that leverage gender-neutral titles and pronouns, use collaborative rather than competitive language, and focus on limiting the number of unnecessary education or skill qualifications, will increase the likelihood of appealing to more candidates who identify as women.[6]

Furthermore, when job postings discuss an organization's specific and sustainable policies and practices that contribute to equity and inclusion, along with benefits that promote a sense of belonging, prospective applicants, specifically those who identify with dimensions of difference, can visualize themselves thriving within the organization and will make informed, values-centered decisions about whether to pursue an application.

Reducing time-to-hire has prompted companies to rely on AI technology in the recruiting process. While this may reduce inefficiencies, it can also replicate the unconscious bias that comes from human programming and biased data sets as we learned through a recent Darden Business Publishing case study[7] students analyzed in our 2021 Women in Business Case Competition at Colorado State University's College of Business. The case study spotlighted Amazon, who reportedly scrapped an AI recruiting program once it discovered its algorithm was biased against women. Anonymized screening methods, which involve removing all personal identification components of a job application and resume, allows a hiring team to assess applicants solely on their skills and experience rather than elements that may lead to biased decisions. Thus, significantly reducing bias in the initial components of the hiring process.
A commitment to this method of screening takes significant planning and often requires a recruiting strategy which may be in conflict with the latest talent sourcing trends.

Companies have significantly improved their social media game when it comes to building brand visibility and spreading the word about opportunities. Since 2018, companies have increased their social media budget by 10%, allocating the largest segment of their recruiting budget toward broadening their social reach with platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok seeing the most "upward momentum."[5]

With a majority of recruiting resources being dedicated to these visual platforms to reach a wider and more diverse audience, one might question to what extent this trend is working against the anonymized screening methods that attempt to reduce bias.

The recruitment and hiring process gives applicants, especially recent graduates looking to land their first job after college, a brief glimpse into a company's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is one of the few instances they'll have access to making observations, asking questions, and truly getting a sense for whether they'll experience belonging within a company's culture or have equitable access to opportunities. Students assess their values alignment with a company within this limited window of time, making crucial decisions about whether they'll move forward in the process or continue to pursue opportunities with that company.

### Thus, the recruiting process is a critical moment for organizations to be knowledgeable, transparent, and forthcoming about their sustainable commitments to DEI work.

While cultivating and hiring diverse talent is a fundamental corporate DEI practice, organizations must also consider the other components of DEI: equity and inclusion. In a 2020 report produced by McKinsey, researchers found that "while overall sentiment on diversity was 52% positive…, sentiment on inclusion was markedly worse, at only 29%".[8] This illustrates that companies must approach DEI strategy with a holistic, multifaceted lens. By hiring and onboarding diverse employees, companies can leverage their perspectives and ideas, making additional progress in embedding DEI practices into various areas of the business.

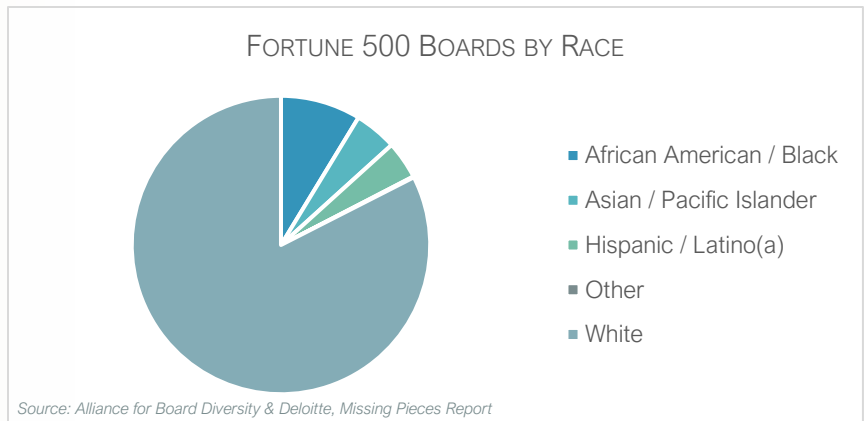**Companies must approach DEI strategy with a holistic, multifaceted lens.**
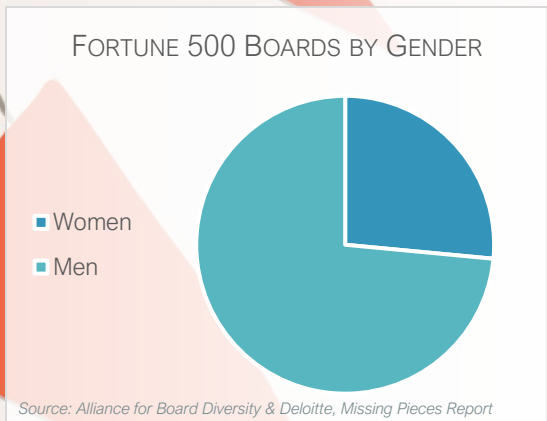
# The company demonstrates continuity in their commitment to DEI through their brand and culture.

