



DEI Panelist Discussion

Host/Moderator:

Rudy Flores, IOM, President and CEO, Lincoln Square Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce

Panelists:

Dr. Nika White, IOM, CDE, President and CEO, Nika White Consulting

Dr. Markey Pierre, MBA, Vice Chancellor of External Affairs and Chief of Staff, LSU Health Shreveport

Crystal Allen Dallas, IOM, MSHA, Founder and Chief Engagement Officer, Excel Business Concepts

Explain what Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion means to you.

Dr. Nika White: "I'm glad we're launching with this particular question because I think it's important to level set around how collectively we are showing up to the conversation, defining these topics. For me, diversity is a point of respect in which things differ, right? I think that as a society, we need to become much more sophisticated in how in which we talk about and define diversity. It's not just about the optics of age, race, and gender. And although those are very important, diversity demographics.

"There are so many others that we have to make sure we're bringing to the conversation. I know that's going to probably come out into our topic of discussion today. The reality is that we don't have to do anything to create diversity. It's already here and happening. And that brings me to how in which I define inclusion, which is vastly different from diversity. We have to do a lot to create inclusion. It doesn't just always happen organically. And this is where we have to really be meaningful and practice intentionality.

"I love that word. It's one of my favorite words in the vocabulary, any variation thereof, intentional, intentionality. And it has a certain look about it. It's very calculated, calibrated. It requires foresight. It requires action. It requires being strategic and a belief in the process that if I am intentional, there's going to be a reward on the other end. And so, when I think about inclusion, it's all about harnessing the differences, leveraging those differences, because we know that difference can make us strong.

"And I think that's really important to amplify. And then when I think of equity, I know that many people will use, you know, equality and equity interchangeably, but they have a vast difference. And it's a distinction that I think is really important to this broad conversation. Equality is giving everyone the same thing with the assumption that giving everyone the same thing is going to yield success to be in reach for all. But with an equity lens, we know that people have different starting places.

"They have different needs. And when we are operating with the equity lens, it means that we are giving people what they need in order to be successful. And that can look vastly different from one person to the next. And



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although I know that belonging is not a part of this question, I do not like to talk about DEI without bringing belonging in because when you put them all together, diversity, equity, and inclusion, that's what you get, belonging. And here's one simple point that I'll say about belonging before I'll toss it over to one of our other panelists today.

"It is hard for any person, regardless of their background, their demographics, any person, to show up at their best in any environment if they are always questioning whether or not they belong. Do I belong here? Am I seen? Am I valued? Am I heard? And so I can't forget to also talk about belonging in the context of DEI.

Dr. Markey Pierre: "And listen, I totally agree with everything Dr. Nika just said. I think that it's always important that we define those words because they're not all the same and they mean something different. And so when I look at DEI, to me, it's creating a space that allows visibility to the invisible. It's removing real barriers that have limited our professional growth and development of underrepresented communities that have historically been marginalized. Listen, you can't say that you have the best minds at the table if you're excluding half or more than half of the population.

"DEI is not about letting, what I hear this all the time, unqualified people get into positions and jobs and that mindset really just it's irritating at this point to be honest with you. It's truly about fairness and equity and we can go on and on. I know that there are going to be other questions so I just want to hit that part of that question but I also want to say I really appreciate Dr. Nika when you talk about belonging because you can't have true diversity, equity and inclusion. If you don't create that sense of belonging to invite others in to that dialogue in that conversation, that's what DEI means to me.

Crystal Allen Dallas: "Well, Dr. Markey and Dr. Nika have set me up very well here, and I don't believe in restating, so I want to say ditto to all the things that have been said about diversity. I will lift up that we are all diverse right we're all unique and we all bring something to Dr. Markey point to the table. And so what I'd ask us to do is consider, let's lean into that more and more. Additionally, again, when you're talking about equity right What one person needs to be whole and to be complete in this space may be very different.

"For example, this panel. Let's talk about meals, right? Markey may need just one meal because she has the other two meals of the day taken care of, right? Dr. Nika may need two meals. I may need all three of those meals to sustain me and so that I can be whole and complete for my day. So just another way to kind of think about that equity piece. And then definitely belonging, to be seen, heard, and valued. That's something that we strive for, not only in my organization, but in the work that I do with clients.

