

Workforce Diversity Retention Project

The region's first-of-its-kind study reveals what employers can do to retain diverse talent.



Making a Difference
**PARTNERS IN
DIVERSITY**
Since 2005



A New Challenge for Employers

Since 2005, Partners in Diversity® has been helping employers in Oregon and southwest Washington create a competitive advantage by attracting, retaining and developing diversity influencers and professionals of color. Partners in Diversity serves nearly 400 organizations by providing a wide range of education programs, initiatives, research and community-building opportunities. We focus many of our efforts on supporting professionals of color who recently relocated to the region.

Workforce Diversity Retention Project

In July 2020, Partners in Diversity released the Workforce Diversity Retention Project in response to concerns from our member organizations that their workforce remains homogenous despite efforts to recruit diverse talent. Research proves that diverse companies perform better, have a more resilient workforce and benefits the community.

The Workforce Diversity Retention Project seeks to:

- Understand why professionals of color leave the region after a few years of arriving.
- Develop ways to support professionals of color in the workplace and in the community.
- Help businesses improve strategies to retain diverse talent.

The project, which began in 2019, comprises a quantitative and qualitative survey of 323 professionals of color who were introduced and recognized at Partners in Diversity's signature networking event called Say Hey!®, in-depth interviews with recruitment and retention personnel, and a steering committee made up of 26 community, business and policy leaders to review the study and develop solutions.

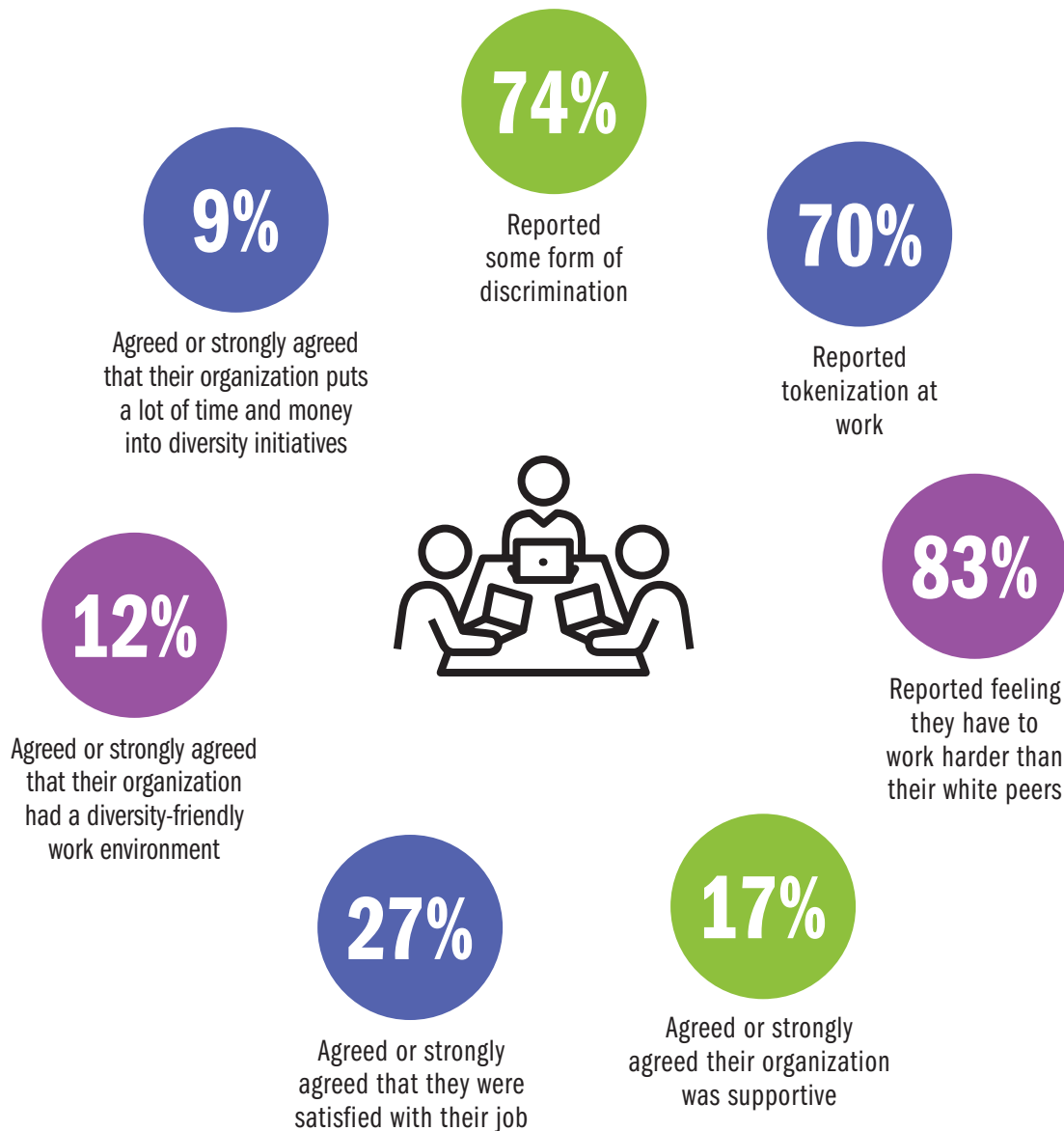
“The work environment acts as a filtering system for people of color. Even if we get [the job], the environment is so uncomfortable that the culture itself acts as a filter.”