A demonstration of continuity among any particular aspect of a company's culture is essential in creating a foundation of trust among a community of employees. Just as brand continuity is critical in establishing market visibility among customers, a unified strategy around a corporate value for DEI will give prospective employees greater confidence in a company's genuine commitment to creating a culture that centers, affirms, and advances those who represent dimensions of difference. At the most basic level, most company websites use images that reflect diverse racial and ethnic identities to indicate their commitment to diversity and inclusion. At the same time, companies must avoid tokenizing and honestly show the true make-up of their workforce. When a prospective employee digs a bit deeper into the actual employee composition of a company, they must assess if those website images mirror the same representation at every level of the organization.

As companies seek to highlight their diverse talent, they may find their employee pool does not yield diverse representation—which is why recruitment is such a foundational component of building a diverse, inclusive organization, as noted in the first indicator. However, companies must go beyond recruitment in order to build an inclusive culture where diverse employees are both retained and promoted. A March 2022 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) article cited a quote from an employment law specialist stating,

"It's easy to focus on filling the pipeline and getting people in and hiring and screening and attracting, but companies aren't doing the really hard work of pushing their sleeves up and looking at their infrastructure and answering: Why are people leaving?"[9]

## FORTUNE 500 BOARDS BY GENDER



- Women
- Men

*Source: Alliance for Board Diversity & Deloitte, Missing Pieces Report*

## FORTUNE 500 BOARDS BY RACE



- African American / Black
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Hispanic / Latino(a)
- Other
- White

*Source: Alliance for Board Diversity & Deloitte, Missing Pieces Report*

A company with sustainable initiatives to actualize a truly diverse workforce, including but also looking beyond race and ethnicity, intentionally creates a pathway of advancement and leadership for employees of diverse and intersecting identities. A lack of strategic focus for advancing and promoting diverse talent becomes problematic with regard to employee retention and is a clear red flag to students seeking a career path with a trajectory toward leadership.

The 2021 Diversity Census of Women and Minorities on Fortune 500 Boards, published by the Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, found there to be "very gradual progress in diversity of America's boardrooms" citing 200 companies with greater than 40% diversity, with white women making the largest percentage increase in board seats.[11] Amplifying diverse voices throughout corporate boards and committees within organizations brings credibility to a company's sustainable DEI efforts. A corporation whose executive suite and board of directors consists of voices with diverse lived experiences can solve complex problems and make decisions that better represent the whole organization and the communities it serves.

Continuity should reach beyond diverse representation among employee talent and organizational leadership, also extending to the diverse consumer segments to which a company markets their products and services. A company that acknowledges the rapidly changing demographics of their consumer markets and strategically responds to the diverse needs of each market segment, clearly has a deeper understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion and its broader impacts on society outside the corporate environment. An authentic display of diversity marketing demonstrates cultural awareness and competency, builds brand visibility in diverse and global communities, and is a visible DEI indicator that is also tangible for students.

> It answers the questions, "Can I be successful at this company and is there a path to leadership for me?" and, "Does the company truly understand the needs of my community?"