"Because to the points that have already been made, when a person feels seen and they feel heard, then they can begin to truly impact whatever project, whatever organization, their community, right, in a really dynamic way. So we want to ensure that in all our efforts that we're being intentional and that the things that we do will create that space for true belonging. Because I do believe when individuals feel that belonging, we can move mountains. We can truly change our today and make it better for tomorrow.



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What have you been saying about this broad topic of DEI that you feel people aren't hearing or understanding?

Dr. Nika White: "I was hoping to hear from Dr. Markey or Crystal, because this is a question that I did think of, and it's always one that I think elicits really insightful input. But there are two things that I would say about this particular question. So, what I've been saying for the longest is that we need to shift the paradigm around how in which we talk about DEI. And what I mean by that is so many people show up to the conversation seeing it as an obligation, right? And I think we need to shift that to where we begin to see it as an opportunity.

"And to take it a step further, when people are engaged in the work of DEI out of obligation, we tend to then ask questions like, what can we do? What can our organization do to help pour DEI out, right? And I think that that is really misguided. Instead, what we need to be doing is seeing it as an opportunity and shifting our language to where we're starting to ask questions like, what can DEI do to make us stronger, to make us a higher performing organization, to make us an employer brand of choice?

"To allow us to be very competitive in the marketplace. And so I think that if we shift the paradigm, it's going to allow us to be able to engage more individuals in a much more meaningful way. The second thing that I have been saying, particularly of late, that I don't think many people are hearing or understanding is that there's a lot of individuals that are devaluing DEI, and they are quite vocal about it. DEI is not something that's new. It's been around for a long time, and conservatives in general haven't just begun attacking DEI.

"They've just become more brazen, and their attempts to undermine DEI. And the reason that I want to make sure people hear that is because I think that fear is seeping in right now to people's psyche, and they're starting to pull back. They're starting to question. They're starting to have removal of the staff within their organizations that are dedicated to this work. And I just want everyone to walk away from today's conversation knowing more than anything else that DEI is alive and well, and it's not going to lay.

"We need it, and we need more people to be champions and advocates of it. Dr. Markey, would you like to weigh in?"

Dr. Markey Pierre: "I absolutely want to jump in on this conversation because, you know, I love the conversation that we had last week in talking about why does this matter? Why is it so important? Creating this equitable, inclusive, and diverse environment is more than just a good thing to do. Ultimately, it's about respect. Equity and fairness is a fundamental component of respect. To treat people disadvantageously at work because they belong to a specific demographic group is inherently unfair and it's disrespectful.

"Another component in that that we've lifted up already is that inclusion. And so when we talk about what can DEI do for you, listen, when you convey that each employee is valued and appreciated for their individual unique self, and we create this sense of belonging within that environment, that's when you really begin to learn from each



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other and to further that inclusion. Listen, none of us are a carbon copy. Of each other, we're all diverse. And when you surround yourself with diverse people from diverse backgrounds, that's when there's new innovative ideas.

“That's when you have that robust conversation and you're able to pull all of those great things away. And so when you talk about what people, what I've been saying for so long about DEI, it's all based on respect.”

Crystal Allen Dallas: “I would say the thing that continues to be reoccurring are two things I want to lift up to what's already been stated. One, diversity is a journey, right? And so you cannot let not knowing what to do next keep you from doing anything. This is an opportunity for each of us to play a role and to ensure that that respect that sense of belonging occurs, right? So again, lean into the learnings. Everyone is at a different place, but that shouldn't allow you to be paralyzed with inaction. You need to use that as a catalyst to do the work.

“And when I say do the work, we do the work together. Because we know, just looking at America, our history, right? So we know the systemic things that have occurred and are still occurring that we need to change, but it takes all of us. So not allowing the fear of not knowing what to do to paralyze you. And then also another thing that I continue to dispel is in embracing DEI, that is not a place or saying that one culture is better than the other, it is that we are all better together. So when we lean in and we work together and we are willing to have oftentimes these difficult conversations, right, around all the issues that plague our society, that's where we see true change.

