Nonprofit**HR**

DEIJ Mini Series #2: Leadership Buy-In For Your Organization's DEIJ Goals

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Your employees may be pushing for greater equity, inclusion, diversity and justice, but have your leaders bought in? Long-lasting, systemic change must be championed from the top but moving minds on sensitive topics can be a daunting, if not impossible, task. Access the second webinar in Nonprofit HR's DEIJ Mini Series and hear the information you need to support the change management process for your leaders and other influential groups.

From this discussion, you'll learn about:

- Equity-focused leadership and how it translates into a DEI-focused organization.
- Why systems thinking is needed to understand how buy-in can impact the organization.
- The essentials of navigating pushback, measuring success and celebrating wins.

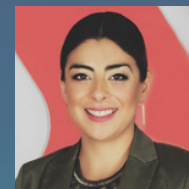**NONPROFITHR.COM/EVENTS**

PRESENTERS

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Senior Consultant, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice*

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PANELISTS

Nicole Lopez-Riley, MPP, SHRM-SCP
Chief Strategy Officer
YMCA of Austin

Erin O'Grady, BA
D.C. Regional Director & Alliance DEIJ Initiative Chair
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Sonya Gyjuan Smith, EdD, JD
Chief Diversity Officer
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Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Hello, everyone and thank you for being at today's webinar.

Thank you so much for joining us for Leadership Buy-In for Your Organization's DEIJ Goals. My name is a Atokatha Ashmond Brew ... I am Managing Director of Marketing & Communication at Nonprofit HR, and ... will be your moderator for today. We have a lot of great content to cover, so let's get started. Before we jump in though, I would like to go over a few items so you know how to participate in today's event.

You have joined the presentation listening using your computer's speaker system by default. If you would prefer to join over the telephone, just select telephone in the audio pane, and the dial-in information will be displayed. You will have the opportunity to submit text questions to today's presenters by typing [them] into the questions pane on the control panel. You may send in your questions at any time during the presentation. We will collect these and address them during the Q&A session at the end of today's event. Today's webinar is being recorded, and you will receive a follow-up email within the next few days with a link to the recording and the slides.

And now, a little bit about Nonprofit HR.

We empower nonprofits to achieve their full potential through their people. Nonprofit HR is the country's leading and oldest firm, focused exclusively on the talent management needs of the social impact sector, including nonprofits, associations, social enterprises and other mission-driven organizations. We focus our consulting efforts on the following practice areas: Strategy & Advisory, HR Outsourcing, Total Rewards, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and Search. Nonprofit HR offers customized learning and development in addition to research and events, all with the objective of strengthening the people management capacity of the workforce. Since 2000, our staff of credentialed experts have advanced the impact of some of the world's most influential brands in the sector.

And now, a little about today's conversation hosts.

First, you'll hear from Bryan Jackson. He's a Senior Consultant for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion with Nonprofit HR. Bryan provides subject matter expert advice, insight and strategic direction to Nonprofit HR clients. He oversees complex client engagements, manages projects to completion, and designs and facilitates DEI training solutions and assessment services to partners and stakeholders.

And you'll also hear from Steven Krzanowski. Steven is a Senior Consultant for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion for Nonprofit HR as well. Steven partners with our clients to uncover inequities in organizational systems. He also addresses gaps in knowledge and skills related to DEI for staff and constituents, and develops intentional, data-driven, actionable outcomes to advance DEI initiatives. Steven utilizes best practices rooted in theoretical frameworks to ensure concepts and content are applicable and easily understood at all levels of an organization.

Again, you will have an opportunity to ask questions at the end of today's event. The recording and slides will be sent in a few days following this event, and live attendees will also receive SHRM recertification credit codes after the event .... And now, without further ado, I hand it over to you, Bryan and Steven.

Bryan W. Jackson: Hey, everybody, thank you so much for joining us all today. We are really excited to be engaging with you all. And we have a really fun-filled and packed day for us ... with our content.

First and foremost, we want to let it be known that we're going to be engaging some panelists, and I'm going to let Steven briefly ... share who will be joining us today.

Steven Krzanowski: Thanks, Bryan. Hello, everyone. We have Nicole Lopez-Riley. She's the Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer with the YMCA of Austin. We have Erin O'Grady. She is the D.C. Regional Director and Alliance DEIJ Initiative Chair with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. And we have Dr. Sonya [Gyjuan] Smith, Chief Diversity Officer at the American Dental Education Association ... We'll give full bios right before they speak.

Bryan W. Jackson: OK, thank you Steven. And so, what you are all going to take away from our content today are these three major objectives.

First, you will learn about equity-focused leadership and how that translates [to] centering your organization around DEI efforts.

We're also going to allow for you to understand systems thinking.

This is the connection from our first session, so we will spend a brief moment of time just allowing for us to understand how these dots are connected and how one then understands the buy-in concept so that it ultimately will impact your organization.

And then we will spend some time, especially with our panelists, really looking into how to navigate pushback, measure success and celebrate wins. This also connects to a lot of the questions that were fielded to us from all of you in attendance. And so, we hope to make sure that we hit on all of these items.

And so, what is equity-focused leadership?

Simply put, equity-focused leadership centers on the process of diagnosing and assessing equity within the culture, policies, programs, practices and processes within an organization.

Ultimately, what you are doing is uncovering all … your organization is, so you can identify the organization that you want to become. As a leader, it is important for us to frame how we impact change by naming what needs to be changed. By naming it, you then have a North Star to look at systems that can be a part of facilitating that change.

The self-awareness piece is something that is also important for leaders. And that perception, that feeling, that emotional EQ — listening instead of just hearing — are all the ways [through] which you can find more information as it relates not only to what you are naming but [also] getting into that buy-in, getting towards that success and getting towards who else to invite into this conversation. But you cannot know where you are going until you know where you are coming from. That is why it is essential to remember the path.

With that self-awareness … remembering the path and naming what those inequities may be, you can … commit to whatever the change is, a part of transforming your organization [into the on]e you want to become. That commitment is essential because it's not just about naming it. It's also about committing the resources … people [and] … time into seeing that change come to fruition.

But this is really all guarded by the self-care as leaders. We know leadership can be a very lonely position and it can be one where you are constantly being evaluated and watched. And that's why we want that self-care … to be central into how you impact the work. And so, centering for who we are as leaders can help us [to] then know how to … cultivate the change that we want to see [and] monitor how the changes are affecting not only ourselves, but [also] those that work closest to us within our organization.

Things that equity-focused organizations do. So as you are on this journey, committing to DEI, these are some of the things that you should consider as part of the process in transforming your organization.

Are you acknowledging the existence of systemic inequalities?

Are you committing resources? When I'm saying resources, I'm talking about financial resources. I'm also talking about time resources.

Are you taking risk?

[Do] you [understand] privilege as it relates to power differentials — not only within C-suite and non-C-suite, but men, women [and] people of different abilities ... different ages?

How are you embracing the change within the system?

Have you diversified not only your staff, but [also] your board? This is essential.

But then, are you being as transparent as possible with decision making? Not saying that you need to share everything within the organization, but [share] especially when it comes to those decisions that impact the people, the culture, the heart of your organization.

Are you seeking ... ways to integrate feedback into understanding how ... change impacts your staff? And is that feedback anonymous?