When students discover a wide integration of DEI efforts that are cohesive, it speaks to a company's genuine and sustainable commitment to making systemic changes. Additional clues to continuity and an integrated commitment to DEI initiatives might include company-specific awards established to showcase diverse talent, public news articles highlighting meaningful community partnerships, and a transparent acknowledgement of diverse vendor sourcing, among others. A 2022 article from *Supply Chain Digital* highlights the top 10 companies fostering diversity in the supply chain and cites Hootology's Corporate Diversity Index which states, "Consumers who perceive a brand as being committed to DEI are three times more likely to consider their products or services, compared to those who do not."[12] With a heightened emphasis on Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) in the supply chain, diversity in supplier sourcing is becoming a key business strategy in advancing corporate DEI initiatives.

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# The company has established Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that are valued and contribute to influencing corporate strategy.

Employee Resource Groups have been credited with initiating positive change within organizations by encouraging the adoption of more inclusive practices. They are spaces where employees can share experiences and express frustrations, and work to create / enhance corporate policies related to equality with like-minded colleagues. This is significant because employees who feel like they can voice their concerns usually stay longer; and, when issues are addressed, it improves the work environment. In short, ERGs can be culture changers. They are also places of professional development as members of the group can connect to colleagues across units and levels of the organization and find mentors who may share similar identities.[13]

While the integration of ideas from ERGs and the support they receive can vary from company to company, we suggest that companies with established and well-led ERGs demonstrate a sustainable commitment to a thriving, diverse workforce. Companies that have worked to establish ERGs acknowledge, on some level, the importance of providing safe spaces to marginalized employees to express themselves and talk about workplace issues. These conversations can include inequities perpetuated by the company and it shows an openness to allow conversations that are critical of the company to occur. Establishing these groups also demonstrates a desire to retain their diverse workforce by providing spaces where people feel like they can be heard, create connections, and find community.

It demonstrates an awareness by the organization that people with marginalized backgrounds may experience work differently and therefore need spaces that provide additional support.
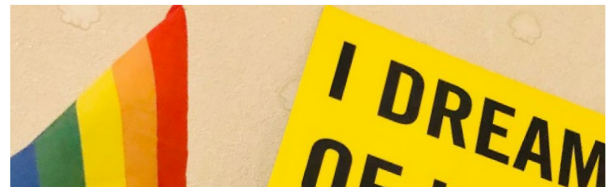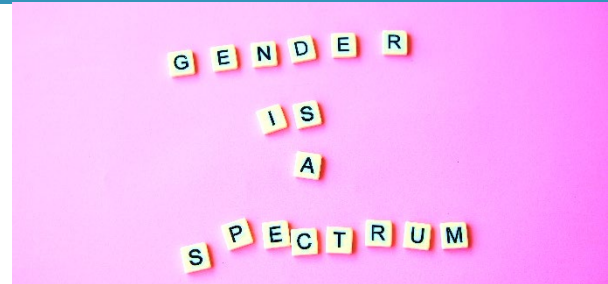
Many people place a deep sense of value in a work environment that feels comfortable. They place an importance on developing strong working relationships and care about the people they work with, want to feel like they belong, be accepted with all their identities, and feel comfortable showing up as their whole self in their work environment. For students who desire a professional environment that fosters connections among colleagues and creates a workplace culture that allows for individual and authentic expression, a company with established ERGs may align with those values. Students may be wondering if there are employees who hold similar identities at a prospective company and how they might connect with them to form community. Knowing about specific ERGs at an organization and what their purpose and mission is could really excite a student about a potential employer as it demonstrates one way that they could get involved and connect.

Companies with established ERGs can highlight them on a website, along with a brief description of each group explaining their purpose, goals, and contact information, as a way to appeal to potential employees. By providing more specifics, readers can have a clearer idea of what these groups embody and can connect with someone from the group to learn more.

Increased visibility of ERGs would be beneficial to organizations because it can provide job seekers valuable answers to questions like, "Are there others who share my identities in this organization?" and, "In what ways can I connect with colleagues and build a sense of community?"

Increased visibility of ERGs could lead to increased interest in the company, especially by those who have identities represented in the ERGs.

