

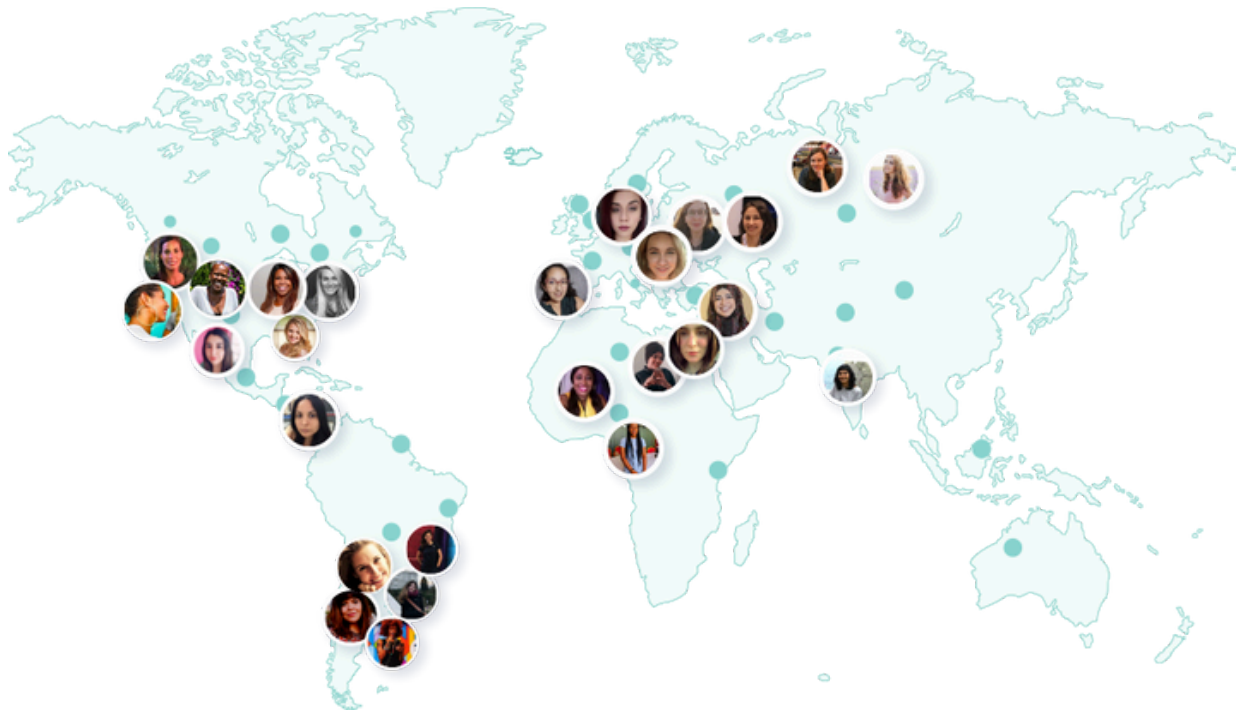


POWER^{TO}FLY

Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace

Introduction

PowerToFly's mission is to fast-track economic equity by upskilling and connecting underrepresented talent to roles in highly visible sectors.





Contents

- Neurodiversity Explained
- Helpful Definitions
- Types of Neurodiversity
- Accommodating Neurodiversity
- Reflection
- Notes

Neurodiversity Explained

Only **4% of companies** that say they value diversity consider disabilities. Even fewer include learning and thinking differences.

While neurodiversity is a concept that is gaining more awareness, many employers have still not fully grasped the importance (and benefits) of understanding neurodiversity and how to effectively incorporate and retain neurodivergent individuals in their organizations.

This document is a follow-up guide to a conversation PowerToFly held with Managers, HR Professional, and Organization Leaders about **Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace**, and its purpose is to continue the conversation and give actionable steps toward inclusion. We will be focusing on ways to create an inclusive hiring process—from application to interviews—and how to support and empower neurodivergent employees at work.