Also, are you sharing power? Are those that are closest to the issue — those working with those outside the doors of your organization — also invited to the table? But not only are they invited to the table, [but] are their voices heard while sitting there?

And then, are we engaging diverse communities? Are we utilizing the insight of those 20-somethings within our organization? Are we allowing for those [who] may not be in the C-suite to have access to sharing their perspective when it comes to how we can transform our equity-focused organization into *that* equity-focused organization?

Are we taking responsibility for the actions? Not only of the present, but of the past as well?

And then, are we operating in a silo? Or we operating with our arms open to embrace other organizations to build up this conglomerate, to build up this coalition, of being an equity-focused organization? ... How are we supporting them? ... How are we in turn being supported by them as well?

 ... To get the chat alive is, I would love for you all in attendance to share in the chat: What is something that your organization does well?

Does your organization commit resources to DEI initiatives? Does your organization have a diverse staff and/or board? Does your organization share power? I would love to see what some of you are highlighting within your organizations that you are doing well, as you embark on this diversity, equity and inclusion journey. So, please add those to the chat.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Be sure to use the questions pane to answer Bryan's question. You can post your responses to Bryan's question in the questions pane.

Bryan W. Jackson: Thank you, Atokatha, and again, that question: What is, or what are, some of the things that your organization does well, as it relates to being an equity-focused organization?

 ... We'll allow for those to enter the chat. And thank you for your contributions, as we go on to the next slide.

What is systems thinking? ... This is a brief synopsis on what we covered [in the] last [seminar]/mini series — a foundational understanding of what systems thinking is.

System thinking means seeing and understanding interrelationships within complex systems, knowing how these systems work over time and challenging the assumptions about why, how and when these things occur. Simply put, we're talking about how A connects to B and how it connects to C. You want to make sure that before you embark on changing a system, you have to know the impetus of it. You have to know where it started, and you have to know why and how it is allowed to be maintained throughout ... [your] time and space.

This is essential because it'll help you mitigate some additional challenges. It will also help you identify what those North Stars are as [they] relate to: What do we need to change? Who needs to be involved in supporting us with the change? Do we have the infrastructure in place for the change? And then, how do we make the change occur?

And then, when using systems thinking, the root of how this helps to better the organization is focusing on what the issues are and how they connect to the overall operations of your organization.

How does it impact the people? The culture? The morale? The communication? Do people feel valued, seen, heard and embraced? Does it allow for folks to see your organization from the outside with your branding as a place that embraces who people are in their full awesome superpowers?

And so, you not only want to think about the interrelation or the interconnectedness of a lot of the systems within your organization, but you also want to make sure that you are looking into, [if and] how ... these systems impact the organizational issues within your culture, within your organization and ... with the overall functioning of how you impact the communities [with which] you are on a journey ... ?

I'm now going to turn it over to Steven to talk a ... bit more about some of the essential assets and ensuring that the movement towards DEI within your organization is sustainable, but also successful.

Steven?

Steven Krzanowski: Thanks, Bryan. And so much of the systems work ... goes hand in hand with people — they go right along with one another. And everything that organizations are trying to do is to hopefully foster a sense of belonging and engagement. So a sense of belonging often means a more engaged workforce. On the screen here, we have listed several behaviors that, when practiced, can lead to advanced levels of belonging. So let's dive a little bit into some of these.

A focus on purpose. This is about communicating the intersection of your organization's purpose with your employees' contributions. Some areas to think about or consider [are]: How often do you discuss your mission and your purpose with staff? How often do you recognize contributions to that mission?

Previously, I worked in a national nonprofit. We started every staff meeting with a mission moment. This was an opportunity for staff to share stories about how they're moving their mission forward, and it was also a space for folks to provide examples of how their values were being executed through these community impact initiatives. It was directly aligning to that focus on purpose, focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and our constituents.

Number two: Be intentional about inclusion. This is all about being deliberate with calculated efforts to bring your staff voices to the table [as you] seek to learn about them. Some errors you might want to consider thinking about include: Does everyone at your organization or on your team have a seat at the table around decision making? Are you aware of your staff experiences and what's happening at all levels of the organization? [Is] there [an opportunity] for anonymous feedback?

Feedback is so crucial. Here at Nonprofit HR, our CEO Lisa Brown Alexander uses what we call TINYpulse [Limeade Listening]. It's [an online platform], and she poses a question to all of the staff across our firm on a monthly basis. It's all anonymous. Staff know that they're communicating with Lisa, but Lisa doesn't know what staff person she's speaking with. It's a great way to understand and address needs at all levels of the organization. And we've seen change come from feedback that staff has provided Lisa over the last few months.

Another thing to think about is, have you conducted an assessment to learn more about levels of inclusion and belonging? We highly encourage all of our clients that we work with to start with understanding the climate and what's happening at the organization, so get those benchmark understandings in place so you can build a strategy around it.

Embed it into the organizational culture. So, this is about creating memorable experiences. Personalized interactions, tailored motivators and fast feedback. This is all about helping others and yourself connect your head to your heart in the work that you're trying to accomplish. We all enter this work for many different reasons. Whatever those reasons are, it's important to recognize how we create a shared vision at our organizations.

How often are you embedding team building and inclusion activities into your meetings and outings? This is one of the most important things for me as a staff person. I love ... [getting] to know my colleagues across the firm and other organizations that I've been at ... taking time to focus on those intentional moments — information sharing about each other can do that. DEI should be integrated across all that you do at your organization.

[Mitigate] burnout. So burnout blocks the opportunity for engagement to occur. So check in with your staff to see how they're managing. Identify ways that you might want to shift workloads.

I know many of you on this call are currently experiencing burnout or you've previously experienced it. And reports [show] that as the pandemic continues, burnout is also continuing ... at higher rates. As nonprofit leaders, you wear so many different hats. When we're burnt out, we're not producing our best work, and ultimately burnout can have — and will have — massive impacts on the effectiveness of your organizations.

How often do you sunset priorities or help staff carve out time to engage in planning or thought work? How are we managing expectations of one another on our teams? How are we communicating the busy seasons and our work with one another? ... From team to team, how are we communicating what's happening? What does support really look like for each person on your team? It is going to look slightly different for every individual.

Build team trust. So, building trust takes time. Providing informal opportunities for people to get to know one another can function as a foundation for trust. So, get into proximity with one another. It can be such a powerful experience. We encourage you to go beyond just work and building relationships around your job, engage in experiences that center the core of an individual.

Reflecting on teams I've been a [member] of, I recognize the most productive teams. All of them had created intentional opportunities for folks on the team to get to know one another. And this can be done in both the formal and informal interactions.

Celebrate contributions. Create a culture that celebrates your employees' contributions for advancing organizational goals. Many organizations that I work with carve out a portion of their staff meeting to recognize each other for a job well done. Others use boards ... online internet, intranet services or Slack channels to call out and call folks into experiences and recognize them for their great work. So, be intentional about how you recognize your staff and team members, learn how they want to be recognized and use that as a starting point.

As leaders committed to fostering belonging on your teams, I encourage you to focus on the following four areas: assessing or being perceptive of the inclusiveness of your team climate; articulating expectations about behaviors expected to promote inclusion; role modeling inclusive behaviors for others; and reinforcing desired inclusive outcomes and behaviors.

Bryan, can you go to the next slide for me?

So much of this work around advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice is connected to the head and heart. Having the skills and the knowledge needed to understand, recognize and critically think about ways to eliminate bias and inequities in our organizations.