The presence of ERGs does not mean that employees are necessarily being treated fairly. And while companies may allow or even establish ERGs, they may not fully listen to or integrate the ideas that come from these groups. In a 2016 article published by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), two experts debated the issue of whether Employee Resource Groups are good for business. One states, "It is fortunate that, at some organizations, diversity, equity and inclusion committees are working together to foster an inclusive workplace rather than pursuing this goal in fragmented silos," taking a stance that ERGs are not the way forward.[14] These polarizing viewpoints with regard to the sustainable impact of ERGs suggest that there may be opportunities for broader corporate integration of the ideas that develop from employees who invest their time and perspectives within ERGs.

As a launching point for building belonging and trust among employees with marginalized identities, ERGs have great potential for initiating lasting change within organizations if their insights are valued and carried forward into actionable corporate-wide initiatives that contribute to measurable results.

# The company's DEI initiatives are connected to a broader business-driven, results-oriented strategy that fosters tangible organizational change.

Connecting DEI initiatives to business-driven, results-oriented strategies implies that these initiatives are embedded into the company's overall strategies, operations, and mission. They are not viewed by leadership as a "one-off" initiative or tacked on as a "bonus" if metrics are achieved; DEI initiatives are central to the business' functions and the organization's definition of success. As noted by Gena Cox and David Lancefield in a Harvard Business Review article, "D&I is far more than an 'HR issue.' It should be a core ingredient in the design and execution of business strategy and embedded in the activities of the organization day in, day out."[15] By attaching DEI initiatives to business strategy, the organization is demonstrating the foundational importance of these initiatives and a willingness to sustainably invest in the work involved in achieving these goals through allocation of resources (money, time, personnel).

Tying such initiatives to specific results and evaluation metrics creates accountability and sincerity in the company's goal to foster tangible organizational change. DEI engagement doesn't simply exist to "check a box," but initiatives are ongoing, evaluated, and adjusted (either metrics or practices) for organizational growth and improvement.

Embedding DEI initiatives into business-driven, results-oriented strategies demonstrates DEI is a core mission and value of the company; it is an integral part of how they operate.

Establishing a formal DEI Council or Advisory Board further shows a company's accountability and ownership of improvement in these areas, and brings in multiple individuals, identities, and perspectives to evaluate DEI strategy and progress.

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Having a DEI Council or Advisory Board that oversees organizational change efforts shows a commitment to external accountability. This will help answer a student's questions of,

> "Who holds the organization accountable for change?", "How is DEI progress tracked, measured, and evaluated?", and, potentially, "How can I get involved in promoting and ensuring change in the organization?".

Other values this indicator may align with are an organization's commitment to continuous improvement, humility, and innovation. The focus on results-oriented strategies that promote tangible change shows the organization is steadily working to create an environment that values and uplifts DEI and recognizes improvements can and need to be made. To create change, the organization may need to identify and implement new and creative solutions to address DEI gaps in their practices.

> This would allow employers to respond to questions of, "How do you stay current on DEI best practices?" and, "How does this organization recognize and address opportunities for growth?".

Increased visibility of a company's efforts within this indicator creates greater awareness of the company culture and business practices. It shows an organization's ongoing initiatives to improve the experiences of employees, shareholders, and customers. If a company shares its goals, strategies, and metrics, students may have increased faith in the company's DEI pledges and see the organization's dedication to achieving its goals. Incorporating and publicizing the involvement of a DEI Council or Advisory Board may result in increased trust in a company's initiatives and outcomes, because activities are overseen and vetted by an outside council. This trust may be further amplified if the council and its members are seen as credible (i.e., broad and diverse membership, expertise of members).

As companies work to increase visibility of this indicator, they must also make steady progress on achieving their identified initiatives. If an organization has shared their goals and strategies, but fails to follow-through or stalls in their efforts, students may wonder if the organization is truly committed to their DEI initiatives. Organizations must also consider that increased visibility may highlight their current shortcomings—although, this also shows awareness and actions being taken to address any issues. Having timely, regular check-ins to assess progress of initiatives and strategize impactful, innovative ways to meet DEI goals can minimize criticism and, again, increase transparency of a company's efforts to create tangible change. Finally, there may be scrutiny of an advisory board's representation and membership, particularly if that group is small or there are vacant seats left unfilled. Being mindful of the multifaceted components of identity and seeking board participation from diverse individuals can create a broader lens by which to examine an organization's DEI efforts and hold it accountable to create change.