PRIMARY CONCERNS INCLUDE:

- Lack of diverse representation among the workforce.
- Lack of accountability among organizational leaders when diversity issues were raised.
- Experiencing wide range of microaggressions and discrimination at all organizational levels.
- Feel like an outsider within their own organization.



“My supervisor wouldn’t support me even though she said she could see it happening. She said it was my problem to resolve since it was unique to me.”

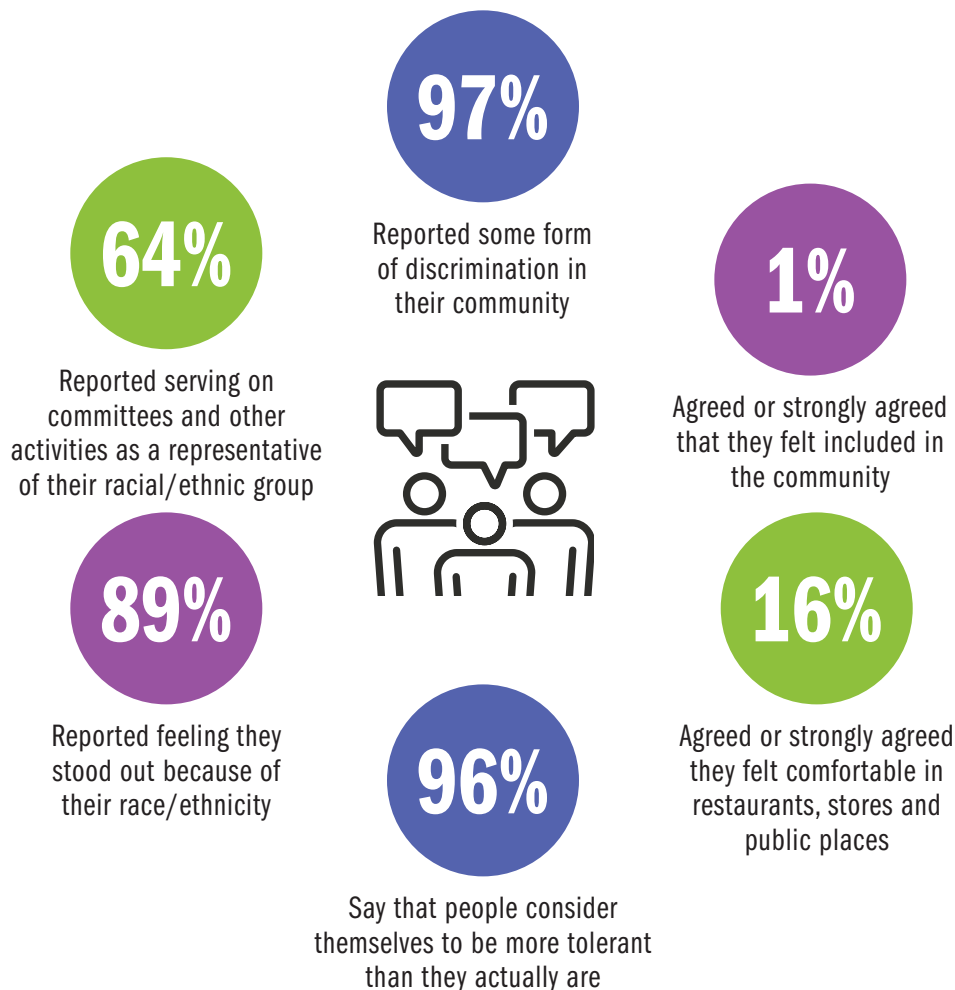
“People want you there but want you to do things the ‘white way’ and not infuse your own cultural values or perspectives.”