It's also about heart work. We all bring ourselves to our workplace — [our dimensions of diversity, our personal and professional experiences that have shaped our worldview and the histories that have created the systems that we're currently operating in. [It's about] inclusive leadership. It's not just about the things we do. It's about how we do things.

On the next three slides, we're going to briefly discuss the impact of transparency, power-sharing and empathy, and how it can lead towards advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.

So, when we think about transparency and transparent leaders, in our next webinar, our final session in this series, Dr. Antonio Cortes and I will be hosting a session called Advancing Transparency & Communicating Your Organization's DEIJ Strategy.

This is going to be on June 7 from 2 to 3:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, and we're going to dive much deeper into transparency and how to embed transparency in your organization.

So when we think about advancing DEIJ, transparency must be part of that process. Shortly, in just a few minutes, you're going to hear from three of our guest panelists who will share some of those experiences with you ... how transparency is showing up in their work and in their organizations, and how they're leading by example by incorporating transparency into their work.

 ... In order to establish and further embed a sense of belonging in your organization, again, we must focus on transparency. And we define a transparent leader as a person who's open, frank and candid and leads in a consistent, predictable manner.

Types of actions that transparent leaders commonly practice: They're very clear about what they and their organization are trying to accomplish. The transparent leader clearly communicates the mission of the organization and why it matters. They succinctly state how the organization is going to accomplish what it sets out to do. The transparent leader lays out the strategy and supports why it will be effective. They show how they're going to get people behind it. The transparent leader communicates the roles that the team members play and why those roles are critically important to the success of the organization and all team members.

They lay out direction. A transparent leader crafts a compelling vision for the future, and frequently communicates milestones that are accomplished. In addition to contributions, team members are frequently recognized and acknowledged as positively moving the organization forward.

So, the bottom line here [is] being a transparent leader builds trust. And trust is the foundation of our work in our organizations.

Next slide, Bryan.

And, can you click one more? All right.

So, let's talk ... about power-sharing and decision making. I want you to think about power structures that exist within your organization.

How do you share power in your organization? Is it a hierarchical structure? Is it a flat structure? And where's power concentrated? How are decisions being made? Who is part of that decision-making process?

[Historically, our organizations] tend to be hierarchical in nature so finding a balance between different levels of power sharing can be really challenging.

We recognize that, because it ... makes us want to think [about] ... our approach [differently] — how we're making decisions that impact ... our staff [and] our constituents across our organizations. So, we need to be intentional about understanding the structure of our organization and adapt strategies that flatten it to provide space for all staff and team members to have a stronger investment in your organization. Through this, we can create a more equitable outcome around decision making, innovation and design, problem solving, and implementing change.

There are three levels of power sharing: voice, vote and view. Voice is when leadership listens to the voices of employees and uses input to influence decisions. Vote is when employees have active involvement in decision making and what the outcome is going to be. View is when leadership has already made the decision and simply communicates to employees what that decision is, and perhaps how they came to that outcome.

These are different levels. These different levels give employees opportunities to feel included and connected, but it's also an opportunity for us to pause, think critically and disrupt bias.

Sharing power and elevating diverse vantage points allows for better decision making and breaks up potentially homogeneous groups sitting at the table where power is often most concentrated. It can also reduce instances of gatekeeping.

So, ultimately, sharing power helps us interrupt bias that may be creeping into our organizational systems and processes and impacting the employee experience and staff experience and that employee staff lifecycle.

On the next slide, we're going to talk about leading with empathy.

So, we encourage you to use your influence within your organization to drive the shift in culture. Listen to the voices of teams [and team] members. When you see an inequity, call it out and hold leadership and others accountable to [correct its root causes]. As leaders within our organization, it is important that we manage with empathy.

Many of you may be thinking: How do we do that while ... ensuring that we're centering diversity, equity and inclusion?

One way is to use PATH as a framework to support your team.

So we encourage you to partner (P) with your team members, meaning you are amplifying your relationship as people and not just centering a power dynamic.

Ask (A) questions. If a problem, miscommunication or issue arises, ask questions such as, tell me more about that, or [continue] partnering, or continue to partner with your team members.

Trust (T) lived experiences. As your team members share about their experiences, trust that they are experts on their own life experiences, especially when they are sharing about how they have experienced an organization.

Lastly, make sure you are continuously supporting your team and holding (H) leadership accountable to do the same. Often, as managers and leaders in our organization, it's easier to partner with people who manage us, but we're in the unique role of supervising. It is essential to support your staff up the chain of command, as well. This helps us infuse diversity, equity and inclusion across all managerial relationships.

So, remember, when in doubt, stay on the PATH.

Now that we've covered some educational material, we're going to transition into some panel discussions. So we're going to take some of the concepts that Bryan and I have talked a little bit about and we're going to hear from three amazing professionals who are doing this work day-in and day-out.

Bryan W. Jackson: And thank you so much, Steven, before we do that, we had a number of you add some thought to what your organization does well as you are becoming an equity-focused organization. And we would love for Atokatha ... to share some of the responses from those in attendance [on] what their organizations are doing well.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Absolutely, Bryan. Tons of things came through. A few of them are: "Our organization's DEI initiative is in its infancy stage. One thing we're doing well is holding group sessions."

Another says, "We have dedicated a significant amount of my time to our JEDI strategy. We have decided — we have dedicated resources, time and money to access outside expertise that we need."

Another says, "We are just beginning DEI initiatives, but we have been focusing on ensuring all of our materials are in multiple languages."

And another person says, "We commit resources, both time and money."

So, plenty of responses have come through, that's just a few of them.

Bryan W. Jackson: Perfect.

Thank you so much for that, Atokatha, and what you also hear ... I am sure that all four of those comments came from organizations that [vary] in sizes ... missions ... location, so on and so forth.

 ... Wherever your organization is on your DEI journey — whether it is a [financial] commitment ... to resources, meaning books and focus groups — it doesn't matter where you start, just as long as you do start. And so, I want to thank you all for adding those thoughts to our chat. Again, we can see that there isn't a perfect playbook [for] engaging DEI within your organization.

It all depends on what feels right to you, as it goes back to what Steven said, with the H.E.A. R.T — heart work. So, thank you, again.

Steven, back to you.

Steven Krzanowski: Great, Bryan. So let's bring in our amazing DEIJ guest panelists. So, I have some bios that I'm going to read, and then we'll go ahead and get started with some prepared questions that we have for our panelists.

I'd like to first introduce you to Nicole Lopez-Riley. She is a servant leader with over 15 years of experience in the social impact sector. She has deep expertise in the areas of strategic planning, human capital management and people strategy, and program and operational management. She holds a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Maryland at College Park, with a concentration in international development. Additionally, she graduated from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida with a bachelor's degree in International Relations.

Throughout her career, she has brought her strategic and forward-thinking abilities to organizations dedicated to systems-level change. She's been committed to serving organizations that support our youths' access to quality education, [developing] strong educators, [building] communities, and [driving] for transformational change to address systematic inequities.

As a first-generation American college graduate, she is passionate about addressing the opportunity gap, dismantling systematic racism and building strong communities. Her diverse expertise includes designing human capital departments from the ground up, implementing organization-wide change initiatives, leading organizational efforts to increase diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, and merger and acquisition planning and implementation.

