



Elevating & Empowering
DIVERSE TALENT

A Playbook to Start the Work Within Omaha.





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The work begins with you.

It is never easy to say “we can do better.” It takes a certain amount of reflection and honesty to come to terms with where ourselves as individuals, our organizations and our community has lagged behind. Workforce diversity and economic inclusion in our region is one of those places.

We created this guidebook to help you be more effective at attracting and retaining diverse talent in your company. What follows are facts, action steps and reflections that you can use as a tool to shape your organization’s approach to this work. It is here to help you start conversations, strategic planning, goal setting and long-term organizational transformation.

The work begins with you, right here. Take what you will and make it your own. And if the team at the Greater Omaha Chamber can be of service in your journey, please don’t hesitate to reach out. Together, we can break down barriers that have caused underrepresentation and loss of opportunity. Your commitment and dedication will fuel the transformation we want to see in Omaha between now and future generations.

Thank you.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David G. Brown".

David G. Brown
President & CEO
Greater Omaha Chamber



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Harley".

Bianca Harley
Senior Director, Diversity and Inclusion
Greater Omaha Chamber



The right place. The right time.

Omaha's need to attract, retain & develop diverse talent.

Omaha is evolving. It is time to ignite change that creates equal access to the opportunity in our region. Together, we have started to address the disparities in attracting, retaining and developing professionals of color. The Commitment to Opportunity, Diversity and Equity (CODE), a program of the Greater Omaha Chamber, began this work in 2016 by engaging local organizations and their leadership in several corporate and community-led initiatives.

We must continue to prioritize and focus on our community and our people by building our diverse talent. These efforts will elevate Omaha and sustain its future. In the past decade, Omaha's population grew nearly 10 percent and we've added nearly 25,000 jobs across various industries. To continue thriving, we must dedicate ourselves to hiring and retaining professionals of underrepresented populations.

“ There are serious implications for Omaha's economic future if we cannot attract and retain diverse talent because Generation Z is the most diverse generation Omaha has produced. If we are going to grow our own talent, we must remain an attractive option for professionals of color. Amazing diversity, equity and inclusion policy can become a virtuous cycle of talent attraction and economic development. The opposite is also true – poor DEI policy will drive talent away from Omaha. ”

Wayne D. Brown, J.D.

Interim President & CEO, Urban League of Nebraska, Inc.

Let's Move the Needle Forward.

A look at Omaha's current diverse workforce.



53% of Omaha young professionals felt their workplace wasn't diverse.



Nebraska's net migration is positive because of rising diversity.



5% of Omaha's minority population owns a business.



86% of Omaha's top executives or business leaders are white.



Minority Workforce Participation

Omaha: 22.3%

Omaha trails both the national average, and peer city Colorado Springs in minority workforce participation.

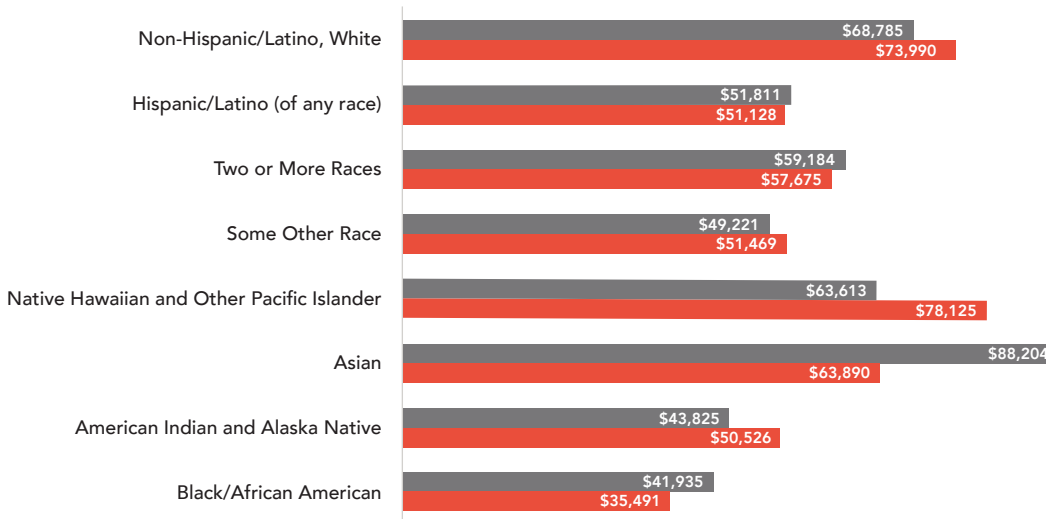
Colorado Springs: 28.2%

National Average: 37%

Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity

Increased opportunities for diverse talent can help close the median income disparity in Omaha.