“Neurodiverse people are an untapped resource,. Outdated and incorrect perceptions of neurocognitive disorders end to focus on the ‘disability’ rather than ‘ability’, and too often we fail to recognize the strengths and talents of these unique and specialized groups, leading to misconceptions about caabilities and employability.”

—Adam O’Loughlin, Head of Policy, National Police Autism Association (NPAA)

In the next section, you'll find some helpful definitions related to neurodiversity. You'll also find details about different neurocognitive conditions, and the strengths they present, as well as the struggles that individuals with each condition may face in the workplace.



Helpful Definitions

Neurodiversity: the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population. Neurodiversity is a word that embraces all neurological uniqueness, all rhythms of neurodevelopment, and all the forms by which humans can express themselves and contribute to their world.

Neurodivergent: an individual whose neurological development and state are atypical; differing in mental or neurological function from what is considered typical or normal

Neurotypical: not displaying or characterized by autistic or other neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behavior. The term originated in the autistic community, as a way to refer to non-autistic people, and is used to describe a person whose neurological development and state are typical, conforming to what most people would perceive as normal.

*All definitions were retrieved from <https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/awareness/neurodiversity/>

“Neurodiversity is an essential form of human diversity. The idea that there is one ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ type of brain or mind or one “right” style of neurocognitive functioning, is no more valid than the idea that there is one ‘normal’ or ‘right’ gender, race or culture.”

— Nick Walker PhD (autistic author and educator)



Types of Neurodiversity

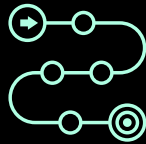
Autism Spectrum

Autism spectrum: Autism a neurological developmental disorder, characterized by repetitive patterns of behavior and difficulties with social communication. Struggling to deal with change, mandatory actions or other points of view can be elements of this learning difference. 'High Functioning Autism' is an expression used to describe cases where the behavioral and communicative elements are present, but do not impact on intelligence.

STRENGTHS



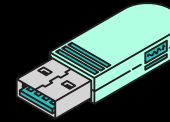
People on the autistic spectrum often have great **attention to detail** and focus. This means they are able to search through a lot of information for specific content!



Efficiency is another common strength. They are usually very good at following rules, sequences and orders, meaning with the right structure can be **super efficient**.



People on the autistic spectrum are **logical thinkers**, as they can struggle to consider emotional factors. This brings an innovative and objective approach to **problem solving**.



People with Autism also build encyclopedic knowledge on topics of interest, **retaining** lots of **information**. Visual memory is often also strong in a similar way.

Potential challenges at work: Autistic people may find elements of social interaction challenging, namely finding it hard to read people and think literally– this can be challenging when colleagues use jargon, or metaphors. Some Autistic people may find conceptualizing abstract ideas difficult, and they may struggle with adapting to changes in structure and routine. Over-stimulation in a busy, noisy workplace can also be a factor that prevents people from performing at their best at work.





Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD): ADHD can feature inattentiveness, impulsivity and hyperactivity, is another form of neurodivergence. In some cases, it may be referred to as ADD, as people with ADD have all the traits of ADHD with the exception of hyperactivity. There are different subtypes of ADHD (inattentive, hyperactive, and combined type).

STRENGTHS



When interested, people with this condition can be **hyperfocused** on and **committed** to specific projects and tasks, making them super efficient!



The imaginative and **creative** minds of those with this allows for original ideas and novel solutions to problems, time after time!



Despite periods of low energy, people with this neurodivergence also have bursts of speed, **enthusiasm** and **determination**!



The fearless and sometimes irrational approach that those with ADHD can often exhibit leads to bold, **innovative** ideas!

Potential challenges at work: ADHDers in the workplace can find themselves feeling restless, distracted and easily bored in a role or with work tasks that are not sufficiently stimulating. Many ADHDers also cannot screen out sensory input, meaning they can be more easily distracted in the workplace than neurotypicals. They may also experience further challenges relating to attention, such as maintaining focus during long meetings, or switching focus once in a state of 'flow' on a task.

