Workforce Dynamics in National Security:

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility

Sam Amadeo: Good afternoon and welcome everybody. I'm Sam Amadeo, the Development Coordinator here with Amy Serafino, our Development Vice President at Truman. Thank you so much for joining us today for "Workforce Dynamics in National Security: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility" led by Guidehouse. I'm so thrilled you're here to continue to learn and grow on this topic because it is so important to all of us. Guidehouse is part of our corporate council, which entitles them to host a certain number of events or convenings with Truman members each year, which brings us here today. This event will be recorded for Truman members and be available soon after we conclude because we want to make sure as many members as possible have an opportunity to hear this important conversation. I'm going to turn it over now to our moderator, Winta Tewolde, a Director at Guidehouse. Winta, over to you.

Winta Tewolde: Great, thank you so much. Good afternoon, it's a pleasure to be with you all today. My name is Winta Tewolde. I'm a Director at Guidehouse in our energy and sustainability practice. I've been with the firm for about eight years. I currently lead our business change enablement solution, which includes our diversity, equity, inclusion, and culture practice. Guidehouse supports a variety of clients across industry with diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility transformation efforts. That's everything from conducting assessments to program implementation to board and leadership advisory support, and we'll certainly talk a little bit about that today in the presentation.

So, before we do some quick introductions of our panelists today, I just want to set the stage for why we're covering this topic, why it's important. All of you are here, so I hope that means that you're passionate about this topic, interested about this topic or open to learning more. So diversity, equity and inclusion is not a new subject matter, though it has come to the forefront of many industries and many businesses in recent years. This work is really rooted in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and even prior to that. When it comes to talking about the workforce, the mission of our government, and more specifically national security, it is more than a business imperative. It is critical to making sure that work is done in the most effective, hopefully equitable way as well. So for example, when we're working with different countries, different cultures, different dynamics across the national security platform, it is imperative that everybody has a common understanding of how you do work in an equitable way, what diversity truly means across a multitude of dimensions, and ultimately making sure that our programs, our services, our missions are delivered accessibly and inclusively as well.

So, we'll talk a little bit about what that means for organizations, as well as mission delivery, which is, I feel, critical to all of the Truman stakeholders. So with that, I will go down the line and have our panelists introduce themselves. Start with you, Albani.

Albani Childs: All right, so hey everyone. My name is Albani Childs Brown and I'm a Managing Consultant within the energy and sustainability segment of Guidehouse as well. I focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and I believe we were supposed to share how we got into the work. So I'll share that DE&I found me, I was in the midst of a career pivot when I was presented with the opportunity to lead the in-house diversity, equity and inclusion program of my former organization. So while in that role I was able to infuse organizational change principles, as well as use my strategy and implementation expertise to make some change over there. But I feel very grateful to be in a role where I'm at the intersection of business and belonging. I feel very professionally aligned in this space. So I'll pass it over to Nicole.

Nicole Nelson: Really well said. I'm Nicole Nelson. I'm a Managing Consultant with Guidehouse and I've been with Guidehouse I guess eight years. So it feels like this coming into the DEIA space was very natural for me. I'm a change person by trade, and so looking for the next big change that was going to happen in my client space, it was just a real natural fit and also I really wanted to be a part of something that was for good and it felt like a really smart place to be, on the edge of this huge change that's happening across the world really.

Winta Tewolde: Davita?

Davita Vance-Cooks: Hi, my name is Davita Vance-Cooks. I'm a Director at Guidehouse. I've been in the consulting world for about seven, almost eight years. I have decades of experience in both the private and the public sector. While in the private sector, I was responsible for managing operations and I dealt with and have practical application in managing DEI work. And then when I moved to the public sector, the same thing happened. In the public sector, I was working for an agency called the GPO and the GPO is responsible for managing information products for Congress, as well as agencies, and also producing secure credentials even for the State Department. In fact, they produced the passport book. I eventually became the head of that agency and as part of that process had to manage a number of DEI issues. So this practical application is what brought me into the DEI world. Happy to be here. And also I want to say I jokingly told the panel before it even started, I represent the seasoned and underrepresented group. I'm the seasoned manager and we'll talk a lot about that and what that means in the DEIA world. Shannon.

Shannon White: Great, thank you. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Shannon White and I'm a Partner at Guidehouse. I have supported public sector clients for the last 20 years, 15 of those years at Guidehouse, where I now am our homeland security and law enforcement leader, where we support our DHS and DOJ clients. So I lead over a thousand consultants who are supporting those agencies. I represent and align to many affinity groups as a black gay woman. Also as a leader, I really try to be an ally of a lot of different groups and encourage allyship from my peer group also. I've also served as our firm's corporate social responsibility leader and served on our Partner diversity and inclusion committee. And now I currently serve as our justice equity, diversity, and inclusion partner champion for our segment. So really thrilled to be here and be part of this conversation today.

Winta Tewolde: Wonderful. And with that, we'll go ahead and jump into our panel questions and I might just alert the audience that there is also an option to provide questions. So please feel free to drop any questions that you have for the group broadly, or any specific individual, in the chat and we'll get to that in about 30 or 40 minutes with our panel. So our first question today is actually for you Shannon, and the first question is, in what ways have diverse and inclusive workforces been shown to contribute to better outcomes for organizations?