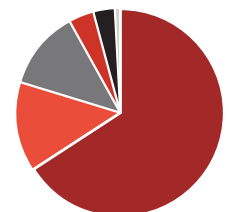
■ National Average ■ Omaha Metro



Source:
U.S. Census,
American
Community
Survey 2015-2019
5-Year Estimates,
"Table S1903:
Median Income
in the Past
12 Months
(in 2019 Inflation-
Adjusted
Dollars).

Omaha's Demographics

- White, non-Hispanic **66%**
- Hispanic or Latino **13.9%**
- Black or African American **12.3%**
- Asian **3.8%**
- Two or more races **3.4%**
- American Indian or Alaskan Native **0.6%**
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander **0.0%**



Source: U.S. Census, July 2019 population estimates

Untapped Power.

How to further diversity, equity & inclusion in your organization.

Organizations that want to create diverse, equitable and inclusive work environments must shift their cultures. Cultural changes aren't sustainable without structural changes. Deloitte's 2021 DEI Transparency Report says, "Equity is a critical lens through which we will examine our existing system, processes and policies to continue to enhance opportunities to achieve success. With this focus, we aim to improve the talent experience for our professionals." When's the last time you reviewed your organization's structure and evaluated its equity?

To achieve sustainable outcomes, our organizations and teams need to recognize institutional racism, biases and other barriers to diversity, equity and inclusion. Then, we must honestly assess and make the necessary changes within our organizational structure that will support cultural change.

Our top corporate leaders need to support DEI to create cultural shifts and address the threats of institutional racism. Your middle managers also have a role and are highly critical to your success. Harvard Business Review reports, "Effective policies enable inclusion, but middle-level managers hold the key to delivering it." They are the ones closely connected to your workforce, having a more direct impact. Middle managers need to be empowered and accountable for supporting this work. Executives and community leaders must give middle management the space, tools and time to do this.

“ Address inconsistencies in the talent experience so that Black, Hispanic/Latinx, non-binary, and LGBTQIA+ professionals feel they can be their authentic selves in the workplace at a rate consistent with the overall workforce population. Develop an understanding of fundamental anti-racism concepts, and cultivate allyship by providing anti-racism education across all levels. ”

- 2021 DEI Transparency Report



The Playbook.

Seven steps to elevating & empowering diverse talent.

STEP 1: Create & Communicate a Vision

You cannot manage what you cannot measure. Set a specific timeline with distinct goals and metrics. Start where you are today and pave a path to where you want to be tomorrow. Allow room for this vision to expand and evolve. Review this vision with your top leadership and mid-management teams two to four times a year to ensure you're carrying out your commitments and priorities. Get support from a DEI or organizational change consultant to guide your DEI strategy, if needed.

STEP 2: Focus on Inclusivity Always, in All Ways

Constructing an inclusive workplace culture starts with evaluating your current culture. Embed inclusion in your vision. Get all levels of your organization on board. Learn about your team and their experiences by creating regular feedback opportunities, such as holding townhalls or starting Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Inclusivity adds to the strength and value of your team.

Here are a few ways to systematically embed inclusion within your organization:

- Review your organizational handbook. Utilize gender neutral language throughout your manual. Audit existing policies to ensure fairness for all identities.
- Conduct ongoing pay equity audits and adjust your benefits packages as needed. Align the paid holiday schedule to reflect your commitment to a diverse workforce, including cultural holidays that may not be federally recognized. Provide remote or paid leave options to accommodate employees with children and/or caretaking responsibilities.
- Stay attuned to disability access and accommodations in the physical workplace (more than what is required by ADA). Create a practice of regularly and consistently acknowledging the indigenous land the workplace occupies.

STEP 3: Rethink Resources & Support

Employees thrive when they are supported. Create an environment for them to grow and succeed. Think of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities—provide continuous education for your teams, such as board culture training. Make safe spaces where diverse talent can connect and share their unfiltered experiences. Seek a paid DEI consultant to help discover blind spots and strategize ways to improve. Learn more ways to collaborate with the Greater Omaha Chamber and CODE toward the end of this playbook.