In her role as Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer, she leads all core operational business functions, including DEIB, to support and enable the strategic and operational performance of the organization.

Thanks so much for joining us, Nicole.

Next up, we have Erin O'Grady.

Erin is the D.C. Regional Director for the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. Managing stormwater programs and growing partnerships in the Washington, D.C. metro region. She also coordinates the Alliance's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team [for] D.C. Green Jobs workgroup and the Chesapeake Collaborative, a creative platform for diverse voices to express their vision for a healthy bay watershed.

Erin holds a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Policy from George Mason University and is a graduate of the Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute. She also holds a certificate in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace, and is on her way to completing an Inclusive and Ethical Leadership training. Erin grew up along the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay at the forefront of the water conservation issues in southeastern Virginia.

Next, I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Sonya [Gyjuan] Smith.

Dr. Sonya [Gyjuan] Smith is the Chief Diversity Officer at the American Dental Education Association, fondly referred to as ADEA, in Washington, D.C. and leads efforts to promote diversity, access, equity, belongingness and inclusion.

These efforts include the development of ADEA's first Access, Diversity and Inclusion strategic framework, the inaugural Faculty Diversity Toolkit, the inaugural Dental Education-Wide Climate Assessment and health equity resources to support historically underrepresented and marginalized patients.

She has served in many leadership roles across multiple institutions of higher learning. Prior to joining ADEA, she served as Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Services and Associate Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. Dr. Smith has published on academic freedom and free speech, diversifying health professions, legal challenges to campus, equal opportunity programs, and reducing health disparities. Dr. Smith holds a Bachelor of Science in History, a Master of Education Curriculum and Instruction and an EdS in Administration and Supervision from Middle Tennessee State University. She received her Doctorate in Higher Education Administration and a Doctorate of Juris Prudence degree from Vanderbilt University and completed a certificate in International Law at the Tulane University Institute of European Legal Studies in Paris, France. Dr. Smith will receive her Master of Global Affairs and Management from the Arizona State University Thunderbird School of Global Management at the end of the year.

On behalf of Nonprofit HR, thank you, all three of you, as you share your experiences as it relates to diversity, equity and inclusion within your organizations. So, let's go ahead and get started. Bryan, we have our first question for our panelists.

Bryan Jackson: All right, perfect. So what I'm going to do is, first, unshare my screen so that we can all see each other.

All right, so just bear with me.

Perfect.

And I [also] want to say ... again, thank you for joining us today. It's amazing hearing your [biographies], because I have a lot of work to do. But also for our panelists, or those in attendance, just to see that we have three amazing sectors here ... environmental, youth and family services, and/or health. Just to be able to see the complexities of how DEI, when done with intentionality, can impact more than just what happens on the inside, but it can also impact what happens on the outside.

And so, before we actually jump into how this is impacting our organization and the work that we're doing, I think it's important to be grounded first in who we are as leaders and how our leadership is impacted by this work. And so, our first question for our panelists, and we would love to hear all of your thoughts, is, how do your social identities, or dimensions of diversity, impact your leadership philosophy?

And whoever wants to jump first, go ahead and jump.

Nicole Lopez-Riley: I'm happy to jump in ... So, first of all, I also want to thank everyone here, and thank Nonprofit HR for the invitation to share our experiences but, most importantly, for me to learn from everyone ... And this is a continuous journey, right? So, we're constantly learning. So, thank you for the opportunity to be here.

So, in terms of social identity and how that impacts my leadership, when I think about my experiences growing up, I think the identity that most profoundly had an impact on me was growing up as a first-generation American. I grew up with immigrant parents in a working-class community and also as a brown Latina. And for me, at the core, it really created a passion to address inequities because of the inequities that I experienced, because of what I saw my parents go through, because of what I saw my community experience. So, it ... generated this passion for systems-level change, for finding ways [to address] the equity gap. And so, I've put [myself] on this trajectory to serve the community.

And then, when I think about my leadership specifically, it really centers DEI as part of my approach to leadership, right? I think about, am I providing space for all voices at the table? And as a leader, am I creating opportunities for others to share their perspective? What kind of behavior am I modeling? Do my actions match my words ... ? And so, it's really going back to this concept ... you mentioned ... [about] being self-reflective.

It has pushed me in a good way to constantly be asking, how am I showing up, right? How am I supporting my team and the organization? And then, more broadly speaking, it put a fire right in my heart to ensure that we're creating the systems, the structures, the practices, the environment at the organizational level, to really support diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. So, it is really at the core, right? It's influenced every [life experience] and continues to impact how I approach my leadership.

Bryan W. Jackson: Perfect. Thanks, Nicole.

Erin O'Grady: I really like that and I almost want to build off of the self-reflection bit that you mentioned there. Again, thank you so much, Nonprofit HR, for inviting me to be part of this panel. I'm very excited to take part in this conversation.

And, you know, for myself, as a cisgender white female, my identity is more than really meets the eye. Looking at me, you wouldn't necessarily know that I'm Hispanic or that I'm queer. And I think my social identity has helped me create safe spaces for staff with imperceptible or undisclosed dimensions of diversity.

And, really, emotional intelligence is probably the greatest tool when it comes to infusing DEIJ in my leadership work. Trying to blend emotional intelligence with almost a coaching leadership style, I think it leans on the PATH acronym that Steven discussed earlier. And one way that I've seen as key to infusing DEIJ in my leadership is creating spaces where staff can grapple with the fear of failing.

It's very common for folks, especially young professionals, to struggle with imposter syndrome or — and that means using safe spaces to discuss these fears and use emotional intelligence to help staff feel seen, supported and empowered in their work. But then, there's another side to this. When I speak for the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, we don't just want our DEIJ work to be procedural or leadership. We want it to be infused in all of the work of all of our staff members, and engaging in DEIJ work, building diverse partnerships. It can create fear for staff to [question], what if I use the wrong language? Or, what if I'm going to make a mistake? What if I'm creating more harm than good? And this fear often holds many staff members back from trying to do anything at all.

And so, the minute I realized that the fear of failure was controlling a lot of my team's engagement, I knew transparency and vulnerability, empathy [in] discussions ... are imperative to helping staff feel confident moving this work forward.

Sonya Gyjuan Smith: Thank you, Nonprofit HR, I want to build on what Nicole and Erin said.

I grew up in the rural part of the U.S. I have a southern accent and have purposely [chosen] not to eliminate my accent. It goes to who I am, it goes to being authentic. And I will tell you along the way, I've been encouraged to change my accent and I very well could. However, what my mom has always said to me, be true to who you are. And that was long before people started talking about bringing your authentic self or your whole self [to work].

She also helped me learn early that people only see your street identity. I mean, when you walk in the room, they say, you're an African American woman, you have a rural southern accent, you're only so smart, probably, and you don't see that, I knew my Puerto Rican great grandfather who raised me on one side of my family and I knew my American Indian great grandfather who knew me on the other side. So, I always think about those men, and Erin, really building on what you said, those hidden dimensions of diversity.

The other thing is, growing up in a small rural town outside of Nashville, Tennessee, there weren't a lot of people of color. So, the other thing is, I'm very grateful [for] some wonderful teachers who helped me become and achieve the things that I've been blessed to achieve ... Early on, it helped me to see that I thought differently than other people and it made me want different experiences.