Shannon White: Thank you, Winta. Well, personally, I really know the power of diversity to help solve problems for our clients. And that is the work that we are all about, is being there for our clients, helping them to solve these important problems. I think the superpower of leveraging diversity is inclusion. So we want a diverse workforce so that we can bring those diverse perspectives and voices to problems, but we also have to use inclusion to invite people to actually use their diverse perspective and insights. And for me, that's what inclusion is all about. Long ago, I was encouraged to bring my whole self to this firm and to use all of the diverse perspectives that I have, and as a leader, I try to really encourage my team members and those who I don't work with to also bring their diverse perspectives.

I think that we've all read different studies about the power of diversity that we see when there are more women leaders, there is better performance of an organization. Where we have more ethnically diverse workforces, we have better performance in our workforce. I wanted to share an anecdote. So before I was really into the DEIA work, I understood the power of this work. Several years ago, I was leading a division at our firm and we were able to grow the organization by 100% in a year. And as I reflected, I recognized that we had a very diverse leadership team. We had Latino leaders, women leaders, people who were from different countries other than the United States, LGBTQ leaders. And what that allowed us to do was obviously to bring these different perspectives, but also we had people who could align and connect differently with our different clients. And so we'd identify who connected the best with clients and make sure that they were there to serve as their strategic advisor and bring the best ideas to them.

We also recognized that our different leaders connected differently with our team members. It is really important for us to help our team members to grow their careers, to get different kinds of opportunities. And so we recognized that we also wanted to connect different leaders with the right team members so that we could bring the best forward from our team members. And so I wanted to share that anecdote because that is what we are trying to do and that is what we continue to see with studies, is that diverse teams really do lead us to higher performing results.

Davita Vance-Cooks: I really like that comment that you made Shannon, and for the benefit of the audience, I would like to draw your attention to the significant and considerable body of work that's out there on better outcomes. This work talks a lot about financial results. In fact, there's one study that I recently read where it talked about the fact that frontline employees, those frontline managers, when they are diverse, they tend to exceed their goals. They also talk a lot about financial outcomes. The fact that organizations that are diverse tend to be more profitable, they tend to exceed their financial goals. They also talk about, and this is the part I want to hone in on and then ask the rest of my panel to comment, when you have a diverse organization, you tend to focus on the employees and all of us sitting here understand that it's the employees who actually drive an organization.

Therefore, when you have a diverse set of employees, you talk about employee engagement and employee engagement is what drives the organization. So I'd like to ask my panel to talk about employee engagement as it relates exactly to what we're talking about, and inclusion as well.

Albani Childs: I'd probably add to what Davita just said, when employee engagement becomes more of a focus when the employee base isn't homogenous and I would say, as leadership puts more attention to engage in employees when they know we can't stick with the same old, same old and the foosball in the break room. So that's the first thing that came to my mind, but I'll defer to Nicole.

Nicole Nelson: No, I think that adding to that, I would say that as a customer I want to see that reflected in the employees and that makes a big difference to my wanting to work with that particular organization, is whether I see myself reflected there, my friends reflected there. It makes sense that 35%, I think that's the increase in financial gain, with diverse teams.

Davita Vance-Cooks: I'm sure it is. It's huge.

Winta Tewolde: Absolutely. So, with that, let's segue to our next question and this is for you, Albani. So as I mentioned at the top, diversity, equity, and inclusion isn't a new subject. Many organizations called it culture or employee experience. So often, DEI is coupled with those focus areas and initiatives within an organization, or separate, but they're all intertwined. We talked a little bit about engagement. So I welcome your perspective on how organizations can effectively transition from seeing DEIA as a response to the market in recent years or a feel good initiative into recognizing it as a critical enabler. We talked a little bit about the data and the evidence that's out there around increasing financial goals, more innovation, but beyond that, how can organizations really embed DEIA into the fabric of their organization and move past, "we're doing this because eyes are on us and it's the flavor of the day" to really institutionalizing it within their organizations?

Albani Childs: That's a great question, and for everyone on the call I tend to speak in three, so if you're taking notes it'll probably come in threes. But in moving towards making DE&I a critical enabler, one of the first things that organizations can think about is how they're demonstrating leadership commitment. And that looks like executive buy-in, and when I say buy-in, I mean full buy-in, the same kind of buy-in that is expected for increasing profits should be applied to DE&I efforts. It also comes in the way of visible commitments because that translates DE&I into a core business value rather than a performative, superficial initiative of the day.

Another thing to keep in mind, I think Shannon and Davita already touched on it, regarding data, taking a data-driven, or I would say data-informed approach, is always a great way forward to make it a critical enabler because data…So we have to be very honest, sometimes everything isn't data-driven. I say data-informed because a lot of things are qualitative. You know your organization or professionals here. We know the people, the processes, what works, what doesn't, and at the same time we need to inform all of our next steps and strategies with data. That's what you do with any critical business imperative and DE&I is no different. So what that looks like could be collecting and analyzing the metrics around DE&I just so it's now quantified and when you're discussing what organizational success looks like, DE&I is now a more quantifiable part. And when you're looking at your data, you're looking for barriers to success and also opportunities to close gaps. So when you're finding those barriers, you can also be setting some clear measurable goals about DE&I success instead of what feels good or what might seem good.