Tip: Get a better picture of your employee population by aggregating your engagement data by employee segments to better understand the relationship between the employee and the organization.

STEP 4: Expand Your Talent Strategy

Focus on inclusivity with your recruitment, retention and succession planning. Provide inclusive hiring and/or unconscious bias training for hiring managers prior to engaging in the hiring process. Be sure to include diverse perspectives in decision making, including among your hiring committee. Ask the committee to present a diverse slate of finalists in regards to gender and race/ethnicity.

You can also include DEI competency questions in your interview process. Find candidates who can speak to specific behaviors and competencies that support an inclusive workplace. Widen your pool by expanding where you post your jobs and asking employees to make referrals. Connect with different cultural groups, including those listed on page 16.

Don't forget about your internal talent. Engage in succession planning and leadership development with a DEI lens. Provide accessible opportunities to cross-train and upskill with a targeted focus on underrepresented talent. Create continued DEI education moments for all levels of employees including, individual contributors, managers, division leaders, executives and board members.



Tip: Review pay equity within your organization. Consider completing a salary analysis to review your organization's data and see how it relates to the Greater Omaha area

STEP 5: Make Opportunities

Challenge the notion that Omaha must look beyond Nebraska's borders to boost its young talent pool. Look to North and South Omaha as areas with untapped potential. Use this as a chance to reverse the brain drain in our state—help keep young talent here.

Look at your board. See who's missing from the conversation and identify who should have a seat at the table. If there are limited positions, make space on your board. Expand your search beyond the C-suite and formalize board succession plans to reflect current needs and priorities. Evaluate barriers and think creatively to bring in new professionals of color. Be intentional.







STEP 6: Boost Employee Engagement

Foster community. Create a culture for professionals of color to be engaged at work. Engagement requires building an environment where employees can show up as their whole selves and feel valued. Coqual's "The Power of Belonging: What is it and Why it Matters in Today's Workplace" report says, "Belonging at work means you feel seen for your unique contributions, connected to your coworkers and supported in your daily work and career development, and proud of your organization's value and purpose." Gallup reports high levels of employee engagement led to better business outcomes such as lesser turnover and absenteeism and greater productivity and profitability.



Tip: Conduct round tables across your organization to get a pulse on the various segments of your employee population. Learn how they are feeling and what is on their minds.

STEP 7: Re-imagine Workspaces

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need for us to rethink workplace norms and pivot how we work. Remote work is here to stay. We need to be creative and flexible when crafting our teams to include working from home. Researchers agree. A 2021 Harvard Business Review article states, leaders need to "think about how they can leverage recent remote-work experiences to intentionally plan for a remote/hybrid workforce in the future. Leaders must think strategically about their remote work policies and practices going forward."

“ Major companies in Omaha have been competing for talent for years. Many of the larger companies had a primary 'in-office model prior to COVID-19. With most companies now supporting a hybrid model where employees can work remotely, Omaha is not just competing locally for talent but are now up against national and global companies. Add to that, Nebraska currently has the lowest unemployment rate in the country. We are in a 'war on talent' with employees in the driver's seat. If we want to retain and recruit young Black and Brown professionals, we will need to offer them more than competitive salaries. We'll need to offer them a reason to want to stay more than a year or two. ”

Joni Wheeler

Talent & Enterprise Solutions Executive Vice President, BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska

For a Better Organization

Rev up. Don't decelerate.

Structural change does not happen overnight, in silos or by chance. Transformative change takes strategy, execution and endurance. If we do not embrace the best practices for creating diverse, inclusive and equitable workplaces, there is a lot at stake.

Threats to organizational growth and operations:

Loss in competitiveness

Omaha has increased competition for talent with other major U.S. cities. Organizations failing to incorporate DEI into their business practices will become less competitive, especially when attracting younger workers.

- Nearly 50 percent of millennial's reported that the diversity and inclusiveness of a workplace is an important factor in their job search, according to a study by the Institute for Public Relations.
- According to a Glassdoor survey, 76 percent of job seekers stated that a diverse workplace is important when looking at job offers.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which increased demands for remote work, intensifies this battle for talent.

- According to Pew Research Center, 20 percent of Americans worked at home before the COVID-19 outbreak and more than half want to continue after the pandemic.
- Several young professionals now desire flexible work environments. Nearly 50 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds said they prefer hybrid work schedules—working from home 2-3 days a week and the rest in the office in a recent McKinsey & Company survey.