What it made me sensitive to, throughout my life, has been people, oftentimes, whether it's socioeconomic around issues of power and privilege who don't have access to certain things. Education has very much been a tool for all of us in our families, I'm a [also a] first generation, ... graduate. But it helped me early on ... to realize that justice was very important for me ... Yesterday, Bryan told us a story about his strong sense of justice, probably from kindergarten moving forward, but I so empathize with what he said. I've taught health and human rights. That's my lens ... through which I approach everything throughout the world. It comes from that justice lens. I am one of those persons [who debate] what it means to be fair.

The last thing I'll say is [that] growing up in the rural South and going to law school, one of the things it taught me is to listen well. Why? Because oftentimes, my safety required that I listen well, and that I could discern the room. Yeah, a lot of code switching, right, to survive. We do it.

The other thing though is that I learned to listen well and to discern what motivates people. And I often asked, when there's conflict, OK, what's the real issue going on here? Or what's happening behind it? But it also has helped me in the DEIB space because you often are challenged or see or ... interact with people who don't necessarily hold the same values or beliefs, yet you've got to bring them along where they are very much equal partners. And so, I learned in law school that if I listen to — I'm going to use a friend, Ian — who was totally, very different from who I was, in terms of his experiences and thoughts. But I learned on that exam, if I wanted an A, I had to think like Ian too. And that has always stayed with me. So ... sometimes I'm offended by even the fact that they think that way, that it's important for me to still listen and learn from those experiences.

Steven Krzanowski: Thank you all so much for sharing a little bit about your personal journey and connecting that head to the heart.

And I think you gave some really brilliant examples in your answers here, and much of your journey also happens in organizations. So, our next question for you is, organizations, like people, enter this work at different stages of understanding and practice. Describe your organization's journey with diversity, equity and inclusion.

Sonya Gyjuan Smith: I'll jump in here and go first. I'm at the American Dental Education Association, and I've been here five years.

When I walked through the door, there was one other employee in DEIB and she'd been here 20 years. Her name was Sonya too, which was interesting — the two Sonya's. But ADEA was very compliant, very much at the compliance level. I think it's Deloitte that talks about the maturing of institutions or organizations across the diversity and inclusion space. But we were very much compliant, and we had a CEO who had also been here 22 years, and … giving credit, who had really moved the organization from a mom-and-pop shop to what it became. But in my fifth year, I guess the CEO, the new CEO, has been here three years … And with that, having … the first woman step … into that CEO role changed how we view things tremendously.

Dentistry [dental education, oral health] if you don't know [are] still … very conservative professions. Having a woman who had been a dean, who had some experiences in which she was not often treated fairly or equally — however you want to define that — has helped us leap very quickly, forward … from the compliance framework to more of the embracing and collaborating framework …

I can give examples of it. We're a small organization[; there are] about 70 of us … The first thing that she did, her first official act, [after waiting] six months, was to move me from being a Senior Vice President to the C-suite to report directly to her, to become a Chief Diversity Officer. That sends a message across the organization to your 55,000 members. That was her first act of business.

And so, I can give, like I said, other examples. I've watched us in terms of how we embrace … [and] … view talent, how we work with our affinity groups I've just watched that emerge so differently under a woman's leadership. And I'm very grateful to the first CEO, but having that different framework … has really helped us.

Bryan W. Jackson: Perfect. Thank you so much for that, Sonya. And again, we are mindful of time … so we want to hear from all of you. So what … we're going to do, is ask questions, field them to a specific person, and you can share what you are compelled to share, and that way we can go ahead and keep it going.

And so, our next question is [about] advice for organizations [that] are considering or starting their own DEI journey and advice for organizations who have already begun their DEI journey. Nicole, I would love to hear from you on any advice that you would give for those [who] are considering [DEI] as well as for organizations that have already begun.

Nicole Lopez-Riley: Absolutely. And I think some of this advice can be applied to both groups, right, if you're just starting or … considering … [start] or [are] in the process. So … like threes, so I'm going to with threes, OK?

So, the first one is, don't let perfection be the enemy of progress, and this goes back to what Erin mentioned earlier. I think sometimes we have a fear of saying the wrong thing, of not doing the right thing, of offending someone and that can be paralyzing. And we need to accept that we're going to make mistakes, we need to normalize that. And so, what I would advise organizations that are just starting this process is to say, "We're going to set expectations. Listen, this is not going to be perfect. We're not going to be perfect. You're not going to be perfect in this process, but we're committing to having a dialogue. We're committing to learning, and then holding ourselves accountable to implementing those learnings."

So, number one, don't let perfection be the enemy of progress.

Number two, I would say, is [to] start the dialogue or keep the conversation going. If you started, keep it going. And when I say, you start the dialogue, I think this is really about listening. For us, the approach that we took was [to design] a needs assessment process [and] we called it phase one. And it involved doing a series of listening tours with our staff across all levels. We have full-time and part-time staff. We currently have 1,200 staff, so [we reached] out to as many staff as possible to have these listening sessions. We also surveyed our staff and then ... worked with our staff-led workgroup, the Diversity, Inclusion and Global Engagement, or DIGE, committee group to get input.

And really, the purpose of these conversations, was to ... ask the question, are we for all? Right, because that's part of our mission: to be for all. Are we for all? If you don't think that's the case, why? If you think that's the case, why? Right? Let's have a conversation. And so, that really helped inform the next phase of us developing — which is what we're in the middle of — a strategy and a plan around equity.

And I would say the third thing is, stay on the journey, stay committed. You may get a flat tire, your AC may break down, but you stay on that road, right? You're going to encounter some bumps along the way. That's OK. Use those learnings, but stay committed. So, don't let perfection be the enemy of progress, start the dialogue, or keep it going, and stay on the journey.

Steven Krzanowski: Nicole, that is amazing advice. Thank you so much, and I took notes, as you were writing that down, I love it.

Our next question for our panelists is, who is critical to include in the initial and ongoing conversation when embarking on a DEI journey within your organization?

I'd like to open it up to any of you. Thoughts here?

Erin O'Grady: I'm happy to jump in here.

Honestly, leadership buy-in is huge. I hate saying it this way, but if you don't have leadership buy-in, it's like fighting an uphill battle. So having leadership, if you have a board as well [partnering with] a board champion is how the Alliance has really phrased it. When you have these initial conversations, getting that support underneath you immediately — [building] out both the board and staff engagement in your DEI journey as an organization — is imperative.

But, it's also very important to remember that this is a journey. It's not going to be completed in a single day from a single board meeting or just one resolution at your organization. This is a constant daily push for leadership to keep making a priority at every meeting, and for your board to keep bringing it up at every event.

And I think that this question can also play with the power-sharing that Steven mentioned earlier … I'll say for the Alliance, we don't want to assign new responsibilities for staff to say, "Oh, your workload is fine. We're going to give you this new committing to be on." But we want staff to feel confident in knowing that we think that they're bringing great conversations to the table, and no matter what level they're at, you don't need to be a COO to push this work forward. And if you're feeling very confident, or if you're feeling very passionate, about how your organization can grow, then be part of that conversation. Please. We want to hear from you. We want you to be sitting with a board member and learning from each other and feeling confident being able to speak up in that conversation. And that in itself is also where leadership has a strong responsibility to make sure that all staff, all constituents, at any level, feel confident moving this work forward in the organization.

Bryan W. Jackson: Perfect, thank you so much for that, Erin.