PRIMARY CONCERNS INCLUDE:

- Difficulties finding close social connections made their personal lives not enjoyable.
- Lack of spaces and events for building connections.
- Lack of cultural resources in the community posed a barrier to creating meaningful relationships.
- The general perception that the area is “progressive” and “liberal” is a veneer that prevents people from recognizing racist practices.



“Coming from the South, my friends and family thought I was escaping much of the racism we experienced. We now know that racism, xenophobia, and prejudice all live here too, but in different, less overt forms. White liberals often are at this intersection in my experience.”

“This is a very passive-aggressive place. It feels like living in a house of mirrors.”





Changes You Can Make

There is a lot that organizational leaders can do to improve the climate for people of color in the workplace and local community. Being empathetic, vulnerable, humble and curious are characteristics necessary to create culture change. When it comes to creating a welcoming environment for people of color, employers need to think holistically and not just in the silo of a workplace.

Partners in Diversity has put together a sampling of solutions based on our findings to help organizations with its diversity, equity and inclusion journey.

Employer policies and practices:

Internal policy ideas, from recruiting and on-boarding to responding to concerns or complaints from employees of color.



Accountability for leaders:

Strategies for creating executive-level accountability and ways to measure results.

Community support and networking:

Ways to leverage existing partnerships and community-based programs to support newly-arrived professionals of color.



Individual support and advocacy:

Strategies to provide emotional and mental support system and ways to address unsuccessful transitions.

The solutions are included in this summary. You can also read the full Workforce Diversity Retention report and download the list of solutions at the Partners in Diversity website at PartnersinDiversity.org.

Let us know how you're using this data and what solutions you are implementing to create positive culture change. Contact us: hello@partnersindiversity.org.



Ideas that employers can implement to improve or change internal policies, including recruiting professionals of color or in responding to concerns or complaints from employees of color.

1. The role of human resources includes being an advocate for culture.

HR professionals need to use a cultural lens to help employees of color feel more connected and able to bring their whole self to work. Build partnerships and help with connections to lessen feelings of isolation and loneliness.

2. Create a model for a safe, confidential and supportive process to resolve formal and informal incidents or complaints about barriers to equity and fairness in the workplace.

Many existing structures place the employee who is raising the issue in a position of being retaliated against. An anti-retaliation policy is needed to assure all employees know what they should and should not be doing. Complaints can be managed by a third party such as Allvoices.co, which provides a space for employees to submit complaints anonymously. Include policies on how to repair and move forward for employees.

3. Develop an equity lens policy as a tool to review all other policies.

This will assure a fair and equitable workplace environment. For example: see websites for equity policies at organizations such as Multnomah County and the Port of Portland.

4. Avoid tokenism in the workplace.

Tokenism is the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of equality. Do not burden employees of color through this practice.

5. Fund, support and empower employee resource groups (ERG).

ERGs or affinity groups help employees connect with each other within the organization and in the community, and can be a powerful tool in helping organizations reach their equity and inclusion goals.

6. Prioritize retention efforts.

Invest in diversity recruiting with adequate practices and efforts to retain and develop talent for the long term.

7. Adopt an equity certification for managers and leaders, provide resources and training for all employees.

Be active in an employee resource group in a significant way as part of the certification. Make diversity, equity, inclusion goals a part of performance reviews, interviews for advancement, etc.

8. Use employee resource groups to communicate the challenges and opportunities that employees of color might experience when relocating from a more diverse community to Oregon and southwest Washington.

Share the history of racism and “Portland nice” so it is not a surprise to newcomers.