Innovative solutions and better conflict resolutions come from diverse teams, which derive from an inclusive workplace.

- In a 2019 McKinsey & Company Diversity and Inclusion report, companies with more ethnic diversity on executive teams were 36 percent more likely to have above-average profitability.

Increased Operational Costs

Employee turnover comes at a high price. Work Institute's 2020 Retention Report says turnover can cost about 30 percent of an employee's annual salary. Retaining our colleagues is a greater cost-benefit.

- "The reality is that regardless of the size of your business, employee turnover is a major concern. Whether it's because of cutbacks or employee dissatisfaction, if it becomes a frequent occurrence, it can have serious implications for your business," according to a Forbes article titled "The Cost of Turnover Can Kill Your Business and Make Things Less Fun."
- 80 percent of employees reported inclusion is important when choosing an employer. About 40 percent said they would leave their current job for a more inclusive one in a 2017 Deloitte diversity study.

Decreased Employee Well-being and Engagement

Well-being and engagement go hand in hand with belonging. Decreased well-being creates lesser engagement which affects other metrics like productivity and profitability.

- "[Belonging] is the feeling of being part of something and mattering to others. We create it through inclusion, which consists of intentional acts. Employees don't need to be popular or liked by everyone, but they do need to have a sense of belonging somewhere and with someone. Employee engagement is not just a measure of work pride and productivity; it's also a valuable indicator of inclusion or exclusion," according to Dr. Britt Andreatta in the "Beyond Diversity: The Science of Inclusion and Belonging" article.
- Harvard Business School researchers say high belonging was linked to more than a 50 percent increase in job performance and decreased the turnover risk by half.
- A 2021 Accenture study reports, "Leaders can unlock up to five times more human potential by bettering people's everyday experiences" by including their employees and making them feel like they belong.

“ I was at my last job six years, where I was senior staff with a hospital IT department. Though I sought more responsibilities and opportunities to advance, I was denied and even explicitly barred from cross-training.

It's cliché, but once my son was born, everything changed. My wife and I are very concerned with the environment he's coming into, and we want to spare him at least some of the negative racial experiences we grew up with.

With a growing son and an increasingly toxic workplace, it became more and more apparent leaving was the best option for my family. ”

Eddie L.

IT Service Desk Coordinator

Reflect to Move Forward

Questions to help guide your journey

How is your company supporting community-wide efforts, so that Omaha is a great place to work and live for all?

(See page 05)

Is each team within your organization reflective of the available talent in Omaha? Are there certain teams, departments or positions where specific groups are over- or underrepresented? *(See page 05)*

Does your company culture reflect the values of diversity, equity and inclusion? What would it look like for your organization to excel in these areas? *(See page 06)*

How are supervisors trained and held accountable for building inclusive teams? *(See page 06)*

How are senior leaders and board members supporting the development of strategic goals related to diversity, equity and inclusion? *(See page 07)*

What opportunities have you created for diverse talent to engage, upskill and earn promotions? *(See page 08)*

How do you inspire spaces where employees feel safe to give feedback on their workplace experience? *(See page 11)*

What is your organization doing to mitigate threats to an inclusive workspace? *(See page 12-13)*



Amplifying Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Omaha: Summary

Empowering and elevating Greater Omaha's workforce starts with us. We have the chance to continue shaping its future, and we need to consider our attraction and retention of diverse talent seriously. We are losing talented professionals of color. We will miss out on being the city of the future if our corporate and community leaders do not work diligently to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in our workplaces.

The Greater Omaha Chamber and the CODE Employer Coalition are here to assist you in this journey toward inclusive excellence. Leaders can help solve the war for talent by fostering inclusive cultures and building environments where diverse professionals can thrive. Organizations can do this by creating a vision, focusing on inclusivity, rethinking resources and support, making opportunities and boosting employee engagement.

Implementing these strategies will add to your organization's culture by dismantling systems and structures that hinder diversity, equity and inclusion and make fertile ground for diverse talent attraction and retention in Greater Omaha.

These changes will help grow our city and organizations—achieving the outcomes we all seek.



Support When You Need It.