The last thing I would add is to integrate DE&I into all the business operations. Operationalizing DE&I makes it real. So DE&I, when it's in the organizational fabric, is much more effective than when it's an add-on or a last minute thought. So if I could add DE&I in your recruitment, in your talent development, in decision-making and in your overall organizational culture, it makes it more of a part of your organization rather than something we do. DE&I is who we are. I can pass it over to whoever would like to weigh in.

Shannon White: I thought maybe I'd give some examples. I think that you're right on about your threes. So at Guidehouse too, we understand that it is this multi-layered approach that what we really want to do is make sure that there's full integration. You talked first of all about leadership. I think leadership from the corporation. We also know there are different levels, the corporation, the center, and then also our different business units. And so I think what's been important to Guidehouse has been to identify and hire a Chief Diversity Officer. So we did that

several years ago because we understood that that was something that was important. We made sure that our Partners across all business units were part of our diversity and inclusion committee. We made sure that we kept layering it down.

So, you talked about recruitment and really monitoring. So we do things like an annual review. We make sure that there is somebody that is independent that is there to ask questions. Are you making sure that your diverse professionals are being represented equitably? Are they being promoted at the same levels? Are their salaries in alignment with their peers? So making sure that there's somebody independent doing that. We also thought that it was important to be able to track and share diversity metrics and we also frankly heard that from our staff, that that was important. And so three years ago, we began sharing those metrics and what I'd say is every year we get finer and finer cuts of that data so that we're sharing it at a very high level, we're sharing it across our different business units, different staff levels. And I think that that's really important for us to see how we're progressing and see frankly where we may not be progressing, where we still have work to do. So we think that metrics are important and so we've committed to that.

Davita Vance-Cooks: That's a really good point. I'd like to also stress one other thing. I thought the question was worded very interestingly, and by that I mean it says "feel good" and then "invest" almost as if they should be separate. And that's not the case.

Shannon White: I agree.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Any type of initiative, whether it's DEI, financial, whatever, is always an investment. So the question is, how do you invest in your organization to make DEI real? And one of the things I found through experience and again, practical application, years and years and years, okay, we'll go through that. The point is business. Have a businesslike methodical approach towards DEI. It is an initiative. What does it mean? Take a look at each initiative, look at it through that business lens and determine how you can make this a good investment that your employees understand exactly what you're trying to do, where you're trying to lead the organization. You make it look that way. Don't make it seem as if everything that's DEI is just designed to make you feel good. It's not. It is designed to make your organization far more operational, far more productive and far more profitable than if it's not.

That's why I always believe that the risk is not doing it wrong, the risk is not doing it at all. And that's why I really feel that DEI should be integrated into the organization and it's more than a feel good investment.

Albani Childs: And when it's integrated, it's sustainable. It's not just happening one quarter or once a year.

Winta Tewolde: And to that end, I think Davita, the way you articulated, it's not feel good. It's about driving mission outcome, business outcome. One thing, and this will be open to the group, it's a little bit of an addition here, but some of the Truman members are interested in this topic, is as we're moving out of the pandemic and organizations are thinking about return to work, particularly organizations that have frontline employees or working on things like national security at the State Department at DHS, DEI really was born and given this focus during the pandemic when we were mostly hybrid or working from home. So as we're reintroducing the return to the work with some sort of regularity, DEI really being the underpinning of that, is how are we making sure things are accessible?

How are we really making sure that all of the advancements and all of the new programs that were implemented, the culture shifts that were happening in organizations during the pandemic and at the height of releasing new ESG reports, how do you really maintain that as

we're seeing some of this resistance of the people not necessarily wanting to go back into the workplace? And part of that is probably making sure we understand the mission, the criticality of being in person. We're all in person together today, which is lovely, but I'll open that up to the group. Just out of curiosity, given the path we were going down there, when specifically we're starting to think about return to work, how do you continue to embed DEI into the trials that are being rolled out? And there's lots of literature out there around what organizations are experiencing. Us as Guidehouse, of course we're going through that as well. So would anybody like to take it first?

Nicole Nelson: I would say as far as, I don't like to call it return to work, but rather return to the office. Everybody has been working very hard. So I think if you were intentional about why you need people together for collaboration and the fact that what comes out of that collaboration is all of these great things that have to do with better performance, I think that intentionality can bring people back together. To say, we need butts in seats because we don't trust you doing your work that you've been doing it all this time. That's not going to float with the American workforce in general. I know that I have days in the office where I feel like because I'm so used to such a high level of productivity with product, that I'm not getting done all of the things that I wish that I could while I'm in the office.

Part of that is you're controlling your atmosphere, you're working longer hours often at home. So I think that there's a lot to discuss as far as returning to the workplace, but that's what I would say, is that the focus needs to be on intentional collaboration if the reason is to be together and be community.