9. Develop a culturally-relevant Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

The Workforce Diversity Retention Project documented the need for more accessible, culturally-appropriate professional practitioners available to provide counseling, stress management, wellness support and resources for employees of color. Enhanced resources, in addition to the regular EAP model, could be a valuable resource.

10. Implement a more robust off-boarding (exit interview) process to learn why an employee resigned to better improve internal culture to retain talented employees of color and other diverse backgrounds.

Engage employee resource groups to brainstorm retention strategies based upon the feedback of exit interviews. Consult a culturally appropriate professional practitioner.

11. Evaluate and replace HR hiring practices that unconsciously discriminate against employees of color.

For example, include methods to evaluate the qualifications in job descriptions and require all hiring panel members to take unconscious bias training.

12. Evaluate and replace HR operational practices using an equity policy lens that recognizes the differences in cultural perception of quality performance.

Examples of operational practices to review include: job evaluations, improvement plans, rewards and bonuses, pay equity and pay transparency, and opportunities to develop career paths, such as stretch assignments.





Ways to leverage existing Partners in Diversity, government and other community-based programs to support newly-arrived professionals of color.

1. Provide employees with information and access to culturally-specific organizations and resources (at on-boarding and beyond).

This includes social and professional opportunities for employees of color to gather outside of work. Companies need to also invest in these activities and organizations.

2. Recognize that not all employers have employee resource groups (ERGs).

Find ways to collaborate with other employers or community groups. For example, companies with large employee resource groups can invite smaller employers to their social gatherings and events. Examples include Community Leadership Academies, Coalition of Communities of Color Bridges program, etc.

3. Create leadership development opportunities by supporting employees of color to join boards or committees in the community, and integrate this into their work.

This mutually benefits the employee, the employer and the community.

4. Support and sustain cultural opportunities in the workplace and community.

Annual heritage months (such as Black History Month, Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Native American History Month, etc.) are great, but people want recognition and activities throughout the year, not just one month out of the year.

5. Recognize employers for doing great diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

An example would be a community celebration or award ceremony.

6. Create opportunities to invest in the diverse local economy through partnerships.

This includes suppliers and contractors that support minority business groups (e.g., Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME), Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber (HMC), etc.).





Leadership buy-in and leadership's understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion work is critical to be successful. This includes strategies for creating executive-level accountability and ways to measure results.

1. CEOs and boards play a critical role in driving diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in the workplace.

They must be accountable in creating an inclusive workplace.

2. Tie the compensation of CEO and senior leaders to the adopted diversity, equity and inclusion metrics and goals.

Similar to other business goals, consider linking pay to how well leaders accomplish diversity goals. The leadership and accountability must start at the top and be embraced throughout the organization. Use networks such as Partners in Diversity's CEO Cohort and other leadership networks to learn and share.

3. Implement regular employee surveys and assessment with the first assessment serving as a baseline.

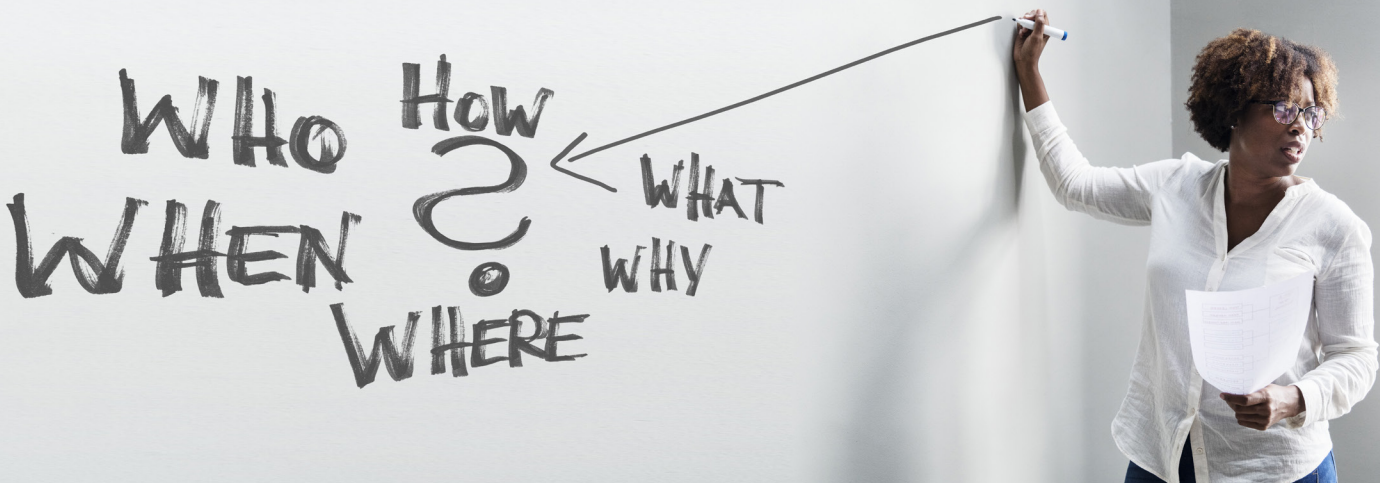
Create an inclusion index using data from assessments (this is similar to quality indexes). This index would include metrics in training, budgets, emotional intelligence, and other measurements that reflect the mindset, commitment, passion and authenticity of top leaders.

