

DEI
Research
Report

THE STATE OF DIVERSITY,
EQUITY AND INCLUSION
IN THE WORKPLACE



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Methodology

Talent Board and iCIMS surveyed talent acquisition and HR professionals working within organizations of all sizes and across a variety of industries. More than 350 anonymous survey responses were collected between May 3 and May 27, 2021.

About iCIMS

iCIMS is the talent cloud company that empowers organizations to attract, engage, hire, and advance the right talent that builds a diverse, winning workforce. iCIMS accelerates transformation for a community of more than 4,000 customers, including 40% of the Fortune 100. For more information, visit www.icims.com.

About Talent Board

Founded in 2011, Talent Board and the Candidate Experience Awards is the first non-profit research organization focused on the elevation and promotion of a quality candidate experience. Talent Board delivers annual recruiting and hiring industry benchmark research that highlights accountability, fairness and the business impact of candidate experience. Learn more about Talent Board at <https://www.thetalentboard.org>.

Introduction

Digital transformation will continue to drive change for businesses. The world has changed - the events of 2020 fundamentally and permanently altered how we live, work, connect and communicate. Now more than ever, talent is a company's key driver of success, but it's never been more challenging to create a winning workforce. As the labor market continues to recover and rebuild, it's critical for employers to retain top talent and attract new candidates in this increasingly competitive marketplace.

In the past few years there has also been an increased focus on [social justice](#) both in people's personal lives and in business. Topics ranging from voting rights, climate justice, healthcare, refugee crisis, racial injustice, income gap, gun violence, and equality in the workplace are all top of mind. It is no longer just a "nice to have" for organizations to prioritize building a diverse workforce and inclusive culture and equitable experiences. Business and HR leaders must put their goals into action to create real change and achieve business success.

[Increasingly, recent research has shown that diversity, equity and inclusion \(DEI\) are good for business.](#) DEI can improve a company's innovation, decision-making, and overall performance. It elevates employee engagement, individual wellbeing, motivation, and commitment. It also improves a company's ability to compete for and win top talent, especially among younger generations of workers.

A growing number of organizations are investing in diversity and inclusion programs to reap these benefits and better align with more enlightened thinking. [Boston Consulting Group's research](#) in 14 countries shows that 96% to 98% of large organizations (over 1,000 employees) have DEI programs. Despite these investments, it's widely accepted that real, lasting progress continues to lag in most industries and at many organizations. As a result, essential questions persist:

What are recruiters and hiring managers doing on the front lines of talent acquisition to attract candidates from historically excluded groups (HEGs) into their talent pipelines?

Are employers doing anything differently now than in the past to ensure diversity among their new hires?

Are specific practices, metrics, and goals being utilized to reduce bias and drive measurable recruiting results?

Talent Board, a nonprofit candidate experience benchmark research organization, and iCIMS, the talent cloud company that empowers organizations to attract, engage, hire, and advance the right talent that builds a diverse, winning workforce, sought fresh insights into these questions in a joint global survey of talent acquisition (TA) and HR professionals. What we found was, at times, surprising, disappointing, enlightening, and encouraging.

DEI is a Recruitment Imperative

Recent [iCIMS research](#) has made it clear that DEI is a core tenet of a sound talent attraction strategy and a compelling candidate experience. However, TA practitioners, HR professionals, and job candidates are all concerned that not enough is being done to help DEI flourish in the workplace or in the candidate journey. In fact, according to iCIMS' [Class of 2021 report](#), 65% of HR professionals said they were at least somewhat concerned their organizations aren't doing enough to promote DEI, while 46% of this group said they were extremely concerned.



This concern is justified—not just in relation to current employees but also in terms of attracting and hiring new and entry-level talent. [A recent CNBC poll](#) of workers found that nearly 80% of candidates want to work for a company that values DEI, and a [2021 Gallup report](#) reveals that Gen Z and younger millennials want to work for organizations that have a diverse and inclusive workplace. “They demand respect, equity and inclusion,” the Gallup report states, “and they are voting with their consumer and employment choices. DEI is not a ‘nice to have’ for this generation; it’s an imperative that is core to their personal identities.”

iCIMS research supports these findings: its [Class of 2021 report](#) also reveals that younger generations of workers expect authenticity in employers’ diversity efforts in a variety of ways including 58% looking for diversity to be showcased during the interview or hiring process and roughly 25% looking for mentions of diversity on company websites or photos of employees from HEGs on the careers site.

Diving Deeper: Our New Survey Findings

To gather deeper insights into the state of DEI within recruitment and hiring practices, iCIMS and Talent Board surveyed more than 350 TA and HR professionals worldwide in May of 2021. Here are some of the highlights of our research:

1. The Overall Picture: How Organizations Think They’re Doing

While many participants feel their organizations have made outstanding progress on diversity and inclusion, many also see plenty of room for improvement.