Winta Tewolde: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Shannon White: I agree. And I think that we've got to also talk to our leaders and share the data that is coming out about the people who are coming back to the office, the people who have found a lot of benefits from staying at home, perhaps mothers or more women. We know that more ethnically diverse people have really found that this is a way to manage work and other responsibilities, is to be at home highly productive. But we know that there are opportunities when you come into the office. And so I think that we've got to have the conversations with the leadership so that they are responsible about how they are, again, promoting giving opportunities to diverse people, how they are encouraging people to come back into the office. I think that at the heart of our DEIA work also is about relationships, and so this is the time when it is important for leaders to leverage and create relationships perhaps differently.

I think that that's one thing that I do, is try to encourage my peer leaders to really be allies, to connect them with diverse peers, to encourage them to support different affinity groups and different conversations. But I think it's important to let them know again about this body of work so that they understand still this new maybe responsibility about how they've got to equitably be supporting people in this post pandemic world.

Albani Childs: I was going to say, speaking of new responsibilities, Shannon, you touched on the different groups that are benefiting from not being in the office, but as we think of returning to the office not to work, like Nicole said, we have to consider what kind of office are we asking workers to return to? There's been an uptick in a lot of disabled employment and it's been a huge benefit for some of that portion of the workforce. So are we bringing them back to offices that are going to be able to assist them in the way that they need better than their own remote situations? That has be considered as far as focus areas and other things for neurodivergent folks, before we just ask folks to come back to an office that might not have been the best setup for them. So if we're going to make that ask, we also have to accommodate in the ways that are not just for them, but for everyone. When we include everyone, everyone benefits.

Winta Tewolde: In many ways it's a litmus test, right? We've been talking this talk of DEIA in this primarily remote environment, and as we're transitioning to return to the workplace or more of a hybrid environment, let's see the application of it. Are you remembering all the things that you've been strategizing and planning?

Davita Vance-Cooks: Well, that's what I wanted to key in on. It's interesting you mentioned that, Winta. I was going to say, what about the lessons that we learned? Okay. One of the things about DEI initiatives that we'll probably talk about later is how to make sure it's successful. And one of the ways in which you can determine whether an initiative is successful is to ask people the feedback, that you're talking about all of us having to return to the office to work. The question is how do we feel about it? Have you asked the employees how they feel about it? If your goal is to make sure that the organization is productive, is it necessarily the right decision to make that people have to go into an office to be more productive, when in fact, the lessons that we learned from working at home is that we actually increased production? Where are the lessons learned and how do we integrate all of that into making the right moves for an organization that wants to move forward? I love that conversation.

Winta Tewolde: Yeah.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Absolutely.

Winta Tewolde: And it's a good segue to our next topic here, and this is for you Nicole, is how should organizations really think about incorporating DEIA into their strategies, particularly as we're getting out of the pandemic wave into this, we're now three, four years into DEIA being the focus? Many organizations we're focused on assessment. Where are we? What's the maturity curve? What should they really be thinking about now when they're developing plans and strategies and budgets?

Nicole Nelson: That's a really good question. I think that as far as strategies go, it was great that we all had our standalone, comply with the executive order, DEIA strategy. Bringing that spotlight was really important. We're now at the place where we need to start weaving this into the fabric of the organization. And because we know that we need to move out of the moral and compliant imperative, into the business imperative by bringing DEIA into that top level organizational strategy, that's where all the performance metrics are kept. It's where executive leadership is, they are accountable to those metrics. So I think that it makes a lot of sense, but I think we have to start back by asking the question, who's contributing to the strategy? What does that look like? Is that reflective of us as employees? Is it reflective of our customers?

So, I think that there's some questions that still need to be asked. Are we doing strategy the way we should be doing strategy? How we've always done it, is that the way forward? If you incorporate DEIA, I'm not so sure the way forward is the way we've been doing it. So I think that back to talking about evidence-based or data-driven decisions, what has happened, the question that we need to be asking, I think with our strategy is what is the end result? What's the work output of DEIA? So in order to get that measurement, we need to get it into the organizational strategy, but I'm open to other people's thoughts, of course, on how we do that best.

Davita Vance-Cooks: When I think of this question, the first thing that came to my mind is what is the definition of DEI? Data is all about the what. Equity is all about the access. Inclusion though, tells you how. I think that organizations now, or some of them are starting to reach DEI maturity. It's debatable, but they're getting there. The point is how do you develop an inclusive culture where data or diversity and equity can thrive? And I think it starts with

having a strategic plan. I really think that people are motivated by seeing a strategic plan. They understand strategic plan. And if that plan has the goals articulated for DEIA, the objectives are actually laid out for DEIA and there's accountability associated with it, and there is such a term as consequential accountability. In other words, if you don't do X this is what happens, then I really believe that is how you can incorporate it into an organization. Tell people where you're going. What's your strategy? Here's the plan. We need to enable all of our employees to participate in, like you said, the development of that plan, the execution of that plan, and holding them accountable.

Shannon White: Yeah, I agree because my favorite mantra is what gets measured gets to attended to, right?

Davita Vance-Cooks: Bingo.