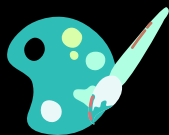
Dyslexia

Dyslexia: Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. It can also include challenges with information processing, short-term memory, and timekeeping. Other characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.

STRENGTHS



Dyslexics are often very **creative**. This is because they are often trying to find other ways to solve problems, learn things differently, or makes things easier, giving them the capability to think outside the box.



Strengths in **spatial awareness** and pattern recognition means that dyslexics tend to be able to **design** graphics and structures in unique ways. This makes them groundbreaking **innovators**.



A common misconception is that dyslexic people are poor communicators, but this is actually one of their strengths! Explain how to live with dyslexia requires strong **communication skills**.



Another common strength is being able to consider the **bigger picture**. Dyslexics are good entrepreneurs and managers, as they can look past the detail and focus on what really matters.

Potential challenges at work: As dyslexia is often particularly subtle and 'hidden', dyslexic people may be particularly at risk of unempathetic, dismissive or even hostile opinions from co-workers or managers, who may see them as ineffective or even lazy. A dyslexic employee who discloses their dyslexia under such pressure – termed 'reactive' disclosure – may risk co-workers seeing this as an 'excuse' for performance issues. Dyslexia and neurodiversity awareness training – and a culture that encourages 'proactive' disclosure – should help to avoid this.





Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia: Developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD), also known as dyspraxia, is a learning difficulty affecting physical co-ordination, movement, balance and organization abilities. Motor difficulties include poor hand to eye coordination and spatial awareness, which can make it difficult for people with dyspraxia to carry out everyday functions.

STRENGTHS



Dyspraxics often learn to develop soft skills such as **active listening, empathy**, and when to delegate tasks to others. Their desire for people to understand what they deal with ensures that they communicate clearly too. All these result in dyspraxics making **good leaders**.



Dyspraxics tend to have an innate ability to understand and respect what others are thinking or feeling. Their experience in struggling with things like coordination can mean they are **empathetic** when they see others in a tough situation.



The learning difference does not affect a person's IQ, but they may often have to navigate an unorganized mind, meaning they are usually very intelligent people. Getting through these barriers results in creating **strategies** to overcome problems in a structured way.



Dyspraxic people are great at coming up with different approaches to situations. Throughout school, dyspraxics find **innovative** ways to help themselves learn better, and this translates into working life, with dyspraxics being able to see alternative routes.

Potential challenges at work: Because of motor co-ordination challenges, dyspraxic people may experience difficulty in the workplace related to movement – this could include difficulties operating machinery. This neurodivergence often exhibits similar characteristics with other conditions, particularly Autism Spectrum and ADHD, and many present significant sensory sensitivity; this could cause discomfort in a work environment with significant noise or bright lights, or awkwardness in social interactions with co-workers due to eye contact feeling overwhelming.

Other Types of Neurodiversity:

Dyscalculia: Developmental Dyscalculia (DD) is a specific learning disorder that is characterized by impairments in learning basic arithmetic facts, processing numbers and performing accurate and fluent calculations.

Dysgraphia: Dysgraphia is a specific learning disability that affects written expression. Dysgraphia can appear as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting and trouble putting thoughts on paper. Dysgraphia can be a language based, and/or non-language based disorder.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD): Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a common mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors.

TIC disorders: Tics are sudden twitches, movements, or sounds that people do repeatedly. People who have tics cannot stop their body from doing these things.

The most common TIC disorder, Tourette Syndrome, is an inherited, neurological condition, the key features of which are tics, involuntary and uncontrollable sounds and movements. This is a complex condition and a large amount of people with the condition may also experience other disorders or conditions, such as anxiety.

