



## 2023 AGC Diversity & Inclusion Roundtable Report

On September 20, 2023, AGC convened industry leaders to address pivotal aspects of fostering diversity and inclusion (D&I) within the construction industry. The following detailed report captures the nuanced discussions and strategic recommendations emerging from this insightful roundtable event.

### 1. The Importance of Leadership Commitment to D&I:

The roundtable commenced with an exploration of what constitutes a genuine commitment from leadership. Key themes included strong leadership involvement in the development of strategic programs and ongoing education for leaders to build inclusive leadership skills.

Participants delved into the ways leadership behaviors shape the overall climate of inclusion and mental well-being. Participants emphasized the necessity for company owners and executives to authentically engage in D&I initiatives. Additionally, the adoption of Inclusive Leadership programs, such as the White Men as Allies Learning Lab from White Men as Full Diversity Partners, emerged as a best practice to cultivate leaders who champion D&I efforts.

*Strategies for Building Commitment:* Leveraging data-driven commitment, participants highlighted the significance of utilizing data points from staff engagement surveys to identify gaps in how individuals feel within the company across various demographic groups. Additionally, participants routinely utilize third-party assessments, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews, to identify tangible actions to create a bottom-up environment for D&I and close gaps in inclusivity.

The roundtable emphasized the need for dedicated individuals to drive D&I results, creating a culture of inclusion, and empowering employees to actively contribute to D&I efforts. Practical approaches included immersive D&I experiences, the integration of unconscious bias training, and fostering uncomfortable yet necessary conversations. The overarching theme was creating a shared understanding that "we are all in this together" among employees.

### 2. Overcoming the Politicization of D&I:

To address the increasing politicization of D&I, the roundtable participants recommended redefining DEI beyond current polarizing rhetoric. This strategic shift aims to mitigate resistance and facilitate a broader understanding of what diversity & inclusion means in the construction

industry. Leaders were encouraged to arm themselves with key talking points, ensuring effective communication of the company's commitment to D&I to employees, trade partners, project owners and other stakeholders. Moreover, the integration of D&I into safety programs and performance reviews emerged as practical steps to normalize D&I within the organizational culture.

*Understanding the Impact of Policy Rollbacks and Navigating Legislative Challenges:* Participants engaged in a deep dive into the potential impact of recent court decisions and state legislation on D&I in the construction industry. Strategies discussed included a proactive legislative engagement strategy, advocating for diverse businesses, and engaging outside stakeholders in conversations to build industry support for D&I. The roundtable emphasized the importance of addressing small business concerns supporting the next generation of businesses by addressing financial gaps and offering alternatives if preference programs are eliminated through court rulings.

### **3. Building an Effective D&I Infrastructure:**

Participants discussed in depth the levels of investment, both financial and personnel-related, required to support robust D&I strategies. Recommendations for companies just getting started focused on presenting tangible business cases to company leadership and involving middle managers and project teams in the establishing of a diversity & inclusion committee. The consensus was that, to be effective, diversity & inclusion programs need clear leadership support, dedicated staff and D&I champions across all levels of the organization. To build that support, D&I should be tied to career path guidelines, executive compensation, and performance management operations.

*Education and Training Resources:* The roundtable highlighted the crucial role of education and training resources in impactful D&I implementation. Participants stressed the need for diversity training to be integrated into regular orientations and ongoing training sessions. Recommendations included creating safe spaces for dialogue amongst small groups of employees, including D&I as a key component of new employee orientation and onboarding, and integrating D&I into existing safety and compliance trainings.

Additionally, roundtable participants addressed the learning and development needs of individuals charged with advancing D&I strategies. They underscored the importance of education and training for D&I practitioners to have a deep understanding of systemic issues and learn effective strategies for sustaining D&I to making meaningful, long-term impact.

*Mental Health and Well-being:* The intersection of D&I policies and mental health was explored, focusing on how companies can enhance mental health support and reduce stigma. Participants discussed the integration of mental health information into AGC's Culture of CARE program.

#### **4. Measuring Progress and Making Impact:**

The roundtable participants scrutinized metrics and key performance indicators for evaluating D&I initiatives' progress. Participants discussed moving away from conventional surveys and utilizing third-party vendors to encourage employee participation that offers a more objective assessment. Exit and stay interviews were highlighted as valuable tools for companies to utilize every 6-9 months to measure employee sentiment.

Additionally, attendees discussed using pay equity audits – which can identify where pay inequities exist within a company and help determine factors that contributed to an inequity – as an effective way to assess the effectiveness of their current D&I programs. The group also discussed AGC's Diversity & Inclusion Assessment as an effective tool for measuring progress and impact, both within a company but also industry wide.

#### **5. Workforce Recruiting Strategies:**

Best practices for attracting and retaining talent, especially from historically excluded groups, were explored. Strategies included creating networks for demographic groups within the company to facilitate open discussions and connections, investing in education programs and mentorship/sponsorship initiatives to support underrepresented communities.

The application of the Broken Rung Theory was recommended to help companies identify gaps and unintentional barriers in promoting diverse individuals into higher levels within the company.

#### **6. Strengthening Supplier Diversity Programs:**

The roundtable acknowledged the importance of supporting the growth of trade partners and diverse businesses. To strengthen supplier diversity programs, the implementation of business development programs for diverse trade partners was highlighted. Addressing financial gaps by connecting businesses with resources such as insurance, CPA, and surety emerged as a strategic approach.

### **Conclusion**

The 2023 AGC Diversity & Inclusion Roundtable provided a comprehensive exploration of strategies and recommendations for fostering a culture of inclusion in the construction industry. By implementing these strategies collectively, the construction industry can evolve into a more diverse, inclusive, and thriving sector.

A big thanks to the thought leaders who participated in the 2023 AGC Diversity & Inclusion Roundtable. Representatives from the following companies contributed to these discussions:

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Caddell Construction Company  
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Whitaker Construction Company