Shannon White: And I mean we do this. As a firm we have goals around financial performance, DEIA is also important to us. We need to have goals, and so I guess what I'd say, great, we put together a strategic plan. We put together a CEO's blueprint on advancing racial justice. I think what we all need to do is continue to follow up and we need to share successes, right? That's the follow up loop. So show again, studies have proven that diversity is going to drive better performance. We've got to be telling that story also.

Winta Tewolde: And the report you mentioned that Guidehouse started doing three years ago, many organizations on that same cycle, around 2020, started releasing it. And that first year when people release their statistics, not just internally, but publicly, it was a little painful and embarrassing for some folks, but it holds you accountable. And you look, you go and you see the next year and you say, okay, they've improved a little bit and they've set some clear agenda and objectives, and then the next year it improves a little bit. But I think the other point here with DEIA work, and I'll tee this up for you, Albani, in our next question, is that it doesn't change overnight. It's a journey, right? You're not going to see metrics jump five, 10% in a year. It's over 10 years or 20 years, but there are incremental things that you can look at beyond just the demographic metrics to see if you're trending in the right direction. You're hopefully going in the direction of your goals and not the opposite, if so there's a problem.

Albani Childs: And about those goals, something, Nicole, you said about outcomes. It behooves us to set outcomes that are ready for our organization.

Winta Tewolde: Yes.

Nicole Nelson: Yeah.

Albani Childs: Everything is not for you, let's be very real. You have to take a hard glance at what you have, your organization, what you all are about, and see what's the customized solution for each one of your business processes. It's not a plug and chug situation. One thing I really appreciate about Guidehouse's approach to DE&I and the interventions we make for our clients is we come in and we tailor our solutions. We tailor the strategies. So take a hard look at what you have going on as an organization before you decide, okay, well, we're going to do this. We're going to be on this list. We're going to be on that list. It's much better to follow authenticity than the trends of DE&I.

Winta Tewolde: Absolutely. To that end, Albani, I'd like to ask you and then open up to the group, how do you help? You serve a lot of clients helping them think about culture and diversity, equity and inclusion, how do you help them foster and promote long lasting impact of DEI initiatives and plans?

Albani Childs: Thank you for the question. I would say everything starts with education. So I'd like to think of all of us as continuous learners, whether we need to be or not, we're always learning. So to foster a continuous learning culture, it takes training and resources and opportunities for folks to deepen their understanding of DE&I, and sometimes gain an understanding. It has to be acknowledged that we're all starting from different stages, and that's okay, that's human, but the provision of learning opportunities has to be intentional and accessible. So that's one part. To make it long lasting, it has to be, we're always learning, so it needs to be continuous.

The second thing is something that I think Davita already mentioned before measurement and accountability. And like Shannon said, things that get measured get done, and things that get done should be getting measured. So when it comes to our initiatives and making sure that they're not just an individual one-offs of DE&I, we should be measuring the impact that we're making and then holding leadership accountable. In the same way that we hold them accountable to management and business objectives, financially reward them as well for some of the DE&I long-term goals that we've set for ourselves. If those aren't met, there should be some consequential, what was the word?

Davita Vance-Cooks: Accountability.

Albani Childs: Consequential accountability, that's the word and that should apply just as much as it applies for financial targets as well. And the last thing I would say is to promote and foster more inclusive leadership, that looks like developing and promoting those folks on the team who are leading and meeting their targets, but also reinvesting into the culture. Inclusion work is work, and when we only have a few people stepping up to do it can burn them out. So I think it is always good to recognize and amplify those folks who are making the individual initiatives span beyond an initiative, but rather infuse into our teams and our groups because that's how our employees start to feel the sense of belonging. It's not during an all hands about DE&I and everything we've done, it's about the one-on-one moments with your manager and with your directors and everyone that you interact with and how you're supporting your clients. Those kind of very real moments.

And that's what I would say as far as making it real for the clients and for our different organizations who are trying to do long lasting impact rather than DE&I for the day.

Winta Tewolde: Absolutely. As a piggyback to that I'll pitch this to you Davita because you've already hit on it a few times, is how can organizations and individuals really measure ROI, right? That's the question we're hearing a couple of years into the renaissance of the DEI movement of the last few years, is we hear organizations all the time say, we've been investing in this, we've been doing it for three years, and we're still getting beat up in the annual employee survey or from the public. It's what is the ROI of the investment? So I'll pitch it to you and then please feel free to talk about some of the benchmarks or best practices, promising practices you've seen in your work too.

Davita Vance-Cooks: I really believe in return on investments, I believe in the concept of ROI because I believe that every DEI initiative deserves a review in terms of ROI. What do I mean by that? When you as an organization decide that you want to have a specific DEI initiative, it is important for you first of all to ask the question, what is the outcome value? How will we measure that particular outcome and how will we know when it is successful? That means that you must engage in very hard conversations about the value of that particular DEI initiative. If you do that for each and every initiative that you believe is important and critical for your organization, then you start to have the conversation about the resources attached to it. So does that mean you need financial resources? How much will it cost? Does it mean you're taking a lot of time out of someone's effort? Does that mean that we need to have additional types of data resources?