*Definitions were retrieved from <https://exceptionalindividuals.com/neurodiversity/>



Accommodating Neurodiversity

Why Accommodation Matters

The full benefits of neurodiversity inclusion are still being explored and understood, but it's becoming increasingly clear that it can have benefits both in and out of the office. One clear advantage is in attracting new talent— talent that has been overlooked.

People with neurocognitive disabilities have talents, perspectives, and skills that can be distinctly beneficial in many work environments. More and more employers are beginning to understand these benefits and develop hiring initiatives that focus on recruiting neurodiverse workers. While these efforts are more common in some organizations, they have proven beneficial for businesses of all sizes in a variety of industries. Hiring neurodiverse employees can provide companies with a competitive edge that brings measurable benefits, both financially and in terms of workplace culture.

All too often, people with neurocognitive disabilities experience barriers to employment before they can even begin a job. The various aspects of the **recruitment process**, from job descriptions to interviewing, can pose concerns along the way that can deter neurodiverse candidates from pursuing a position.

While neurodivergent people may face their own, specific challenges in the workplace environment, or with particular tasks, they can bring unique and valuable strengths to their work.

Thank you to **EARN** for the following guidelines on accommodating neurodivergence in the hiring process.





Job Descriptions

When considering hiring neurodiverse people, employers should first ensure job descriptions use inclusive language, making it clear that the organization welcomes neurodiversity.

- **Use inclusive language.** When considering hiring neurodiverse people, employers should first ensure job descriptions use inclusive language, making it clear that the organization welcomes neurodiversity.
- **Focus on job requirements.** Aim to make distinctions between what is required and what is preferred or nice-to-have. Many organizations currently use a “more is better” approach to developing their job descriptions. In an effort to easily eliminate unqualified job candidates, they often provide detailed job descriptions with “requirements” that could inadvertently deter qualified neurodiverse candidates from applying.
- **Avoid overgeneralizing.** Some companies’ job descriptions include very general skill requirements that can be applied in multiple settings, such as “strong communication skills” or “ability to work in a team environment.” Descriptions like these can make some neurodiverse individuals, like those with dyslexia or autism, apprehensive about applying. If something is not an essential function to accomplish the job, employers should make this clear or not include it.
- **Double-check formatting.** Employers should also consider making job requirements easier to understand for those with neurocognitive disabilities. For example, this could include offering alternative formats, such as video clips to accompany text-based job descriptions.

Interviewing

Conventional interviewing methods are often not the most effective recruitment method for neurodiverse hiring.

- **Know what to expect.** Conventional interviewing methods are often not the most effective recruitment method for neurodiverse hiring. This generally has to do with candidates' varying communication styles. At a minimum, interviewers should be trained on what to expect and **how to conduct interviews** with neurodiverse candidates, including what to ask and how verbal and non-verbal responses should be interpreted. Vague or open-ended questions such as, "What can you bring to the table?" can sometimes be more confusing than asking something in a more direct manner, such as, "Describe a time when you added value to a project you worked on."
- **Create a comfortable environment.** Interviewers should also consider the environments in which the selection process occurs. Noisy, distracting environments can be uncomfortable for neurodiverse candidates with sensory needs. In fact, some companies invite candidates to visit their offices prior to beginning interviews or selection processes to help candidates familiarize themselves with the office setting.
- **Don't fish for answers.** When considering interviewing procedures, it is important to note that it is generally not permissible to ask an applicant if he or she has a disability, including a neurocognitive disability. Rather, it is up to the person to decide whether to disclose, for instance, in order to request a reasonable accommodation. Even then, the individual does not need to specify a diagnosis or disability. It is permissible to invite applicants to self-identify as individuals with disabilities when the question is being asked for affirmative action purposes, but there are restrictions on who has access to that information.





Evaluation

Neurodiverse employees, just like all employees, desire to build skills and advance in their careers. Therefore, performance measures should be thoughtfully planned out to foster their growth.