“So being willing to have the conversations, being willing to show up as your authentic self with what you know today and lean into the others so that we can push forward.

How do you provide more than just a “seat at the table,” but actually provide an opportunity to be part of the conversation?

Rudy Flores, IOM: “This is a question that, you know, I think about all the time and I and my board and I we talked about this kind of stuff is that how do you provide more than just a seat at the table, but actually provide an opportunity to be a part of the conversation and and this one means a lot to me as I said earlier, part of the LGBT community.

“You know, I'm actually half Mexican, which people don't always see that. And, you know, and I want to be invited to things because of my knowledge and my passion and not just checking a box because they're looking to fill a quota. So I think this is something that I hear a lot of people talking about and asking.”

Crystal Allen Dallas: “When we're talking about this seat at the table, right? I would take us back to something we've already talked about, and that's intentionality, right? We're not here just to check a box. We really want to be inclusive in our efforts. And everything that we do. And that requires some intention on our part, right? Because we've been hardwired to do things a certain way for so long that we need to look around and say, you know, one, what is our goal? What's the end result of what we're trying to accomplish here?”



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“And if that's A visual something, then we need to read, you know, really reestablish or revisit what that is. I am then really look at how do we create this inclusive environment, how do we not only invite someone to the table, I can tell you from my own experience, I have a lot of experience of being the only, the one, you know, and so when you have people at the table, what are you doing to truly engage them? “Are you, is it just because you want them seated at that table, or are you really looking to include their voice, their experience, their whole person to amplify the efforts of whatever the conversation is?”

“So again, I would say being intentional, but I want to hear from my colleagues on this panel as well. Dr. Markey?”

Dr. Markey Pierre: “Yes, let me jump into this one right here. I think it was Shirley Chisholm that said early on in Congress back in in the year I was born, if they don't give you a seat at the table, bring your folding chair.

“I truly lean into this space because I think it is that you have to be intentional. You have to be deliberate. What I have found as a former chairman of the board of a chamber that typically had white men with gray hair and blue eyes that sat at the table, I felt like I was a breath of fresh air when I walked into the room because You have to be able to have courageous conversations and to ask, you know, we have an entire community that we have left out of this dialogue and I'd like to open some spaces for them to have it, but I don't want to just open the space for them to have it.

“I want them to have a real voice. And us to look toward implementing some of the things that they are talking about that we need, not only in the business community, but our community as a whole, when we look at what the opportunities are and where we can all grow from these diverse conversations. It requires being bold. It requires being fearless. And when you talk about creating that sense of, of environment that allows you to have that belonging you know one of the things that I have talked with our chamber about are is unconscious bias training because there are unconscious biases that are there let's be honest people do business with who they are comfortable with and sometimes it's come they're comfortable with the people they've always done business with and so to be bold enough to have that dialogue and say listen I'd like to make some change but I'd like to make some change that's going to be impactful and that means bringing in other voices other communities to talk about where are we lacking in these areas and not be afraid of what comes out of that conversation and so I can appreciate what I like to call courageous conversations in this environment because they're necessary and unless you're willing to have them you're not going anywhere because we greatly benefit from these unique voices and positions of influence.”

Dr. Nika White: “Thank you Dr. Markey for bringing the great Shirley Chisholm to the conversation. That is always a quote that comes to mind when I think about having a seat at the table. No, but I have a friend that often says, ‘nothing about me without me.’ And I have adopted that same mantra. And that's really what we're leaning into is this idea that if you are a governing body of influential individuals that are making decisions about diverse constituents, then you need to make sure that you have their voice at the table, that you understand how the decision will impact them.



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“And so, I think it's really important for us to make sure that having a seat at the table is not the same as really being welcome to the conversation. So, Rudy, thank you for this question. A couple things come to mind for me to add to what's already been shared. The first thing is, I think there's value in co-creating solutions, right? And I often use that word and that language because I think that it shows the unity and it shows the need for all perspectives to be considered when you are really trying to make sure that you are governing yourselves according to understanding and the knowledge of all the different ways in which people that are, you know, potentially involved could be impacted.