# The company leverages their platform to visibly acknowledge and condemn social and racial inequities with an actionable commitment to create positive systemic change.

Acknowledging and condemning social and racial inequities with an actionable commitment to advocate and fight for positive systemic changes is a form of public accountability and societal awareness. As the Forbes article, "Silence Is Not An Option" points out, consumers expect companies and corporate leaders to speak out against inequity.[16] Speaking out demonstrates a company's understanding that inequity exists and that businesses and business leaders often have a platform and power that can be leveraged for positive change. Today, consumer expectations go beyond press releases—"60% [of respondents] say brands should take steps to address the root causes of racial inequity."[17] Consumers expect companies to act. Companies and leaders have wide audiences, which allows their messages to be heard and their voices amplified in a way that can have great influence in shaping business operations and societal expectations. They can help lead and inspire change.

Once a company responds publicly, condemning social and racial inequities, and outlines concrete steps to be taken toward positive systemic changes, this allows them to be held accountable by their various constituents and stakeholders. Such accountability is where the sustainability of this indicator lies. The public can review and measure a company's actions to evaluate just how committed they are to fighting for positive systemic change.

Acknowledging social and racial inequities demonstrates a company is "with it"; there is an awareness of current events and social criticisms—and perhaps agreement with those criticisms and calls for change. By stating their commitment to creating actionable systemic changes, a company may signal allyship with communities and individuals who have been oppressed in current systems and structures. This is in alignment with Gen Z's expectation for companies to speak up for what's right and advocate for larger change. "To connect with these younger consumers [Millennials and Gen Z], brands need to take a stand against racial injustice in a way that is authentic to the corporation as well as their customers."[17]

As the most racially and ethnically diverse generation, Gen Zers might be asking such questions like, "How does this organization feel about inequity?", "What is this organization doing to address inequities?", and, "Will this organization support my identity(ies) that are marginalized/targeted?" as they explore employers.

Outlining concrete actions being taken by the company to address systemic inequities, both in and outside of the company, is a way to clearly show commitment to fighting for positive change.
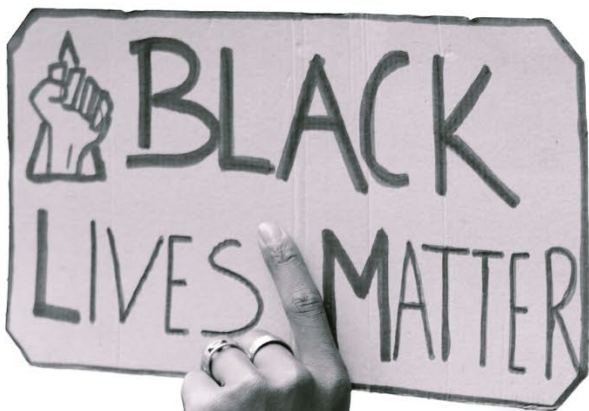
Increased visibility of a company's efforts within this indicator may highlight the company as a leader and model of how to address inequity. By crafting sincere statements that condemn inequity, explain the company's response and actions to fight for change, and initiating a call for other organizations to join the fight for justice, a company is modeling the many avenues they have to create positive social impact. Through leveraging their power and platform, a company may inspire others, corporations and individuals alike, to take actions resulting in large, systemic change. Doing this may increase support for the organization among employees, shareholders, and customers, which could result in potential increase in revenue due to customer value alignment with the organization and their public stances. This is in line with research that states, "a majority of Americans of all generations—60% of the U.S. population—say that how a brand responds to racial justice protests will influence *whether they buy or boycott the brand* in the future."[17]

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# 60%

## of the U.S. population

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While some individuals may be drawn to an organization based on their response to injustices, others may distance themselves from such organizations, which could be a potential consequence of increased visibility of this indicator. Benefits of speaking out on injustices may outweigh many possible risks with "87% of employees [saying] businesses should take a public position on societal issues relevant to their business", and such action correlating with higher efforts among employees at "vocal employers".[18] After visibly acknowledging and condemning an instance of social or racial inequity once, a company may feel pressure and the expectation to always respond to such incidents, which may beg the question, "What's the threshold for making a public statement?". And, if such statements are made too late, there is the possibility of public backlash and frustration. Company acknowledgements could be seen as performative, particularly by individuals who are skeptical of the organization's motives in calling for systemic change. However, embedding concrete, actionable steps in response to injustice may lessen that perception. As companies publicly condemn inequity and identify their commitment towards change, there will naturally be an expectation for organizations to take ownership of their roles in supporting and operating in systems of oppression and exclusion.