Our next question also connects to a number of the questions that we received from those in attendance, and it revolves around navigating pushbacks, hesitation and concerns both internally and externally.

And so, I would love to open this up to one of you and to answer, within your experiences, how have you navigated pushback, hesitation and concerns both internally and externally?

Sonya Gyjuan Smith: I'll jump in here and try to answer that question.

I'll start by saying that you really have to decide which battles are worth fighting and who your allies are very early when you're doing DEI work, both internally and externally.

Because we are a member-driven organization, we have an ADEA Board of Directors Advisory Committee on Diversity. They are very much our allies. When I first arrived, they met once a year ... I wanted to strengthen their voice ... so we started meeting quarterly. That gave them a voice that they did not have. We meet virtually twice a year ... in person at our annual conference and in September at a board meeting.

I was very fortunate ... that one of this [committee's co-chairs] was the Vice Provost for Diversity at Columbia. He's a dentist and had just received, when I started, $55 million from his president to diversify the faculty over five years. Now, that's some power, right? That is an ally I want. [In] connecting [with] him very early on ... he's a tenured faculty member [and] could say some things that I can't say, right? And so, identify both allies within your organization, externally who are powerful ... have the ear of the board ... have the ear of your CEO. It can be informal. I can tell you informally, one of the best persons that I rely on when there's pushback is our CEO's executive assistant. She is a major ear for me, when I'm getting pushback in the organization around an issue in policy, and she's very good at helping me work it out.

... It's very important to have those allies, both internally [and] externally, at all levels. I can also tell you that having those allies, particularly within the membership — formally and informally — was the key to helping get the resources I needed to build my staff. I had one person, now there [are] six of us. And so, they would go to the board and say, "We need to accomplish this. We need more DEIB staff." Now, I can say it, but [for] them saying it is totally different.

So, identify your allies early on. Identify which thing that you [can focus on] ... You only have so much energy in one day, you can't tackle everything. Decide which things are critical and who your allies are at all [internal and external] levels.

Steven Krzanowski: Thank you, Sonya. And this is building a little bit from what you shared. My next question is, how have you created buy-in around DEIJ? How are you and your organization's empowering your staff, board, constituents and members to participate in DEIJ-focused initiatives? Nicole, would you answer this one?

Nicole Lopez-Riley: Yeah, happy to jump in.

So I would say ... in our journey, we've implemented three key strategies ... to ensure that we have that buy-in and engagement. The first one is inviting people to a dialogue.

I mentioned earlier having a listening tour, having focus groups, providing surveys, just different avenues for your staff, volunteers, board members [and] in our case, members, to provide input on our current state, and what would they like to see from an equity standpoint ... moving forward. So invite people to a dialogue.

And in these conversations, you're going to get a ton of different perspectives and there's going to be some fruitful tension, right? And that's what we want in this work, we want to push ourselves. So, number one, invite all your stakeholders to a dialogue, and there's different ways of doing that, right?

... The second thing we've done is cocreate. I think that this is so critical to the buy-in process. And from our experience [and] current state, what we're doing is ... inviting our board members, our community and our staff to help cocreate the vision, right, behind equity ...

And so, as an example, we convened a DEI task force that was made up of board and staff that was empowered to come up with a set of recommendations for the strategic planning process on how we're going to make equity core to the work. It's not this separate initiative, it is part of the organizational DNA and it's how we show up and how we serve. And so, this board-and-staff-led group co-created the set of recommendations. They co-created the draft vision statement and [we're currently] engaging our community ... We just launched this [community voices campaign] past week. And the first step is a survey [that] is part of our strategic planning ... and equity processes — building equity, because it's not separate. It's the strategy, it's who we are. And so, we've been really intentional around that piece. So co-creation ... is really critical.

And ... the third piece ... a third strategy is understanding that you have to iterate. This is not ... a one-and-done ... approach. You have to constantly iterate ... Going back to those groups that you started with the initial conversations, and getting their input on where we're at in the process. Where [we are with] defining the strategy, what additional input you have and ... staying nimble in knowing that you're going to have to continuously go back and get feedback, because that further supports that buy-in.

So, invite people to a dialogue, co-create the strategy and iterate, stay nimble.

Bryan W. Jackson: Perfect. Thank you so much for that, Nicole.

Sonya Gyjuan Smith: ... Something that [Nicole] just said ... is really critical when she said that around strategic planning. That goes to the question that you asked me before, something that she just said.

One of the key things is that when you face challenges [and] get pushback, connect what you're doing to the strategic plan and objectives. The other thing is I always try to tie things back to an accreditation standard, because [there are] all these accreditation standards on diversity, equity [and] inclusion, and ... I tie it back to our mission.

So, oftentimes, [recently, as we were implementing a performance measure within our employee performance quarterly meetings and I got some pushback ... I had to go back to our mission]. And I went back to a strategic objective and that brought the chief of staff full circle.

And so, I ... think that's very important around strategic planning and knowing what those policies are because when you get pushback and I can say, "Well, you don't have to do this, but your accreditation standard says..."

Bryan W. Jackson: Thank you so much for that. This is our last question, and we'll be sending it to Erin.

And so, the last question of the day will be, what has been the most significant success and challenge [you have experienced regarding] the Alliance's DEIJ journey?

Erin O'Grady: I love ... that this question came after both Nicole's and Sonya's comments because it went back to our strategic plan.

Our greatest success was building inclusivity as a foundational pillar in our strategic plan. This helped our board approve dedicated internal funds to push DEIJ into our staff time and ... our annual budget. And that type of funding allotment for a nonprofit, no matter the size of your budget [is] a big deal.

Now, on the flip side, the challenge was keeping the conversation prevalent. And I'll speak from my field, in the environmental field, we use scientific concepts and designs to practice alleviating environmental issues. So, we need exact actions to alleviate pollution or address water quality issues ... The challenge that we see is that these are very structured practices, and it can be hard for folks with this scientific mind to understand that the concept of DEIJ work is not a silver bullet. It's not "one and done." It's not a whitepaper that I hand to you, and then, you know exactly what to check off. You have to keep addressing it. [DEIJ is about] consistency ... growth ... vulnerability and there is no single end point; this is a big 180° for many folks in our organization that we're still working through.

Bryan W. Jackson: Perfect.

Well, we cannot thank you all enough, Nicole, Sonya and Erin, for that insight into not only the journey, but the commitment, the passion. And nothing worth working for is going to be easy. But when it comes to people and letting people know that their superpowers have a place to live, thrive and be dope, it comes back to centering those people. And I want to thank you for your commitment to this work.

Also, I want to thank you for that vulnerability because no organization is perfect. But there has to be a piece of how we wake up every morning and [know] that we can go to sleep resting well, because others are able to do the same. And so, I will give you a virtual round of applause. Thank you, thank you, thank you! And if we are in person at some event, I want to give you a round of applause in person, as well.

I want to ... pass it back to Atokatha, because now we will officially open up the ... lines for Q&A for Steven and myself.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thank you so much, Bryan. And thank you so much [to] the panel for such a lively conversation today. We're going to launch right into your Q&A. And we'll take this all the way through the rest of the event.

Here's our first question.

How do you encourage employees to come forward and share their experiences, perspectives and opinions without feeling as if there will be repercussions?

Steven Krzanowski: I love this question; part of it is that you need to create the space for that.