What does it take for your organization to have a DEI initiative that is sustainable, that works? That is what investments are all about. And then there are three different ways in which you will look at it through metrics. You talked about metrics, Albani. Albani, as far as I'm concerned metrics are the way to go. And I know this from a lot of experience because that which gets measured gets done. You're going to hear that a lot. But in DEI, you have three organizations or three frameworks for measurement. It's the employee life cycle. Are we looking at retention? Are we looking at turnover? Are we looking at promotions? Are we looking at all of those different things related to the lifecycle? Then you've got the employee experience. Are we looking at how you feel? What are the surveys telling us? Do you feel like you're belonging? What's the sentiment associated with that? And then thirdly, what's the makeup of the organization? What does the data tell us? How many people are actually in leadership positions? How many women do you have in leadership positions? You put all that together and you've got inclusion.

And so what I'm saying to you is that from an ROI perspective, Albani said it very well, not all metrics are applicable to everyone, but you really need to make sure which metrics are applicable to your organization and which ones matter, and then run them through that ROI cycle to make sure they're appropriate, to make sure you're using your resources correctly, and always align them to the business result. What's the business outcome? When you do that, it will work, but it takes a while. So I'm open to anyone making a comment.

Albani Childs: I really appreciate how you said that. Sorry, Shannon, what you're going to-

Shannon White: No, please.

Albani Childs: One thing I was thinking with running it through the ROI cycle, it'll filter out all of the performative things.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Absolutely.

Albani Childs: Because you'll say, why are we doing this? Why are we doing this metric? Why are we tracking it? And if it goes through the ROI cycle and you really can't have anything, it doesn't stand up, one thing it was a feeling, it won't make it through the ROI cycle that Davita has just explained so I really love that you mentioned that.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Let's talk about that, performative. I'm really hot on the performative DEI thing. I have to share this. I love the way you talk about examples so let's talk about one.

Shannon White: Yes.

Davita Vance-Cooks: All right, and Winta kind of mentioned it earlier. Remember when the executive order first came out and everyone said, we need to have a Chief Diversity Officer?

Winta Tewolde: Yes.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Okay, well that's great, everybody got a Chief Diversity Officer, but they forgot to give that Chief Diversity Officer a budget, they forgot to give that person responsibility, staff, and authority. So now what we have is a performative DEIA approach where we basically have window dressing that says, I've got a Chief Diversity Officer, but I didn't give that person the responsibility to make it work. Through an ROI investment, it takes care of that. It says, don't do it if you're not going to give them the budget, the authority, and the responsibility. It says, what's the investment? How do we make this work? We have to get away from performative DEI approaches and make it meaningful. If you want it to be sustainable.

Winta Tewolde: And tie it to mission. I think that's particularly important within this domain, and maybe Shannon, you can speak to this given you're serving as our law enforcement leader and justice leader here. Obviously you want to make sure that your organization has employees that feel engaged, that feel included, and the goal is ultimately to have better business operations, to retain your employees. But I am curious, what are some of those markers potentially specific to the law enforcement domain? And you're dealing with the public, you're dealing with the broader international public as well so I'm curious if there are any specifics that may come to mind for you.

Shannon White: Well, I guess we find that our clients in the homeland security and law enforcement space, they too know that this is really important. They need to have diverse workforce. They need to have people that feel like they've got a great place to be able to achieve their mission. They've got people who want to deliver on the mission and so they want to create a workspace where people feel safe, where they feel like, again, their ideas and their talents are going to be used and celebrated and promoted. And so we find that clients need the support because again, so many Chief Diversity Officers without the resources, and so often we have been needed to fill that gap for them.

So they've got this desire, they understand, leaders understand the benefits of a diverse workforce, but need help to be able to achieve that and so we've been fortunate to be able to help our clients with different projects. For example, one of our clients is FEMA, and in their strategic plan, one of their three priorities is about creating an equitable foundation for emergency management. And so that means integrated into all of their work. How do they layer it down? So how are their different initiatives? How do they continue to come back to that strategic plan annually to evaluate their progress? Then how are they going to change it? How are there going to be new initiatives?

Winta Tewolde: Yeah, absolutely.

Albani Childs: Evaluation is so key because even if the progress is incremental, it needs to be evaluated and documented just like any other imperative that we have for business.

Shannon White: Right. And being okay to say, okay, this initiative didn't work, so let's try a new initiative. I think internally that's what we've done with the Justice Equity Diversity Inclusion Council in our segment. We've had it for three and a half years, and we continue to evaluate it annually and see if we have the wrong programming. We also continue to be persistent. And to your point, Albani about training, there's all sorts of training that we support as a firm. We've got training for managers for our annual review process. People have to take diversity training so that they can fairly and equitably evaluate their other team members or for recruiting. We've got mandatory training so that people have to take that. For our justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, we understand that it's important to give people some actual learning, not just this desire to be a DEIA champion.

So, we've encouraged and supported a lot of people to get different DEI certifications either through eCornell or USF, and then be able to continue to do that work internally and also on behalf of our clients. So I think persistence also is very important, and this continuous monitoring evaluation and changing is really important.

Winta Tewolde: It's a competency is what I'm hearing. It's not just a passion, right?