Nearly half (49%) of participants rate their organizations’ overall efforts to recruit and hire diverse talent either “superb” or “excellent.” In contrast, 45% rate their organizations’ efforts “fair” or “okay,” and 6% rate them “disappointing.”

Interestingly, the C-suite tends to rate their organizations’ efforts 74% higher than recruiters do. In fact, this disparity persists to some degree across all levels of management. Additionally, organizations with 100,000+ employees rate their efforts to recruit and hire diverse talent 46% higher than smaller organizations (501 to 2,500 employees), which isn’t surprising as large employers have typically made the most significant investments in DEI to date. By industry, Education rated its efforts 38% higher than the average across all industries. Aerospace & Defense and Healthcare rated their efforts 23% higher than the average. Government (public sector) gave itself a -21 NPS (Net Promoter Score), the lowest in our research (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).

TABLE 1. NPS BY TITLE

TITLE	OVERALL	C-SUITE	SVP	VP	DIRECTOR	MANAGER	RECRUITER	SPECIALIST	OTHER
NPS	29	50	33	46	33	31	23	11	37

TABLE 2. NPS BY COMPANY SIZE

TITLE	OVERALL	UP TO 500	501-2,500	2,501-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-25,000	25,001-100,000	OVER 100,000
NPS	29	23	27	36	27	33	40	43

TABLE 3. NPS BY INDUSTRY:

(The following industries had the greatest representation by industry in this research -- otherwise less than 1-2% for all other industries)

INDUSTRY	NPS
Industry	NPS
Aerospace & Defense	38
Construction	0
Consumer Goods	8
Education	44
Finance & Insurance	26
Government (public sector)	-21
Healthcare	38
Manufacturing	33
Nonprofit	20
Services	35
Technology	27

Perhaps one factor helping to fuel the high ratings of many of our survey participants is the fact that 62% also say their organizations now have a designated individual to promote DEI in the hiring process. Appointing a DEI champion is an important and highly visible step in the right direction; it signals to the world—and especially to job candidates—that a company takes the issue of DEI seriously, as does showcasing DEI elements on a careers site, although **participants’ ratings on this tactic aren’t nearly as positive:**

19%

say their company’s career site contains images of diverse employees.

14%

say it contains information about employee resource groups (ERGs)

14%

say it contains employee testimonials in text or video form.

13%

say it contains a DEI mission statement.

All of these figures—even the best of the bunch—show that a significant number of organizations still have key opportunities to nurture DEI in both their workplace cultures and their recruiting initiatives.

We’d be remiss if we didn’t raise one other issue: across the decade that Talent Board has surveyed organizations about the candidate experiences they provide, we’ve consistently found that employers rate themselves higher than actual candidates do in terms of overall quality and progress. While we did not survey candidates or employees in this case, it’s not a stretch to believe participants in this survey rated their organizations higher than candidates and employees would have regarding DEI progress—especially where the 49% of “excellent” and “superb” ratings are concerned. TA and HR practitioners who want to know whether their own perceptions actually align with the experiences of candidates or employees should survey those groups on their own.

2. Leveraging Metrics, Targets, Policies, and Practices

Although research shows that progress is being made in the use of DEI-related metrics, targets, and policies, our findings indicate they’re being significantly underutilized, despite how essential they are to helping organizations make and measure DEI progress.

Diversity Metrics — When asked which diversity metrics their organizations track, **participants’ top five responses** were:

17%

Ethnicity

17%

Race

12%

Disability

12%

Veteran Status

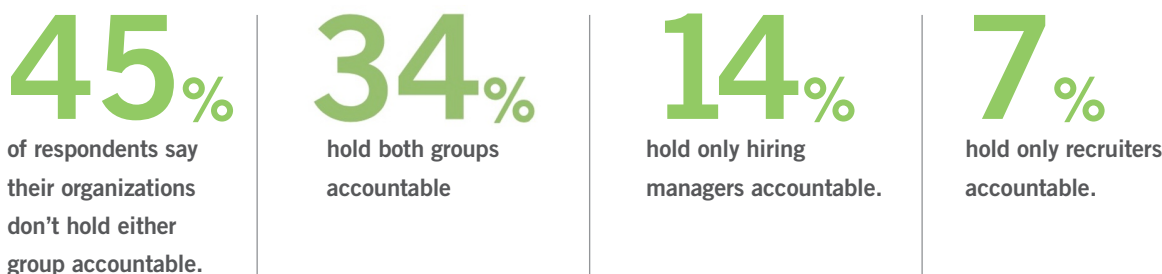
9%

Age

These percentages seem startlingly low, particularly in light of how highly half of the respondents rated their organizations on overall DEI progress. Metrics are a crucial tool in tracking and assessing such progress, so we expected to see higher percentages here. Metrics like caretaker status and socioeconomic status didn’t even crack the 3% mark.