4. Create a transparent process to advance employees of color into leadership roles.

Create formal and informal mentor/coaching/sponsorship programs that recognize that diverse teams require different management skills. Front load all fellowships, internships, and scholarships to get a jump start on recruiting people of color.

5. Understand and recognize that discrimination and racism exist and have negative impacts on the organization.

It is essential for top leaders and elected officials to embrace their role in building an anti-racist culture.





Strategies to provide an emotional and mental support system for professionals of color and strategies to address unsuccessful transitions.

1. Understand Oregon and the Pacific Northwest's history of racism.

Provide employees and potential employees with information about Oregon's historical white supremacy structure and how it continues to impact our culture today. Knowledge of history will help current and new employees understand the significance of race and culture in the community and workplace, and hopefully inspire work to change it.

2. Advocate for improving the mental health infrastructure to serve the needs of communities of color.

This could include attracting professionals of color to careers in mental health professions. Address the stress of relocating to a non-diverse community. For example: incorporating a culturally competent EAP service designed for employees of color.

3. Connect employees with culturally-specific organizations.

Creating a template or model for culturally relevant on-boarding that would include resources and best practices. Must be sensitive to the needs or interest of the new employee and family members. Provide resources for social engagement and culturally-specific services. Examples include: OHSU Center for Diversity and Inclusion's Community Resource Guide, Travel Portland and Travel Oregon website, and minority-focused newspapers.

4. Create formal mentor and sponsor programs for employees of color.

The programs should recognize the dynamics and cultural differences between mentor and mentee.

5. Design strategies that may be an umbrella to include smaller companies (members) that don't have the resources to implement.

This may include employee resource groups and diversity, equity and inclusion training, etc.

6. Provide services for the "trailing spouse" (a person who follows their partner to another city because of work).

Help with job search, community connections, and events that focus on activities for new employees, partners and families.

7. Prepare a process to achieve "a great place to work" status.

How well an organization supports its employees can be measured by the way the organization's culture is perceived. Develop evaluation tools that measure culture change that is relevant to organizational values and goals.

8. Train and provide each newcomer with an "onboarding mentor" to assist with the transition to the workplace and community.

Regional employers such as Nike have developed programs such as this, which can serve as a model or reference for others.

9. Connect job candidates with employees or other community members who are willing to share their experiences.

Work within your organization or community groups, such as Partners in Diversity, to create a program for volunteers to meet with job candidates who want to better understand life in Oregon or southwest Washington.



Learning Opportunities

Partners in Diversity is a membership-based nonprofit that provides educational programs, resources and community-building opportunities, as well as a jobs board that connects employers with diverse talent. Our programs are ideal for organizational leaders, human resources professionals and diversity, equity and inclusion advocates. Learn more about our programs and membership benefits at PartnersinDiversity.org.

Breakfast for Champions	Equity Conversations	Say Hey!	CEO Forum	NW Equity Summit
Regular sessions to learn impactful approaches to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.	Series of smaller gatherings to engage in safe and meaningful dialogue.	Quarterly multi-cultural networking event to welcome professionals of color who recently relocated to Oregon or southwest Washington.	Convening of CEOs, presidents and executive directors to exchange ideas and gain new insights.	Large convening of diversity influencers to learn from national experts on topics related to championing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.



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