Shannon White: Exactly.

Winta Tewolde: It's not just like "I like to draw" it's a competency and you have to develop it. Just in the same way we teach people the economics of our business, how you manage a project and manage profit, you also need to build your DEI competency.

So, final formal question, and then we'll turn it over to the audience here, is for you, Nicole. Let's wrap it up talking a little bit about some of the tools, frameworks, resources for the folks on the line, all of us here as practitioners and champions of this work. What are some tangible things, tools, tactics, that people should be thinking about as they lead or advance or support DEIA efforts within their organization and communities?

Nicole Nelson: So, I think that a really good tool is our government-wide strategic plan to advance the federal workforce. There's some really good roadmaps in the back. I mean, I don't know if you've seen it recently, but there's actually really important maturity models that are in there, and they actually have a program called REDI, which it stands for recruitment, engagement, diversity and inclusion. That's been around since 2015. So the government has some great programs, and organizations can use government resources even if you're not government. I'm not sure if everyone knows that, but I think it's really important to know where your tax dollars are going and that these are available to you as any organization, nonprofit or otherwise, to use.

I think there's some other really great corporate frameworks as well. Baldridge has a really good criteria for performance excellence in which DEIA is woven throughout. That's a really good one. Obviously FEVS, the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey is really important to keep up. And they have DEIA questions within that, and so I think you can measure your organization based on that. Obviously there's a lot of different tools that can be used as far as other corporate employee type surveys. I also think that there are platforms now that can be used that take out biases. We haven't talked a lot about systems, but there's technical systems and then there's systems within, but I think that those can all be put to really good use as far as retaining employees, recruiting employees.

There's also pulse surveys things that can be done. We don't have a lot of bots that we use for that sort of stuff, but that's out there and available. It has accessibility and readability that works. I actually use the GPO writing style guide still.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Well, thank you so much.

Nicole Nelson: Because it's so comprehensive.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Yes, it is.

Nicole Nelson: And it's super helpful to have those items to make sure that the products that you're developing are accessible to the public. So I think that there's so many tools out there that it's really an issue of narrowing down what works for you and can be customized for your organization.

Davita Vance-Cooks: I would like the audience to be aware of two other models. One of them is ISO. There is actually an ISO standard out there for DEIA and it's great. It has a lot of information about governance, and if you're interested in how to govern your DEIA within your organization you should really take a good look at that. And secondly, there are lots of benchmark models.

And the one that I'm the most familiar with, I'm working on this with a client, it's the GDEIB model, and it has over 275 benchmarks across four different groupings within 15 different categories.And it looks at how you attract and retain people. It looks at setting a strong foundation in terms of developing the strategy. It looks at how you bridge and align your neck, a lot of confirmation, a lot of information about measurement and benchmarks related to that. And finally, it looks at the external world, which is what you were talking about in terms of how do you walk the talk in your community? So this GDEIB model is just one example of

benchmarks that any organization can use. And it's free. Let me repeat. It's free. And you can in fact measure your organization against it. And the final thing I'll say about it is that there's a whole section in this GDEIB benchmark model called best practices. You can measure your organization against what are best practices across 275 benchmarks to tell where you are and identify your gaps, your weaknesses, and gives you strategies on how to improve. Can't beat it. It's a good model.

Nicole Nelson: Wonderful.

Winta Tewolde: That's great. Yeah. Yes. So with that, maybe we can open it up to some of the questions from the attendees.

Paige: Absolutely. This one came in from an attendee, and I think it's a good one as we go to wrap things up. Certainly has been addressed a bit, but what advice would you give to those who want to be DEIA advocates, but aren't quite sure where to start?

Davita Vance-Cooks: First thing I would say is, I'm going to piggyback on something Shannon just mentioned. You get your certification so that you know exactly what DEIA is. Okay? A lot of people get emotional about DEIA, but I think it's best for you to understand what it means. And I'm assuming that the attending does, but there are some certifications that cost a little bit of money, especially through University of Southern Florida.

Shannon White: Yes, it's a $100.

Davita Vance-Cooks: It's a $100, but it walks you through the mechanics of DEIA so that you understand what is diversity? What is equity? What is inclusion? What is accessibility? You're talking the language of DEIA. Once you understand that, then you can start to be a DEIA champion, taking a look at your organization within that framework. That's one of my suggestions.

Shannon White: Absolutely. I'll also go back to relationship building. Build relationships with different people, invite a different person to lunch. Do what you can as an advocate. Whatever your sphere of influence is, if you can invite a different kind of person to work on a project, if you can invite them to be in a leadership role in a project, do that and I think it's so important around relationship building, but definitely also do this work because I think oftentimes people want others to tell them about the work. You can really have agency and learn it on your own, and then be able to engage further in the scholarship and in discussions, and then really see how you can be an even greater advocate of DEIA work if you do a little work-

Davita Vance-Cooks: Research. Absolutely.