In addition, 52% of participants' organizations have not used other diversity-related data or analytics beyond what is minimally required for EEOC compliance—another lost opportunity to gain insight and clarity.

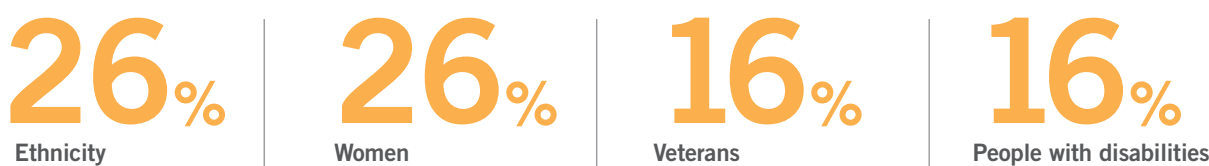
Specific Goals and Targets — When it comes to **holding recruiters and hiring managers accountable** for diversity-related goals or specific targets during the recruiting process:



Again, these figures indicate ample room for progress exists in the use of targets and establishing accountability for diversity and inclusion in recruiting and hiring.

Diverse Candidate Slate Policies and Hiring Goals — 60% of our participants' organizations have diverse candidate slate policies or diversity-focused recruitment/hiring goals. This figure rises with company size; it goes to 78% for those with 100,000+ employees, compared to 60% for organizations with 501-2,500 employees.

For organizations that do have diverse candidate slate policies, these goals are in place for the following groups:



Diverse candidate slate policies are another tool for building accountability and removing unconscious bias from the recruiting and hiring process. They help ensure people from HEGs are represented proportionately in selecting job candidates and making actual hires. Once again, the figures above seem low and in sharp contrast to how highly many of our participants rated their organizations' overall DEI progress.

Interviewer Training — One practice that's clearly being underutilized in the battle against unconscious bias is training individuals on how to conduct structured interviews. Just 26% of participants say their hiring managers receive such training, and only 21% say their recruiters do. Another 19% provide training to employees on their hiring panels, and 12% train the C-suite. These percentages remain relatively consistent across company sizes and industries.

While not all organizations use structured interviews, a strong case can be made that they help to reduce bias—both conscious and unconscious—that can creep into interviews. Structured interviews (in which the same set of standardized, vetted questions are asked of all job candidates) minimize bias by keeping interviewers from veering into potentially offensive or unfair questions. They also keep the focus of the interview on specific factors that could directly impact job performance.

3. Leveraging Technology

Technology solutions to support DEI are being leveraged at many organizations, but a significant opportunity exists for more than half of participants' organizations.

Forty-seven percent of participants say their organizations have already implemented technology to reduce unconscious bias in their recruiting and hiring, while 53% have not. One-third (33%) of those who haven't implemented technology solutions say they plan to do so in the future.

As a [2021 article in Employee Benefit News](#) observed, technology can give organizations diversity and inclusion insights based on real data, enabling them to make decisions based on fact rather than feelings and emotion. As the article states, technology can help employers with “the heavy lifting around eliminating recruiting bias and changing corporate culture. These tools are crucial to holding employers accountable and creating a diverse and dynamic workplace.”

Technology can help with a host of tasks in the recruiting and hiring process, including identifying potentially offensive or exclusionary language in job ads, on careers sites, in interview forms, and in other recruitment and new hire materials.

[Artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#), for example, is behind many of the latest tools in recruitment tech. When candidates see chatbots on a careers site or are recommended a job based on their skillset, they're experiencing AI in action.

AI is built to surface candidate profiles based on skills and support – not replace – people in the hiring process. All decisions should start and end with human touch points. AI tools can rapidly turn a vast amount of data from candidate profiles and pipelines into useful recommendations. AI can help guide recruiters on who they should consider talking to first and why.

When selecting an AI vendor, keep in mind that ethics matter. AI tools need to be transparent: recommendations should be explainable to support human understanding and build trust. They must also be technically robust and safe to minimize risk, and they need to be accountable to support audits, risk assessments, and best practices.



Human review can lead to biased assumptions, but algorithms are able to look through billions of data points with no ‘knowledge’ of (or biased assumptions based on) personal identifiers we see on resumes, like name, ethnicity, gender, or where someone went to school. When used responsibly, AI can offer candidate recommendations based on skills and experience, where the outcome is neither an exclusionary experience nor discriminatory practice. AI is one of the most powerful tools we have to promote [diversity and help provide a faster, fairer hiring process for everyone involved](#).

More than half of our respondents are not yet leveraging technology to reduce bias in their recruiting and hiring — which represents a substantial opportunity for those who have not yet implemented those tools to reap these benefits.

