

# The 2024 DEI Outlook

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Runner standing on 2023 start point and next point is 2024 for preparation new year change and start ... [+] GETTY

Social change often comes in bursts. Two steps forward, one step back, as the old adage goes.

DEI is social change—change that, sadly, takes time. For those growing impatient with the increasing polarization and political misrepresentation of DEI, 2024 will be more of the same. The U.S. presidential election is likely to further polarize and politicize DEI much as it did in 2020.

Dr. Martin Luther King famously said, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

I remain cautiously optimistic about the future of DEI. It will happen. It needs to happen. Yet, change takes time.

## A Look Back

Remember the summer of 2020? For DEI practitioners, it was like whiplash. Diversity work had plummeted during the pandemic but swiftly resurfaced following the murder of George Floyd. Statements of solidarity and financial donations soared. Yet it was a moment, not a movement.

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As we end 2023, DEI is at an inflection point. There is a mixed bag of evidence showing continued slow support of DEI:

- [Job postings](#) for DEI are down.
- Most employees [perceive DEI](#) as positive, yet there is a significant political divide.
- [DEI investment](#) is steady and projected to double by 2026.
- Investors and [legislation](#) are continuing to pressure organizations to prioritize DEI.
- [Younger employees](#) see DEI as non-negotiable.

There are some silver linings for 2024. Those who remain committed are deeply committed. Those that were performative have abandoned DEI efforts. It has never been clearer where organizations stand. For those that want to capitalize on this competitive

advantage, 2024 is the right time. By 2030, our U.S. workforce will be majority non-white, and labor shortages will continue to magnify the need to engage women, LGBTQ+ and those with disabilities.

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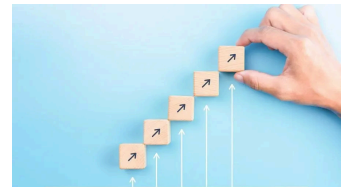
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## **10 Ideas to Consider**

1. **Start with the why:** I was working with a client this year whose DEI council was struggling to gain engagement. Every time they met it felt like the same conversation and nothing was really changing. We brainstormed together and determined that the organization was lacking a deeper purpose around DEI. In fact, the council had never shared their own personal whys for DEI. They had been meeting for years and missed the opportunity to personalize the experience. Humans make decisions based on emotion, yet facts are often used to justify decisions. Let the emotional “why” flow into your DEI work. Even better, crystallize a why statement as an organization and share it internally and externally to show genuine support. If you don't have a strong why, DEI work will inauthentically flow with the news cycle.
2. **Get senior leadership all in:** Employees are wise at picking up what work is actually important at an organization. You can't say DEI is important and cancel DEI programs. Real action is more important than rhetoric. This means that even having one or two DEI naysayers on your senior leadership team is problematic. If it's okay for them to refuse to support DEI, that models that it is okay for everyone to not support DEI. Make DEI commitment a non-negotiable.
3. **Change the culture first (not individuals):** I learned this lesson the hard way. DEI is cultural change. That change necessitates a top-down and bottom-up approach. By

only focusing on optional training for individuals, you likely appeal to the people who already get DEI. The culture needs to be primed to care about inclusion from the top and the bottom. Ideally, DEI lives in the values, mission and vision of the organization.

4. Make DEI a row (embed), not a column (isolate): I am borrowing this phrase from [Modupe Akinola](#), whom I heard speak last month at the Thinkers 50 conference. She made a fantastic point that having diversity narrowly siloed in an organization limits its power. Embedding DEI across the organization facilitates more allies and avoids the common pitfall where DEI leaders are 100% responsible for DEI on their own. Everyone is responsible for DEI, not just one person or team.
5. Notice power dynamics: Modupe also shared, “DEI is about noticing.” Notice who is represented in leadership, at meetings and succession-planning discussions. Notice who speaks more, who interrupts and who makes decisions. Chances are it's mostly the dominant group (white, cisgender, non-disabled straight men). Intentionally invite those who are often underestimated to speak, be heard and be promoted.
6. Engage the murky middle: Middle managers are starving for support and development. They feel stuck in the middle, caught between short-term results to please leadership and purposeful work and belonging that their teams crave. Give them content to help them develop coaching, feedback, delegation, time-management and trust-building human skills. For those who manage front-line workers (who are often more diverse in representation), there is an opportunity to help them avoid costly turnover through inclusive leadership training.
7. Address equity through sponsorship: Mentorship programs are great, yet sponsorship is significantly more impactful. As [Verna Myers](#), former CDO of Netflix, says, “mentors talk to you, sponsors talk about you.” Sponsors are in rooms where decisions about growth opportunities, pay and promotion decisions are made. Educate sponsors on the importance of nurturing relationships with those different from themselves, and give them tools to be successful. One client we work with has an annual application process to be in their Men As Allies program, which matches women to the men based on the skills the women hope to learn. They take it a step further and have the men build an allyship plan, learn how to sponsor and practice

coaching skills. Over the past four years, the program has helped improve retention and increased representation in leadership of women.

8. **Right-size the content:** This is perhaps my favorite lesson learned of 2023. A consistent and steady drip of DEI content creates more sustainable impact. The big one-and-done events are great, yet more often than not, people leave not knowing how to take real action. Create a calendar of content once or twice a month to start showcasing cultural celebrations, inclusion tips, case studies, new reports and more. DEI content can be enjoyed through a wide range of videos, podcasts, books and more. You don't have to recreate the wheel; there is a lot of excellent content already available vetted here for you.
9. **Measure key performance indicators:** We measure what matters at work. I have seen some DEI spreadsheets that make my head hurt. Start with a dashboard containing data that is already available (e.g., HRIS representation numbers, employee engagement inclusion perceptions, turnover rates and exit-interview data). Hold leaders accountable for their KPIs through performance management with an expectation to get better rather than create quotas. Report at least quarterly to increase accountability and create positive peer pressure.
10. **Craft an annual DEI report:** Google and other large global firms have resources to build comprehensive data-driven reports. If you are smaller or just starting out, start small. DEI is progress over perfection. Use the data you have available and share the activities you are working on. Even a one-page simple Word or PowerPoint document is better than nothing. I have a client that creates a 10-page report each year, and it has been a powerful recruiting tool for the organization, especially for Gen-Z (which has an unwavering commitment to DEI).

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