Albani Childs: Absolutely. And building on what they both said. So thank you, Shannon. Thank you, Davita. It does stem back to education so what you don't know, find out. And I would also press that, try not to burden some of the folks of the communities you're learning about with educating you. We all have the resources, Google is free. The certifications that Davita mentioned are not too expensive, but Google is absolutely free and there are things out there that you can learn about, seminars you can take, webinars that you can invest in. And while you're learning, just being intentional about that learning, but also as your lens starts to change and as you start to learn new things, like Shannon said, when you're in certain rooms, pay attention in the way you didn't pay attention before. Pay attention to who's there, pay attention to what's being discussed without the people who it's being discussed about being in the room and then use your voice.

I think that's one of the best ways you can advocate is by doing something. You might not do it perfectly and just shake the dust off your feet when you don't get it right but keep educating

yourself and have some confidence in going forward as an advocate because you're needed. You're not always going to get it perfectly right, but action is better than inaction.

Nicole Nelson: I would add that I think this starts at the individual level and as Albani was talking about, looking at what you don't know, asking yourself, being honest with yourself about the questions that you should be asking. Letting that education pour in, but also stretching those conversations and having the difficult conversations with your team. So keep getting the circle a little bit bigger, a little bit, to support a community that is having these hard conversations I think is still really important. We're not beyond the tough conversation time where there's a lot to talk about and just understanding your own brain biases. That's new to people. Nobody understood prior to brain research that we all have them, and how do we work with that understanding as far as DEIA goes, I think it's really important to keep spreading the ripples.

Winta Tewolde: Yeah, absolutely. Paige, I think we probably have time for maybe one more question.

Paige: Absolutely. This one is a bit specific. It is, again, from an audience member, but can you give an example on how to bake diversity into a job description? What are some ways we can be proactive in seeking out candidates from underrepresented communities?

Albani Childs: Well, I'll take that one first and then pass it on to the panel. Words have such power, and some of the ways that we craft job descriptions tend to lean towards traditionally feminine and masculine wording of the task. And if we can put those job descriptions through a filter maybe to make it a bit more objective and less traditionally based on, oh, fast pace and strong this, and considering what we're actually asking for, what that job entails, just being intentional about how we word things is very important.

And then when it comes to accessibility, everyone should be able to access the description of the job. There shouldn't be a reason why a read-only device cannot pick up what your job is putting down, for lack of a better term. So if we can make sure that organizations are always putting out descriptions that everyone can access, I think that would take us a lot further in that goal.

Winta Tewolde: It gets back to the discussion we were having during the formal panel, it's a competency. So just like you have an expectation of an executive or a middle manager, or even I'll use the term the journeyman career level staff person is have you built and sustained diverse teams? Have you grown diverse teams? It is a competency just like collaboration, like leadership, financials, and business. It's all of those things, and so when you talk about policy change or embedding it in accountability, it should be in everybody's performance metrics. And the expectations can become heavier and more weighty as you move up in the ranks of an organization, but getting back to the point that it is a competency, there are lots of good examples out there.

So, if this particular person is interested, they can reach out and we can share some of the things that we've provided to our clients and our thought leadership. But I think the important thing to remember is it is a competency, and there are certain expectations and outcomes you can expect of various people in an organization.

Nicole Nelson: And it needs to be coached.

Listen, we've put a lot of stress on leadership on this panel, and there's a lot of accountability. And so being able to say, you know what? This is not my jam. I'm not great at this. I need help. We need to make that more acceptable for all leaders.

Davita Vance-Cooks: My final comment is this. Albani said it really well when she said, Google is free because believe it or not, there are a lot of articles out there on how to build a job description so that it's agnostic. There really are. And it also instructs you on how to make sure that you use inclusive language. A lot of times the job descriptions are exclusive rather than inclusive. And so you can find all of that, you can find all of those examples or like what you said you can contact us and we can help you with it, but I love the question simply because it really and truly reflects the fact that the individual understands this is impacting their pool of diverse applicants. And you do need to take time to develop job descriptions that are more inclusive than exclusive so that you can attract that diversity. And then once you have that diverse talent pool, then you have to put some items in place to pull them along further, but that's a good question.

Nicole Nelson: That sort of goes back to your systems as well. So how you receive those resumes, are you blacking out universities? Because those are all biased things that people have in their brains. And being able to look at that as this person's skillset and their experience only is really, really important.

Davita Vance-Cooks: Even the names of individuals is an issue too. There is a recent study about that, interviews where the names of individuals would actually stop people from pulling their application.

Albani Childs: And being specific. I think clear communication, I know it's a kind of trending phrase, it's a love language. Being clear in your communication, even on your job description. So what is excellent communication skills? What does that mean? Excellent written communication, make it plain and be specific. So there are folks who are going to self-sabotage or exclude themselves because they're not sure what you are asking for. So in looking for more diverse pools of talent, be clear about what you're looking for in your job description.

Winta Tewolde: Wonderful. Well, I think we're at time. So that concludes our panel discussion for today. It's been wonderful chatting with all of you. We all work together, and I learned so much from the panel here today and Truman Center thank you so much for allowing us to host this event with you. You can find all of us, I believe our LinkedIn information and personal contact information was provided as part of the distribution. So we are happy to continue the conversations with you all offline. We'll certainly review the additional questions that are submitted and look forward to future engagement. So with that, that concludes our panel for today.

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