- **Set attainable goals collaboratively.** Most supervisors will have a general idea of their employees' strengths and limitations and should consider these when formulating an evaluation plan. Goals should be formulated collaboratively with employees, not only to determine their work-based performance goals, but also to consider any soft-skills focuses or other non-duty focused goals.
- **Adjust existing evaluation methods.** Many neurodiverse hiring programs have employees undergo the same performance evaluations as neurotypical employees, but also ensure that managers work within parameters that meet or address their neurodiverse employees' additional needs. Ultimately, neurodiverse employees should still be evaluated on performance success; however, the manner in which this is done can vary.
- **Ask for feedback.** In addition to considering the intervals and overall structure of performance evaluations, it is also helpful to consider inclusive feedback processes for conducting evaluations. For many neurodiverse employees, this means providing very clear, constructive feedback. Managers should generally refrain from alluding to or implying concerns. Instead, they should tactfully, yet directly, indicate areas for improvement, ask questions to ensure understanding and provide clear next steps. They should use these same approaches when providing positive feedback as well.

Workplace Accommodations

Providing appropriate workplace accommodations generally makes a significant difference in ensuring positive, productive experiences for neurodiverse employees.

- **Talk about needs.** The most important aspect of making any accommodation is conferring with individual employees about their specific needs. By the time many neurodiverse employees reach working age, they often have ideas of what would help them be most productive in a work environment and it's best to work collaboratively to develop solutions for potential issues. Aim to provide clear job expectations, then work together to determine what accommodations should be implemented to help the employee meet these expectations.
- **Consider work schedules.** Clarifying priorities and developing routines is often helpful for employees with neurocognitive disabilities. Well-structured work environments can include assisting with organizing priorities into daily, weekly and monthly tasks; breaking tasks into smaller steps; and giving clear guidelines and times regarding breaks and lunches.
- Other examples of common workplace accommodations for neurodiverse employees include:
 - Written or recorded instructions to ensure they can be referenced later
 - Fragrance-free environments for sensory sensitivity
 - Flexible work days/hours to maximize peak performance
 - Backup plans to help eliminate the stress of unscheduled needs/changes
 - Preparing employees in advance for drastic schedule changes, such as office retreats or training days



Resources

Why Accommodation Matters

The full benefits of neurodiversity inclusion are still being explored and understood, but it's becoming increasingly clear that it can have benefits both in and out of the office. One clear advantage is in attracting new talent— talent that has been overlooked.

People with neurocognitive disabilities have talents, perspectives, and skills that can be distinctly beneficial in many work environments. More and more employers are beginning to understand these benefits and develop hiring initiatives that focus on recruiting neurodiverse workers. While these efforts are more common in some organizations, they have proven beneficial for businesses of all sizes in a variety of industries. Hiring neurodiverse employees can provide companies with a competitive edge that brings measurable benefits, both financially and in terms of workplace culture.

All too often, people with neurocognitive disabilities experience barriers to employment before they can even begin a job. The various aspects of the **recruitment process**, from job descriptions to interviewing, can pose concerns along the way that can deter neurodiverse candidates from pursuing a position.

While neurodivergent people may face their own, specific challenges in the workplace environment, or with particular tasks, they can bring unique and valuable strengths to their work.

Thank you to **EARN** for the following guidelines on accommodating neurodivergence in the hiring process.



Recommended Resources

For further learning and exploration, check out:



» Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace Webinar

On August 31, 2021, we welcomed HR, Managers, and organization leaders to join us to learn and discuss ways to hire, retain, and support neurodiverse talent. Specifically, we covered:

- An introduction to neurodiversity in the workplace
- Ways managers can recruit and empower neurodiverse talent
- What you can start doing today to make your organization more inclusive



» Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace Slideshow Presentation

This slideshow was created by webinar panelist Sydney Elaine Butler (neurodivergent HR Professional, Accessibility Activist, and Speaker). It covers recruitment best practices, ways to empower neurodiverse talent, practical steps towards creating an inclusive workplace, and further resources.