# The company publicly supports communities of marginalized identities through corporate social responsibility and philanthropic efforts.

Supporting communities of marginalized identities through corporate social responsibility (CSR) and philanthropic efforts shows a company's investment in the well-being and development of those communities through business strategy and allocation of finances, time, personnel, and other resources. The organization recognizes its responsibility to partner with and support marginalized communities, which in turn creates ethical, pragmatic, diverse, and sustainable business practices.

> Working collaboratively with marginalized communities allows for deeper understanding of individuals within those communities, which may present new opportunities for the organization to develop products and services to meet the needs, challenges, and desires of those populations.

Forging ties with businesses owned and operated by individuals with marginalized identities supports those businesses financially and may amplify their businesses reputation and brand awareness, while also providing broader reach and opening new and untapped markets for possible customers.

Beyond CSR efforts, a company's philanthropic contributions to communities of marginalized identities demonstrates a company's willingness to invest part of their profits and operating budget without expectation of reciprocal financial benefit from the community organization(s) they are supporting. The company is also able to bring attention to communities in need and philanthropies doing good work, helping those community organizations sustain initiatives which might otherwise go unnoticed and unsupported.

Uplifting communities of marginalized identities through CSR and philanthropic efforts demonstrates a company's allyship and advocacy. CSR is often associated with corporate ethics and organizational values. By supporting communities of marginalized identities, with specific reference to CSR practices, a company is signaling to job seekers that they believe this practice is of ethical importance. Ethics matter greatly to Gen Z, according to Deloitte's Welcome to Generation Z report, which states "not only must companies have strong ethics, they have to demonstrate they take action consistent with their ethics and values".[2] Furthermore, engaging in philanthropy aligns with values of altruism and generosity, connecting to Gen Z's interest in social impact.[2]

Supporting communities of marginalized identities may answer a student's questions of, "Will my identity be recognized and supported by this organization?", "Does this organization care about me and my community?", and, "Does this organization recognize the ways in which I have been marginalized based on my identity?".

**By supporting communities of marginalized identities, a company is signaling to job seekers that they believe this practice is of ethical importance.**

Current job seekers and employees want to work for companies who provide holistic support for employees and communities in which the company operates. A Gallup poll showed that Gen Z and Millennials—46% of the full-time workforce in the U.S.—want to work for "an employer who cares about their wellbeing" above all else.[19] Supporting the communities in which employees belong to is one way employers can signal their support of the diverse identities in their workforce.

Increased visibility of a company's efforts within this indicator shows the company as a member of or ally to the communities of marginalized identities. Taking meaningful and quantifiable actions to support such communities, like establishing business partnerships or making financial investments in philanthropies, underlines a company's commitment to be a partner or ally. From the Deloitte report, Gen Z is looking for demonstrable actions by companies, not just words.[2] By actively and clearly supporting communities of marginalized identities, a company may even receive positive, free marketing for their initiatives.

> For example, as part of United Way of Larimer County's series highlighting volunteerism in their community, UWLC recognized corporate partner Nutrien for its commitment to community impact through Nutrien's Matching Gift and Employee Volunteer programs. These company practices prompted UWLC to recognize Nutrien for its "commitment to inclusion and efforts to give back to the community".[20] This free publicity may keep an organization top of mind for job seekers as a desirable place to work. Finally, transparency in a company's accounting, specifically regarding philanthropic efforts, may contribute to perceptions of trust, generosity, and viability of the company. If engaging in charitable giving, a company may be seen as financially stable and dedicated to investing in a community's well-being, over lining its own pockets.