4. Expected Business Impact

Participants have realistic expectations regarding the business impacts of DEI, especially where financial gains are concerned. But the low numbers in our survey are potentially troubling.

When asked about the business impacts they would expect from improving DEI at their organizations, **participants’ top three answers were:**



There is little variation in these results across industries and company sizes.

It’s worth noting that these three responses are supported by a wide body of research published by *Harvard Business Review*, McKinsey, Gallup, Boston Consulting Group, *Forbes*, *SHRM*, and many others. However, the relatively low percentages for these responses lead us to wonder whether many participants either aren’t sure they’d reap measurable results by improving DEI or might not feel informed enough to answer the question confidently. Whatever the underlying reasons are, the low percentages are a reason to do more research around this topic.

Intriguingly, the response “improved financial outcomes”—which has been both supported and refuted by various research reports—is at the bottom of participants’ list of expectations (15%). TA and HR practitioners are likely quite familiar with the debate surrounding DEI-related financial gains. With so many other more likely positive outcomes that can be realized by improving diversity and inclusion efforts, many participants may feel it unnecessary (and perhaps unwise) to expect direct financial gains from these initiatives. As a 2020 [Harvard Business Review article](#) noted, when diversity programs promise financial gains but fail to deliver, people are likely to withdraw their support.

Key Opportunities for Improvement

1. Put DEI data and metrics to greater use, which will increase accountability.

The adage, “If you don’t measure it, you can’t manage it” rings true when reviewing the substantial percentage of our survey participants whose organizations aren’t leveraging or tracking specific diversity metrics, SLAs, targets, and diverse candidate slate goals. In line with our own findings, Josh Bersin’s report, [“Elevating Equity: The Real Story of Diversity and Inclusion,”](#) says that 76% of the organizations it surveyed have no diversity or inclusion goals. It states that roughly 80% of organizations are “just going through the motions” of DEI and “not holding themselves accountable.” Employers who want to increase accountability would be wise to gather clear, reliable data about their DEI-related hiring, and then set realistic, attainable goals for the future, along with a clear timeframe for getting there.

2. Implement more strategies and tools for reducing bias.

As our survey found, less than half of participants’ organizations have implemented technology to reduce bias in their recruiting, interviewing, screening, and hiring; and only 21% of recruiters and 26% of hiring managers are trained in conducting structured interviews to help reduce bias. A recent [Talent Board post](#) offered several additional insights on simple ways to reduce bias in recruiting such as weeding out microaggressions in interactions with candidates, rewriting job ads and descriptions to eliminate gender- or culture-specific words and phrases, and scrubbing rejection letters and emails, which can easily stray into biased language. Of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Employers might also consider using a variety of talent sources to ensure inclusion, utilizing a collaborative or group interviewing process to reduce bias on the part of one or two individuals, and switching to validated assessments that have been pre-screened to remove bias.

3. Showcase DEI more prominently on careers sites.

Our survey also revealed that many employers are not using their careers sites to full advantage when it comes to highlighting their commitment to DEI. Frankly, it’s more important than ever that they do so. As [iCIMS’ Class of 2021 report](#) and many other sources have noted, today’s workers expect authenticity in employers’ diversity efforts and they’re choosing to work for organizations where inclusion is embedded in the fabric of the culture. Astute organizations can showcase their commitment to DEI early in the talent attraction process by ensuring their careers site features assets such as photos and videos of employees from HEGs, testimonials about DEI at the organization, diversity-related hiring statistics, personal messages of DEI support from senior managers, information about ERGs, and a strong, well-defined DEI mission statement.

Take Aldi, the supermarket chain, for example. The company features [employee-generated videos](#), created by iCIMS Video Studio, throughout the careers site to engage with candidates more authentically. The videos range in topics including specific roles, a day in the life, company culture, perks and benefits and the company’s diversity and inclusion efforts.

Without question, employers are becoming more aware of and sensitive to the importance of DEI in the workplace. However, it's clear from the data we've gathered that there remains plenty of room for improvement when it comes to nurturing DEI in the recruiting and hiring process. The three key areas of opportunity noted above are crucial to employers who wish to make progress that can be measured and sustained. Until greater numbers of employers become more disciplined about reducing bias and putting hard data and metrics to use in the recruiting process, it will be hard to justify the large percentage of TA professionals who feel their organizations efforts to hire diverse talent are superb or excellent.

Like so many aspects of the candidate experience, improving DEI in recruiting and hiring will take time and effort. Given the fact that it's both a moral and business imperative—one that bestows a host of benefits to the organization and its people—iCIMS and Talent Board anticipate that employers worldwide will make significant strides in the coming months and years. We look forward to tracking this issue with future surveys and reporting on their progress.