

Using DEI Data to Effect Change in the DEI Landscape

By Michele Davis, Geraldine Pierre, and Tonya Pinkerton

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has become a hot topic facing research administrators. There is more emphasis being given to this initiative by external sponsors and in institutions of higher education, based on a survey conducted by the DEI working group for NCURA Collaborate in late 2022 (NCURA, 2022). The following is a snapshot of the information gleaned from both the survey and ensuing conversations.

Beginning the survey are two questions regarding accessibility to DEI resources. The existence of a DEI office or champion at their institution was identified by 86% of respondents. Champions included roles such as a Chief DEI officer, VP/AVP for Inclusive Excellence, a DEI council, or a Social Justice Center (Pierre and Sackmann, 2023). For the 5 respondents that did not have a dedicated office or champion, 40% reported that the institutional research (IR) or human resources (HR) office compiled DEI data. The next set of questions dealt with an institution's inclusion of DEI in institution-wide initiatives. Most respondents' institutions have DEI-related goals as 86% of respondents reported having DEI-related goals within their institution's vision or strategic plan. In addition, 78% of respondents reported that their institution has a published DEI statement.

Two questions posed were focused on the inclusion of DEI information in project proposals. Many respondents (89%) reported that their institution did *not* have DEI requirements as part of project proposal development and review. Fifty percent of the respondents have encountered DEI eligibility requirements in a funding announcement. The final questions posed in the survey dealt with access to DEI resources. Interestingly, 50% of the respondents noted that their library is equipped with DEI resources; and 69% of respondents affirmed that their institutions included DEI-related issues or populations in the student and/or employee handbooks. Seventy-five percent of the respondents stated that they either did not know of any DEI resources, were unsure, or did not respond. This means only 25% of respondents could easily identify DEI resources available to them.

One conclusion drawn from analyzing the survey response data was the need for subsequent discussion of the topic of DEI resources at institutions. This resulted in the first *Collaborative Conversations* session that occurred

on February 7, 2023, which is available via the NCURA YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJg0WJA6hi0. The following is a summary of the presented information regarding strategies to address DEI challenges in proposal development.

What kinds of DEI institutional data should research administrators have in their toolbox?

Michele Davis, executive director of sponsored programs and grant development at Davenport University, encourages the use of the Institutional Research (IR) team at your institution. Much of the data needed, on both students and employees, is already gathered by the IR office or team, but it is not always desegregated through a DEI lens. Student data can include demographics of enrollment, retention, graduation, and employment. Employee data can include application, interview, hiring, promotion, and retention details. The population sets identified in IR data, for both employees and students, typically include race and ethnicity, gender (and gender identity if the institution tracks more than binary gender information), age, disability status, veteran status, and first-generation status. Michele also pointed out that IR will also have information on the footprint of the institution—demographics that relate to the community where the institution resides, does business and research. Laneika Musalini, Ed.D., director of the office of sponsored programs at Columbus State University, pointed out that some programs will look for specific target populations. These project proposals need the data of specific target populations to describe what is going to be done and how the research will serve those individuals. Dr. Musalini also pointed out that there are additional resources for data regarding the footprint of the institution and its regional and statewide market available at the economic development office, workforce investment board, and the census bureau.

Research administrators should know the DEI champion of their institution and inquire about ongoing DEI trainings and initiatives to assess applicability to proposed research. Other areas that will provide useful information are the library, student access center or support services, military and veterans affairs, handbooks for both students and employees,

human resources, registered student organizations, mentoring programs, and tutoring programs. Community organizations and industry partnerships can provide additional resources. Research administrators should also make it a priority to keep the DEI resource information current and accessible to investigators.

Look at the reviewer feedback of the DEI statement; follow-up through reporting and monitoring to determine if the research is following through with the stated actions in the DEI statement; make one of the research objectives DEI related; gather information regarding the retention of underrepresented groups as faculty and staff (some DEI offices may have this data) and the leadership needs to hold the institution accountable for maintaining DEI initiatives. This is not an initiative that can be undertaken by one person or office on campus; it is a collaborative effort. Resources can be found on NCURA's Collaborate site under Sample Policies and Procedures (<https://collaborate.ncura.edu/samplepoliciesandprocedures743>) as well as in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion community boards.

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What resources are available to help a Principal Investigator (PI) to write a diversity plan and to train PIs?

In looking at the population being served; PIs should be able to identify the target population and the diversity of the population. Additionally, the recruiting staff should represent the diversity of the target population and be trained on best practices of interacting with participant populations. Research promotion and incentives should be accessible and equitable to all of the target population—language, transportation, internet access, banking abilities. The institution should have policies that support DEI starting with the hiring process of research personnel. Questions for PIs should identify any desired or expected outcome and there should be a process to remove that bias. Any barriers or exclusions to access should also be identified in an attempt to eliminate that element and bridge the gap, and offices involved in all parts of the research (proposal development and preparation, award negotiation and management, monitoring and close out) should own responsibility in adhering to the proposed DEI statement. Dr. Musalini encourages that PI training start at the institutional level – training that is available through the institutional office of inclusion (diversity office) and HR resources. To get a full DEI training experience, PIs may also need to utilize resources offered through external professional development avenues. Either way, the most important step is to APPLY the training.

Do you use any tools in assisting researchers in developing diversity plans?

Dr. Musalini suggests networking with other research administrators and other offices on campus. Pay attention to the funding announcement and rubric that is being applied to and check out the agency's website to see

their DEI initiatives. Any standard language from the DEI office, institutional strategic plan, and mission statements should be incorporated into the development of the diversity plan. These are no longer superficial requirements – agencies are looking for statements that are applicable, achievable, and measurable.

Who should take the lead on writing a DEI statement of an application? Is it something that HR or a DEI office should write and then each researcher tailor for their application?

While the PI is responsible, research administrators can provide support and resources as well as liaise with different offices on campus, providing the link from PI to resources. However, the DEI statement needs to be specific—align with target populations, enhance research, reach the goals and objectives, and adhere to sponsor guidelines.

In summary, we still have some work to do in order to achieve a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for research to continue to flourish. The topics presented through the survey and subsequent *Collaborative Conversations* are a good starting point to guide research administrators to DEI information within their campus and the community in which their campus resides. This initiative is a continuing and evolving practice that involves the institution, the research community, and the community of the organization. ■

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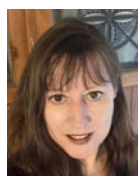
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