And if you are able, as an organization, to create a space where people ... feel that they can share ... be seen ... be valued and heard in their experience, there will be a sense of community that's created. And when [you can] lean into that community, you can have challenging conversations with one another. Because you've established trust, you're able to ask more pointed or ... challenging questions of one another. And you can redefine what expectations might look like as an organization ... When you're able to do that, it goes into ... transparency ... power-sharing and ... decision making — you're able to really embed equity at the center of your work.

Bryan W. Jackson: And I would just add, too, in creating a mechanism for anonymous feedback, you have to do something with that gift. So, you have to see that feedback as a gift, but you have to do something with it. It's not that it just lives in the cloud and ... you are aware of it, but acknowledge that you have received feedback, and pointed feedback. But then have touch points where those that have said something can see the fruits of that trust, coming to fruition. We often talk about it — just throw it out there and ask for feedback. But if you do nothing with it, then it puts you right back where you started. "Well, here we go again, they ask for it but they [aren't doing anything] with it."

And so, you don't have to throw in the whole house, plus the kitchen sink. But if you ... open up a door for folks to know that they have not only been heard, but these are the intentional actions that are being placed ... folks can really feel that thing ...

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great. Here's another question.

How can someone build out a curriculum for an organization where people who are on different parts of the spectrum of their equity journey all feel included?

Steven Krzanowski: I think one of the things that you need to start out with is understanding where people are.

So I like to lean into an assessment to assess folks' understanding, comfort level ... sense of belonging, how they understand concepts surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion. All of that needs to be ... at play. And, I think that it's important to start with some grounding exercises and trainings [so] that people are working from the same definitions, right? So ... that foundational coursework that folks can start to have [where they] use the same terms. Because so often when we're communicating with one another ... we're using the same terms, but we might have very different meanings, right?

So having that foundational perspective is ... key and then moving into different tracks. I think it's perfectly fine for folks to self-select where their learning might be and what their needs are. So having tailored trainings and development opportunities that really meet the needs of the staff. But what's important there is also sharing what learning is happening. [Create] those sense of community opportunities where people can share what they've learned and apply the principles that they are learning in DEI trainings.

Bryan W. Jackson: And what I'll add to that too is that we have to extend the misnomer that DEI is only about Black or ... Asian folk or only about those who identify as LGBTQIA folk. ... We have to begin to show that they are interconnected connections that we all possess.

So if I tell you that I'm a Black male from the Midwest with two kids that are biracial and interfaith somewhere along that track, somebody can go ahead and say, "I've got a connection there." And some of my good friends are from Wapiti, Wyoming, Bismarck, North Dakota and Detroit, Michigan. That's because that connection that was established went beyond gender and color, but the fact that I've never gone ice fishing, let me just check that off the list, so I never do it again. But what it does is it opens up a door, right?

And so, what we have to do for people along the journey is show that there are connections that can be made that extend further than just what you see, because what did our parents tell us? What you see is not always what you get. I had no idea all of the unique aspects of Sonya's ... Erin's ... and Nicole's [identities]. But I do know [that] if we were able to break bread in person, that's true DEI right there.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Here's our next question.

How can we diplomatically let a board member who is the only one pushing back against change know that they can either come along with the rest of the organization or leave the board to make space for someone who is engaged in making deep and lasting change in their DEI initiatives?

Steven Krzanowski: One of the things that I think ... Sonya mentioned earlier was going back to your mission and vision and values as an organization.

And when all of that is aligned with diversity, equity and inclusion at the forefront, there's your argument. That's who you are. That's where you're aspiring to be as an organization. And when you're navigating pushback, I think it's a delicate balance, right, because so many of our board members, our community members or sometimes they're receiving our services as nonprofits, and you don't want to alienate folks in their experience. But you also want to convey, "Here's where we're going as an organization," and stand firm in who you are as an organization and what this work means to advance your mission. And that outcome piece, I think, is where you can really ... sink your heels into it ...

Bryan W. Jackson: And I'd love—

Steven Krzanowski: Oh, I think we're going to say the same thing.

I was going to say, I'd love to hear from ... Erin, Sonya and Nicole as folks [who] are in nonprofits working and doing this work. Have you had similar experiences, and what are some of your thoughts about this?

Nicole Lopez-Riley: Yeah, happy to share a ... bit about our experience and the approach. What's been critical, and I mentioned this earlier, is putting together a task force that ... includes board members, right? If you engage them in the strategy development [and] ... conversations, then they have that buy-in and ... a level of understanding. To your point, Steven, [ask:] Why is this core to our identity as an organization and ... mission ... ? So, you have those ambassadors at the board level.

And then, when we've encountered pushback from board members, we lean on those ambassadors to have conversations as a colleague on the board, to say, "Let me just understand a little bit more where you're coming from." And our goal is to invite people in, right, and have a dialogue and grow them, and also re-affirm that we're committed to this work, and that it is, again, part of our organizational DNA.

So, for us ... engaging the board in the process has been helpful, and then, not relying, but asking and sort of enrolling other board members to be ambassadors to further the conversation when we get pushback.

Sonya Gyjuan Smith: One of the things that I will add is that three times a year, we have what we call an educational session. That's about three hours with our board, and one of them is [with] all [of our committee members] ... All the members of the board and [DEI] committee are there.

And ADEA gets to decide [on] the training ... I've done implicit bias, [guiding] members to help facilitate that [with] students to create that safe space that Nicole is talking about ... When you give someone the opportunity to share their perspective, and ... use that time ... and educational trainings ... to challenge the person — not in a rude in-your-face type of way, but through scenarios ... case studies [and] vignettes — [results happen]. And I've found that very effective. I've watched board members have "aha" moments that way. [Like I said], we typically get to determine the training for three hours, so the CEO was very strategic in talking to me about where different board members were.

 ... I also want to stress what Steven said. We also provided assessments for our board members to help them see, in terms of self-reflection, where they were along that continuum.

Erin O'Grady: I love that, Sonya.

I would add that, I think, going back to Steven's note about the shared terminology, the shared language, making sure that everyone feels confident in knowing, what exactly are we talking about? Because we had the same thing. We had ... aha moments for board members who said, "Oh, I didn't understand that that's what you meant by diversity or that's what you meant by inclusive practices." A lot of times, there's fear of, will this work mean that I'm going to be booted out? And that's what creates a lot of pushback.

On the other end, I would even say [create] opportunities for boards to engage with board members from similar or like-minded organizations and learn about their efforts. Maybe there's a conference where they talk about DEI and your board, and they can learn from what other organizations or boards are doing, creating a space where they can learn from peers and I feel like, perhaps, be more receptive in that space.

Bryan W. Jackson: I thank you all for that.

And the only thing that will add to this discussion is that sometimes subtracting a piece actually gives you an addition. And you have to say to yourself, though you may have been on this board for 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, thank you for your service, and it can come from a genuine place. But when you are looking at one or a group of individuals that may be impacting the sector of people that [depend on your] work ... does one equate to 500? You have to really ask yourself this, and always connect it back to the mission. Always connect it to why you get up on a day-to-day basis and ... do the work that you do.

And you can't let someone stop your go, especially when it revolves around the people in the community [who] are benefiting from what you do and how you do it. And these are the tough decisions. That's why this DEI work is not easy. But if you can identify what piece that is and find pathways to either circumvent [the] decision [a person makes and] ... asking for that person to reconsider, or sometimes they just need to have an adjustment on their thinking and realigning what their North Star is for the betterment of the 500 versus that one [individual].