» Employee Biodex

What One Neurodiverse Team Can Teach Everyone About Workplace Inclusion.

75% of Ultronaut's employees are on the autism spectrum and they created a resource called Biodex to get to know each other better.

In the Biodex, employees describe how they work best. Everyone at the company has a Biodex linked to his or her Slack profile, and completing a Biodex—along with reviewing everyone else's—is a foundational piece of company onboarding.



» Neurodiversity Inclusion: Checklist for Organizational Success

This checklist summarizes some of the lessons learned from successful neurodiversity hiring programs. Employers can use these practices to design and implement a successful and scalable program to recruit, hire, retain, advance and provide long-term support for neurodivergent employees.

What Is your Neurodivergence?

Curious about your own neurodivergence? This resource, shared by Khushboo Chabria, helps you identify ways you may be different in distinct neurological dimensions.

Neurodiversity at Work Guide

The guide aims to raise awareness among employers of neurodiversity in the workplace and to inspire more employers to take action to create more inclusive workplaces where neurodivergent individuals can thrive.

Is your Website Inclusive for Neurodiverse Individuals?

Making your design accessible for neurodiverse users makes it more accessible for everyone. If you're not yet familiar with this term, here's an introduction to the concept and a run-through of how to apply key principles to your **web design**.

»» HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Definitions retrieved from <https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/awareness/neurodiversity/>

»» TYPES OF NEURODIVERSITY

Definitions partially retrieved from <https://exceptionalindividuals.com/neurodiversity/>

Potential strengths retrieved from <https://exceptionalindividuals.com/neurodiversity/>

Potential challenges retrieved from https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/neurodiversity-at-work_2018_tcm18-37852.pdf

»» ACCOMMODATING NEURODIVERSITY

Inclusive hiring guidelines retrieved from <https://askearn.org/topics/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace/>

Reflection Questions

How is your organization handling neurodiversity?

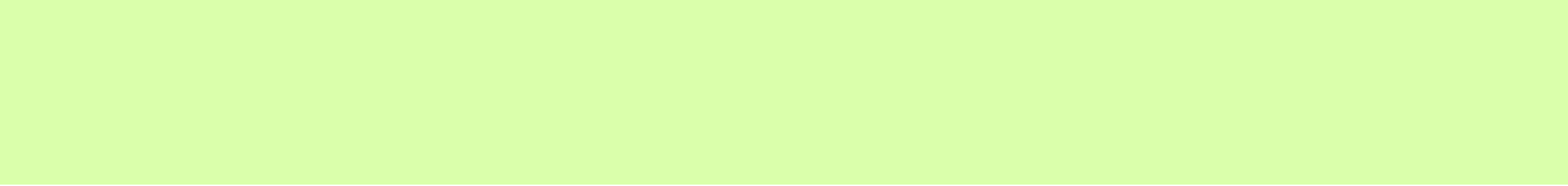
[illegible]

What did you learn from this handbook that has changed your perception about neurodiversity?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines. The first line is a solid black line. The remaining 19 lines are dashed black lines, providing a guide for letter height and placement.



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines. The first line is a solid black line. The remaining 19 lines are dashed black lines, providing a guide for letter height and placement.

POWER^{TO}FLY



[Find DEIB employer solutions](#)



[Access more guides, reports, and white papers](#)



[Meet our team of DEIB strategists and educators](#)



[Connect with us on LinkedIn](#)

PowerToFly was founded by Milena Berry and Katharine Zaleski in 2014 to fast-track economic equity by upskilling and connecting underrepresented talent to roles in highly visible sectors. As an end-to-end diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) recruiting and retention platform, PowerToFly is focused on empowering underrepresented talent across all races, ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, abilities, veteran statuses, and gender identities. Read more about our [origin story](#) and [see which companies](#) are partnering with us to reach their DEIB goals.