Collaborate with the Greater Omaha Chamber:

- Participate in workplace DEI training, by attending the CODE Education Series.
- Increase your knowledge by attending our events
- Join our Employer Coalition by signing the pledge

Employer Coalition members can:

- Engage with others doing this work in our members-only LinkedIn Group
- Take the annual CODE assessment to evaluate their DEI practices and organizational culture

Link with existing networks:

- Assistology
- Connect Black Omaha
- Empowerment Network
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Latino Center of the Midlands
- Metro Young Latino Professionals Association
- Midlands African Chamber
- Nebraska Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) + Greek Collaborative
- Outlook Nebraska Inc.
- OutNebraska
- Urban League of Nebraska Young Professionals
- Young Nonprofit Professionals Network of Greater Omaha

Special Thanks

Sponsor:



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Our Glossary

Language is evolutionary. It changes, grows and adapts. While cultures might agree on meanings of words, context influences language interpretation; and interpretation is impacted by lived experience.

This glossary is neither exhaustive nor static. It is fluid. It is changing. It is offered as a starting point for understanding.

There are 1,000s of relevant words in the context of diversity, equity and inclusion.

All of these words are important. The words included below are a respectful nod to increasing thoughtful conversation around topics discussed during the 2021 Conference on Opportunity, Diversity and Equity.

Accessibility - "The extent to which a space is readily approachable and usable by people with disabilities. A space can be described as a physical or literal space, such as a facility, website, conference room, office, or bathroom, or a figurative space, such as a conversation or activity."

Source: CSSP (2019). "Key Equity Terms and Concepts: A Glossary for Shared Understanding." Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Ally - "A person who is not a member of a marginalized or disadvantaged group but who expresses or gives support to that group."

Source: Harvard Human Resources.

BIPOC - "BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Pronounced 'bye-pock,' this is a term specific to the United States, intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color." **Source:** YWCA.

Discrimination - "The unequal allocation of goods, resources and services, and the limitation of access to full participation in society based on individual membership in a particular social group; reinforced by law, policy and cultural norms that allow for differential treatment on the basis of identity."

Source: National Conference for Community and Justice, Resources, Social Justice Definitions.

Diversity - "The wide range of national, ethnic, racial and other backgrounds of U.S. residents and immigrants as social groupings, co-existing in American culture. The term is often used to include aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class and much more."

Source: Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. A Community Builder's Tool Kit.

Equity - "The effort to provide different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. Working to achieve equity acknowledges unequal starting places and the need to correct the imbalance."

Source: CSSP (2019). "Key Equity Terms and Concepts: A Glossary for Shared Understanding." Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Gender Identity - "One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth."

Source: Human Rights Campaign.

Implicit bias/unconscious bias - "Attitudes that unconsciously affect our decisions and actions. People often think of bias as intentional, i.e. someone wanted to say something racist. However, brain science has shown that people are often unaware of their bias, and the concept of implicit bias helps describe a lot of contemporary racist acts that may not be overt or intentional. Implicit bias is just as harmful, so it is important to talk about race explicitly and to take steps to address it. Institutions are composed of individuals whose biases are replicated, and then produce systemic inequities. It is possible to interrupt implicit bias by adding steps to decision-making processes that thoughtfully consider and address racial impacts."

Source: *Race Forward*. (2015). "Race Reporting Guide." New York: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation.

Inclusion - "Being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and quantitative representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation, with a true sense of belonging and full access to opportunities"

Source: *Race Forward*. (2015). "Race Reporting Guide." New York: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation.

Oppression - "The systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups."

Source: Adams, Maureen, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, Eds. "Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice."

Prejudice - "A pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics."

Source: Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. "A Community Builder's Tool Kit," Appendix I (2000).

Race - "A dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that (1) sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics; (2) associates differential value, power and privilege with these characteristics and establishes a social status ranking among the different groups; and (3) emerges (a) when groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic or cultural) to each other's world view or way of life; and/or (b) to justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current or future) of, and prejudice toward, other groups."

Source: Markus, H. R. (2008). "Pride, Prejudice, and Ambivalence: Toward a Unified Theory of Race and Ethnicity." *American Psychologist*, 63(8), pp. 651-70.

Sexual Orientation - "Refers to an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person."

Source: American Psychological Association. (2011). "Answers to Your Questions About Transgender People, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression."

Structural Racism - "Refers to the system of social structures that produces cumulative, durable, race-based inequality. It is also a method of analysis that is used to examine how historical legacies, individuals, structures and institutions work interactively to distribute material and symbolic advantages and disadvantages along racial lines."

Source: World Trust Organization



OmahaChamber.org