“The other thing, too, is this lens of intersectionality. Just because someone has a seat at the table, I think sometimes we can just relegate that person's perspective to what we perceive as generalities, right, or stereotypes of certain populations of people. And I want us to be really careful about that. When we talk about being a part of a conversation. It is really allowing that person to show up authentically based upon their lived experience, and their lived experience can be vastly different from someone else in which they may share the same identity with.

“And so, I think we need to be careful about identifying people that are to be the spokesperson for a whole population of individuals. You know, no one group is a monolith. The thing is, when these individuals are courageous enough to take up space and to share their perspective, believe them. Believe their perspective. It may be vastly different from what someone else could perceive as, you know, from the seat that they sit in, but believe them and their story and what they're bringing to the conversation.

“I also think that as we connect this to the whole notion of belonging, we have to also think about psychological safety, particularly when those individuals that have a seat at the table are a part of historically marginalized, underrepresented, I like to say underestimated populations, right? Because if you are the one and only, that can be very intimidating. And so if there's not a sense of psychological safety about showing up as your best self, being able to have a dissenting point of view and not be judged for that or criticized for that.

“I think that's important. That's how we are able to be a part of a conversation and not just taking up space in a seat. And so I think that's critically important. The last thing that I will say is we have to support their success. Seat at the table is one thing, but being a part of the conversation requires someone to be able to show up confidently. Where they feel like they're being supported. So supporting someone's success means really getting familiar with what are their needs, right?

“What does support look like for them? And that can change from meeting to meeting, moment to moment, right? And so just being so in tune to wanting to make sure that that person is set up for success, that you are committing to doing your part, whether you are a fellow board member or whether you are the head of the organization, whoever you are, maybe you're just an ally in that space, and you want to make sure that you're doing your part as an ally so that that person can feel like they can show up as their best selves in that conversation.”



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Can you share the importance of having an intersectional lens in approaching DEI?

Dr. Nika White: “Sure, and this will be quite brief because I did touch on it in the last question.

I just think that we cannot forget that we as individuals, as human beings, we have a lot of different intersecting identities that shape how we show up to the world, how in which we communicate, how in which we interact, how in which we make decisions. And so if we are failing to remember that, then I think that we're not fully able to optimize on creating these inclusive cultures of belonging. And so I think that's critically important. Kimberly Crenshaw, back in the 1980s, coined this phrase of intersectionality.

“She really was trying to help us to solve in a much more meaningful way for creating equity and inclusion. And if we're only seeing people as confining them, defining them as a singular type of identity, then we're not fully recognizing all of the different ways in which we can provide support to help them show up at their best. And systems of oppression, they come in many different forms to harm groups that are underserved. I am a Black woman, and the fact that I am a Black woman, I am certainly have the propensity to, and I have in my life, been systems of oppression from a gender perspective as well as from a race perspective.”

Dr. Markey Pierre: “I'm just going to build off of what Dr. Nika said, because I think that it's important to get familiar with intersectionality. It's, as she said, it is not a new term. When Kimberly Crenshaw, it's been about years since she actually coined that particular term. And so, when we talk about intersectionality, or as I would define it, complex ways multiple identities intersect, it really does help companies to better understand their employees, their diverse employees, their multifaceted employees, to help deepen the diversity and inclusion initiatives.

“You know, I think it's important when we are talking about business and intersectionality and how you can approach it, it's more of a, you know, a check on the pulse that businesses can take on their employees and be open to feedback. I think when you start talking about ways to enhance that intersectionality lens, then you look at, as I've stated, unconscious bias training for employees, diverse panel discussions and providing those types of things, creating these various channels where employees can get together and to talk and promote DEI in their professional lives as well as outside of the office.

“That's a way to foster a more inclusive workplace and to advocate for continuous growth about the learning experiences of the colleagues and employees that we work with. Because it's just, it's truly important that we are not taking, that we don't take advantage of just saying we've got DEI initiatives. It's more than just, as I said earlier, something good that we do. It's important that we embrace it and that we are intentional, that we are deliberate in our initiatives and in our activities in which we are trying to grow not only a better workplace, but a better community as well.”