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Here's our next question.

[Do you have any] thoughts on the best way to coordinate efforts and organizational communication when multiple parties in the same organization are working in this space? Examples are a diversity officer, HR programs and services.

Steven Krzanowski: One of the things that I think can be really powerful is when you bring a group of thought leaders together and you're co-creating. And ... that's an opportunity, when you co-create, to all be on the same page. And to make sure that it's one message [that reflects] the values of the organization and the strategic direction [in which] the organization is moving ...

... Find inroads with one another and working relationships that you can establish to have that sense of trust with one another and build out those communication strategies through co-creation.

Other thoughts from folks?

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: We can move on to the next one.

[I think someone was asking for clarification]. Can you repeat the difference ... regarding voice and vote, and what the difference in that means?

Bryan W. Jackson: I mean ... we all have a voice, but not everybody's going to listen to it.

And so, if you have a voice, the piece of allowing for that vote is for those voices to be heard. So, we often hear [about] having voices at the table, but giving those voices power is how I assess how that voice then turns into a vote.

Steven Krzanowski: Yeah, Bryan ... I love the example that you use there. But it's [also] when leadership [listens] to the voices, right? So they're inviting you in to have a conversation and a say in the decision making. So, this is all about decision making ... You're providing your voice, your insight [and] your input into what a decision might look like, right? A vote is a vote, right? So, you have several options, and the staff can come together and vote on the best scenario to move forward in decision making.

... Then, the other that we talked about is view, right? ... As a leader in the organization, it's not a decision that needs to go to vote or view, and it's what you make at your level. And you're simply communicating with your employees ... staff ... and team what that outcome is, right? So, the voices, bringing people in, getting them the opportunity to share their perspective — a vote is a vote — and then view ... what that decision [is that] has already been made and some of the outcomes and ramifications of that.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great. And we have several questions in here regarding culture and the impact [of] DEI on culture. I'm just going to read one of them, it's: How do you work towards changing the culture [that] works against DEI through its systems and its policies?

Sonya Gyjuan Smith: Can I take that question?

We represent all the U.S. and Canadian dental schools, allied dental ... [and] dental hygiene [programs] so [anyone in a hospital] — staff, students, commissions residents, fellows — [comprises] about 55,000 members. And, we're talking about: How do we change the culture of dental education in two countries [where] the institutions have their own cultures and beliefs and values and sometimes ... collide? ... I'm going to go back to what Steven said about assessing where you are and assessing where people are.

One of the things that I'm very proud of is that we did a feasibility study [and] our members, our diversity committee, helped lead it. And as a result, they recommended to the CEO that we do a massive climate study across the dental education, and that's why we engaged Nonprofit HR.

I'm going to tell you, [in] getting the buy-in from all these different groups, we've done focus groups [and] built surveys. But I'm really proud of that because there's no way to change a culture without having the data and the evidence. From there, I could start to talk about ... the key findings, what are the best practices, what are the industry standards, what can I learn from other people to help these various institutions across the U.S. and Canada [to] change? Because it's massive.

And ... the other thing ... we go back to [is] it's not going to happen overnight. I mean, you're talking about a massive cultural change. And ... we're building out phases here. We're building out phases in terms of ... the impact ... [on]] employees, policy, admission. And so, culture is finicky. But you have to have the tools to help individuals assess where they are and to look at ... The next phase is to help them ... audit and evaluate what they've been doing in light of the new evidence.

So, I remind you, it's not going to happen overnight, but we've got the baseline now. In three years again, we'll put strategies in place across dental education, individually within these institutions, and then we'll assess again, and along the way, we'll share best practices. But you've got to start with the evidence because otherwise, no one's going to [listen to] you.

The board, they've committed the funds to do this, and because of that they need the evidence to be able to say, "Here are the issues, we need to put resources into them."

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thank you so much, Sonya. Thank you so much to everyone. We're close to the end of today's webinar. It's been an amazing experience. I do want to go around quickly, to give everybody an opportunity to share 30 quick seconds of takeaways for our audience. Any final thoughts from our panel?

Erin O'Grady: Yeah, I'm happy to go.

This work is not linear. And I think that's something that is tough for folks. This is cyclical. You need to be continually learning, and helping folks get to the level that you need, and a lot of it, especially going back to culture, is about establishing expectations for your organization, and getting your leadership on board. Whether that's middle management, supervisors, C-suite, we need to have expectations across the organization to keep moving this forward.

And then, check on your change. Are you continuing on the path that you want to be going on? Are you making the changes that you hope to see? That's where the Alliance came to work with Nonprofit HR ... We wanted to make sure that in the five to six years we've been doing this, it has made the change we want. [We also asked]: Are we on the [appropriate path] for our size organization and the work ... we want to be doing?

But also, just, you're working there, you are getting there. If it's a small step or a big step, you're making progress, and that's what really counts.

Nicole Lopez-Riley: I'll build off of what Erin mentioned, [I] definitely want to echo everything said. I think what I would say is stay on the path, right? To Erin's point, it's not linear, but stay on that path and stay committed. Don't let perfection be the enemy of progress. I strongly believe that.

 ... The other thing I would say is to put a plan in place. That plan can change, iterate and be adjusted. But having a plan in place holds the organization ... the board [and] the community accountable to understanding the direction in which we're headed, so put an action plan in place.

And then the other piece would be, think about how equity is part of your organizational DNA and not a separate initiative ... If we truly center our work around equity, it makes this work easier moving forward. And so, it's really thinking about: How do you center it and not have it be a separate initiative that only this group owns and leads?

Stick to the path, stay engaged. I know it's hard sometimes, but you can do it. You can do it.

Sonya Gyjuan Smith: I will end by saying: [Focus] on you. In that, it's important that you create networks.

You have to recharge. You have to rebuild. You have to take care of yourself. This is not easy work. What keeps me going is, [that] you oftentimes don't see all the progress at once; the network of wonderful individuals that I've met as a result of this webinar, but also throughout my organization and ... externally, beyond.

Build your networks. Your networks will be of value to you not only in terms of sharing best practices but also But when you need that shoulder or someone to lean on, it's very important. And also, remember to take a moment to breathe. You're not going to save the world overnight, and it's OK for you to say, I'm not going to save the world overnight.

Sometimes ... as diversity leaders and advocates, we can be very intense. So, have a sense of humor, take time to rebuild and to be resilient.

Bryan W. Jackson: Perfect, perfect. Atokatha, do we have time for our 10-second take aways?

All right, I'll just say it anyway, quickly.

We all know that feeling of not belonging, so ... create an environment where that feeling isn't permeating through everyone. We want people to feel as though they belong.

Steven Krzanowski: And wrapping it all up, the belonging piece is so important. We've heard multiple examples today about how we can create a sense of belonging in our organization, and it really is [about] connecting that head to the heart. So, thank you all so much.

And we may have been cut off.

Bryan W. Jackson: I think so.

Well, if we did, OK. If not, hey, everybody, be safe. Thank you for your time.

You can find us on our Nonprofit HR website if you have any questions. And yeah, thank you. It's been fun.

Nicole Lopez-Riley: Thank you, everyone.

Bryan W. Jackson: Thanks, Erin, Sonya and Nicole. Thanks, Steven.