As a company works towards transparency related to this indicator, they may face scrutiny over which communities and organizations are supported through CSR and philanthropic efforts. Some individuals may want explanations as to why certain communities/philanthropies were selected and prioritized over others. Some individuals may not agree with the level of support a company is providing, curious as to why greater financial support isn't being offered. And others may disagree entirely with a company's practices and choose not to engage with the company based on the organization's association with a marginalized community or particular philanthropic cause. Preparing for questions surrounding CSR decisions and having thoughtful answers explaining a company's rationale for engagement with various causes may help increase public understanding and support of such actions and decisions, while also continuing transparency with regard to this indicator.

# Corporate Visibility Spotlights

During our research we came across several companies who truly embody these indicators. Their investments are visibly accessible to the public and prospective candidates who are making important decisions about where they want to contribute their talents.

**The company engages in inclusive recruiting practices to cultivate a diverse workforce.**

*Accenture is committed to deepening the diversity of their talent pool through annual pay equity reviews, mandatory antiracism and unconscious bias trainings for their employees, and sponsoring apprenticeship programs among marginalized and diverse socio-economic communities. They understand the value of diverse representation within their company and know that it's only one key piece in building toward sustainable and equitable change at all levels.*

**The company demonstrates continuity in their commitment to DEI through their brand and culture.**

*Target's sustainable commitment to DEI is not only visible, but congruent throughout all facets of their brand and culture. From their commitment to supporting black-owned businesses and entrepreneurs to their debt-free education assistance benefit which invests in the economic mobility of their team members, Target truly lives its values of inclusivity, connection, and drive. They care for and invest in people at all levels: guests, team members, supply chain, and communities.*

**The company has established Employee Resource Groups that are valued and contribute to influencing corporate strategy.**

*Ball Aerospace cultivates community and belonging through their employee networks, which go beyond race and ethnicity to include abilities, religion, gender identity, and veteran status, and supports intersectionality in and among communities. ERGs focus on celebrating difference, building a legacy of support, collaboration, and growth that retains and promotes diverse talent on a global scale.*

**The company's DEI initiatives are connected to a broader business-driven, results-oriented strategy that fosters tangible organizational change.**

*FirstBank's culture of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion extends beyond their employees and customers into the communities where they reside. Their Multicultural Banking Center focuses on serving Hispanic, Asian, and Black/African American communities by offering services in a customer's preferred language and an understanding of their cultural needs. FirstBank's integration into the communities they serve by providing financial literacy classes, products and services that meet rapidly changing market needs, and events that promote community collaboration is evidence of a broader business strategy that advances a DEI vision.*

**The company leverages their platform to visibly acknowledge and condemn social and racial inequities with an actionable commitment to create positive systemic change.**

*Though small and family-owned, Keen is mighty in the way they take a stand against racism, inequality, and social injustice. Their public acknowledgements not only condemn racism and systems upholding white supremacy culture, they commit to actionable steps that contribute to change. They've turned their commitments into corporate strategy goals that prioritize making a difference over making shoes.*

**The company publicly supports communities of marginalized identities through corporate social responsibility and philanthropic efforts.**

