

# RACIAL & HEALTH EQUITY: Make It Your Business

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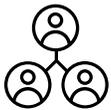
## Learn: Why Representation Matters

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Representation goes hand-in-hand with inclusivity. When an organization is inclusive, diverse voices and lived experiences are integrated and respected in discussions and decision making.

That means those diverse perspectives are represented. It also means that through inclusivity efforts, existing and future employees witness that the organization values these voices, which can lead to positive outcomes related to recruitment and retention.

Representation and its impact can take many forms. Let's look at some examples:



### Representation in Leadership

Every presidency produces defining moments – many of which are captured in photographs. Arguably one of the most memorable photos of President Barack Obama's presidency was his 2012 photo with Jacob Philadelphia, the then-five year old son of a departing member of the National Security staff. Before the photo was taken, Jacob said to President Obama, *"I want to know if my hair is just like yours."*

At President Obama's encouragement, Jacob reached out to feel the president's head. According to the New York Times, the president said, *"So, what do you think?"* To which Jacob responded, *"Yes, it does feel the same."*

Many have reflected that the photo epitomizes representation, with the young boy connecting with the president and seeing vast potential for his future. (Indeed, Jacob later told a New York Times reporter that he either wants to be president or a fighter pilot.)



### Representation in Education

Just two percent of public school teachers are Black men. But due in part to a training program in Portland, Oregon, that rate is 18 percent at a local elementary school.

Two of these teachers – Lionel Clegg and Anthony Lowery – teach first grade at Woodlawn Elementary and are passionate about the impact they and other BIPOC teachers have on students. They both recently shared their thoughts in a segment for the Today Show: *"I firmly believe that sometimes just ... having someone that looks like you gives these kids the trust to be able to come to me ... about things they may be having problems with,"* said Clegg. Lowery added that, *"For a white kid, I think it's also important because when white kid sees a Black kid as their teacher, we can let them know ... we're people of substance."*

Research supports these assertions, with one study highlighting the impact Black teachers have on graduation rates and considerations for college. And a recent article by the American Federation of Teachers echoed these sentiments: *"It's important for children to see Black males in their lives, especially on a daily basis, who are in respectable positions of authority,"* says Terrence Martin, president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, AFT vice president and a former elementary school teacher. *'I think that gives them something to strive for, even if they don't become teachers. They can see someone who 'looks like me,' and it tells them they can become a professional, a writer, an educator, someone who is respected.'"*



## Representation in Community

Another example of representation is Blue Cross' [Healthy Together Willmar initiative](#), a five-year endeavor focused on improving community health while intentionally amplifying the voices of communities who historically have not had a seat at the decision-making table.

This led to the creation of the Community Table – a group of diverse community members who had firsthand experience facing barriers to health, and who worked together to surface and test ideas to address them.

Together this group directed more than \$500,000 in funding to 35 community-led projects, along with advocating for immigrants with the Willmar City Council, influencing the resurgence of Willmar's Human Rights Commission and organizing community events.



## Representation in Business

These examples can all be tied back to the importance of representation in business, both related to the diversity and inclusion of employees, as well as who has a seat at the decision-making table in an organization.

Much work remains in this area, particularly when it comes to senior leadership. According to a recent [Harvard Business Review article](#), *“Just 8% of managers and 3.8% of CEOs are Black. In the Fortune 500 companies, there are currently only three Black chief executives, down from a high of 12 in 2002. And at the 16 Fortune 500 companies that report detailed demographic data on senior executives and board members, white men account for 85% of those roles.”*

# Reflect: Representation in Your Business

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Is increasing representation prioritized in the organizational culture?

Are diverse viewpoints and lived experiences included and heeded in decision making processes?

Does your organization measure engagement levels of BIPOC employees? If not, consider how to implement this. If this data is measured, where are there areas for improvement?

Where are there opportunities to increase representation in your organization?

What actions can you take today to create change?

# Change: Steps Toward Progress

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## Audit the current state of representation in your organization

- Who is at the decision-making table?
- What percentage of senior leaders are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC)?
- Determine what your current benchmarks are and set goals to increase representation in these areas.



## Review employee engagement to ensure the voices of BIPOC employees are being heard and listened to

- If data is already being captured, set specific goals around increasing BIPOC engagement – and develop a robust plan around how to achieve those goals.



## Ensure systems are in place to support BIPOC leaders and employees

- BIPOC employees experience explicit racism and microaggressions constantly. It is important to have mechanisms in place that enables employees to report racist or unsafe things they experience or witness. These mechanisms must ensure zero retaliation against those who are reporting the behavior.
- It is also critical to have support systems in place for employees who experience these instances.



## Establish employee resource groups if they don't currently exist – and ensure they have leadership support and resources they need

- Employee resource groups build community, develop talent, providing learning opportunities and elevate employee voices.
- As stated in the Harvard Business Review: “[Employee resource groups] are a clear pathway for organizations to offer support to Black employees and a critical resource to inform organizations of what is and is not working for them. Valuing, supporting and sustaining Black ERGs is a win-win. So, what is it that they need in return? Companies need to: 1) Make sure they have equity and resources to accomplish their goals; 2) Be transparent and build trust with their Black employees; 3) Offer mental health support; and 4) Provide formal validation from senior leadership.”

## Learn More

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- “Strategies in Addressing Power and Privilege” by Leticia Nieto and Margot F. Boyer
- “Inclusive Leadership” from LinkedIn Learning
- “Me and White Supremacy” by Layla Saad
- “Understanding Inclusion at Work – and Why it's Important”

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