*Nutrien's transparency of their strategy, commitments, and progress toward ESG goals is unmatched. Their commitments align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to address global challenges and drive systemic change. Nutrien prioritizes partnerships centered on collaboration, information sharing, and resource pooling that supports systems-based solutions.*
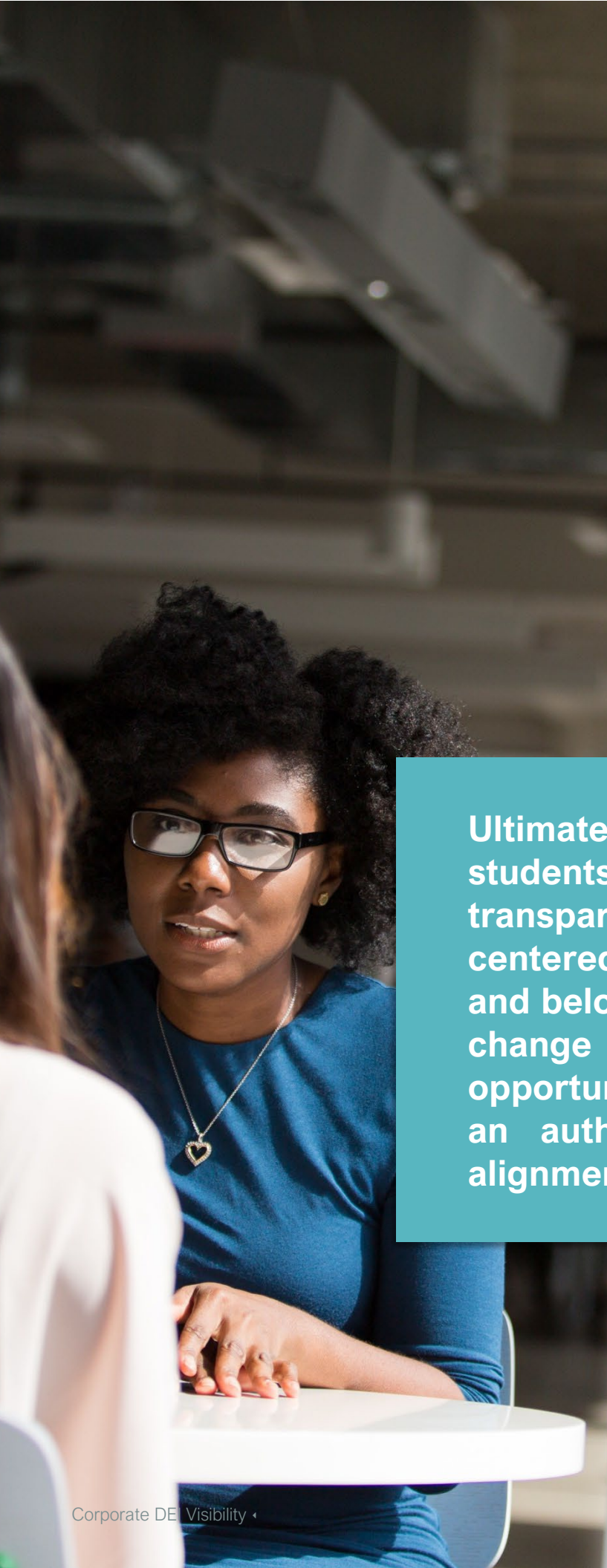
# PRACTICAL
# APPLICATION

The key indicators for assessing DEI visibility outlined here are building blocks for answering our second question, "How can we in career services help lessen the burden on our students to find the answers to their questions about how a company genuinely lives their values around justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging?". This research has informed the development of a student guide with an intention of lightening the research burden on our students, guiding them to resources and facets to assess a company for values alignment and sustainable DEI practices.

**As a result, our hope is to support students on their decision-making journey toward lasting career satisfaction in corporate environments that respect, honor, and affirm DEI, making sustainable contributions toward a more just society.**

This guide educates students on these key indicators of visible DEI practices, empowers students to ask deeper and more thoughtful questions relating to a particular company's commitment, provides curated resources on where and how to research companies with authentic investments toward progress, and prompts for critical reflection encouraging the level of self-efficacy crucial for making confident career decisions.

Leveraging our position in higher education career services as liaisons between students and employers, we are also utilizing this opportunity to share insights and perspectives we've observed in our interactions with students to help corporate partners become more visible and transparent in the way they communicate and represent their sustainable investments in DEI while they're engaging in campus activities. These insights are shared with employers through an employer guide with the intention of helping employers prepare for more candid and direct conversations with students interested in their companies.

**Ultimately, our goal is to empower both students and employers to have more transparent and meaningful discussions centered on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging that will support positive change in connecting students with opportunities that are meaningful with an authentic and sustaining values alignment.**

Download the Student Guide
Download the Employer Guide

## AUTHORS & CONTRIBUTORS

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CASSIE SHEARHOLDT, M.A., has spent nearly a decade in college career development in a variety of roles, including as an internship coordinator, career counselor, and instructor of career development courses. She has worked in several public higher education institutions, from an urban community college system to large, suburban 4-year universities. She is currently a Career Counselor at Colorado State University's (CSU) College of Business in the Career Management Center. Cassie is passionate about working with students, particularly first-years, and supporting identity development, self-understanding, and exploration of majors and careers.

SHELLY REED, M.A., and MATXALEN VILLALOVOS, B.S., were additional contributors to this white paper's content and research.

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