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Crystal Allen Dallas: “Absolutely, I love that about that community piece, Dr. Markey, that you're lifting up. And so that's where I'll focus my few comments around in the intersectional lens is that not only do we have the benefit of exercising that within our organization, but when we do it right, it carries over to our community, right? And at the end of the day, we're not just individuals, we're not just organizations, but we are our communities that we live in, that we serve in, that we're hoping to make better, right, for not only ourselves, but the next generation.

“And so allowing ourselves to come fully into the spaces that we inhabit is a better product for all within our organization and in the community.”

How do we address the current resistance to DEI we are currently seeing?

Rudy Flores, IOM: “You're talking about community and this came to mind for me is that I've had some conversations both where I am and, and with other chambers and organizations about, well, my community is this, we don't have a lot of diversity. So that's why our makeup from board looks like this, or the committees and things like that. And, and conversations I've had is like, we're representing businesses and all the employees that work for those businesses.

“They're not all from necessarily your community. We all commute to different communities or different regions for work or travel. Business owners might, and I was giving the example of Mexican restaurants. Most of our communities have Mexican restaurants. You could be an all-white community as a residential population, but you have Indian restaurants, Mexican restaurants and stuff like that. And it's like, how do you engage them and make them a part of your organization and bring them to the table?

“And sometimes I personally think that we're looking at DE&I only one way. And this is why sometimes it's we're seeing this resistance because we're not really looking at all the different ways that our communities are diverse. It's not just what you might see walking down the street.”

Dr. Markey Pierre: “So, I will jump into this one because I want to bring back and lift up once again what Dr. Nika brought up that we need to change the paradigm. I don't want us to be placed in a box when we begin talking about DEI that you know this is all about diversity, equity, inclusion and giving somebody a job because we need to check a box. As I said earlier in my earlier comments about what DEI means to me, this is about respect. It is a fundamental component of respect and treating people the way you want to be treated. Conveying that each individual person is valued. We have got to change the conversation and the paradigm in which we have this dialogue.

“And I could care less about the name. I really could. It's about the principles that we are displaying. It's about the principles that we are talking about. It's about the principles that we have adopted and what we want to do. Yes, the conversation happened, and it raised it up to the forefront after George Floyd. And there are a lot of programs that are not impactful around this country that aren't doing anything but checking a box. That's not what I'm



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interested in. It's about respect and changing how we have this conversation and bringing it back around to that individual person.”

What will the SCOTUS ruling impact have on the business community where many have already implemented DEI initiatives?

Dr. Nika White: “You know, it's been a number of months now since the SCOTUS ruling has presented itself. And I think that, for me, the first thing is we have to recognize that just because things become more difficult does not mean that it's impossible. And I think that's important to amplify because while there are walls of the land that everyone must follow. And I know many organizations are really kind of pitching their tent there, and they're using that as part of how they're socialized, how they're showing up to this work of DEI.

“I think it just reminds me that we are in such a time to where we have to become much more sophisticated, much more innovative, much more creative in our approach to solving for continuing to place a high value on DEI, even when the systems, right, that we are to follow are not necessarily working in the favor of DEI. And so, really, my message here is that it is impacting many individuals, but we have to make sure we are just as diligent about finding some creative ways. I do know that there's not a situation where, you know, it still remains lawful.

“Let's put it that way. It still remains lawful for employers to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion programming that seek to ensure workers of all backgrounds are afforded equal opportunity in the workplace. And so, if the premise of that still reigns true, then I think that there's always going to be hope and opportunity for us to just be creative about how in which we are addressing moving this work forward. A lot of the institutions that used to really rely on being able to ensure from an enrollment perspective, those historically underrepresented individuals were able to be a part of their institutions.

“They're finding it harder now, but they're implementing other strategies, such as how do we now make sure that as they're writing their essays, you know, that also gets considered for entry into the higher learning institutions, that we can understand a little bit more about them and their lived experiences. And so, it just takes being more creative and innovative and continue to push the message that our workplaces are better and stronger when they are diverse in terms of people from all different types of backgrounds, experiences, and so if you're really for the business community continuing to grow and thrive, you will not back off of continuing to commit to DEI.”

How do you leverage transformative learning practices to promote DEI in institutions of higher education?



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Dr. Markey Pierre: “So, this is something that we are all dealing with and, you know, of the things that we encourage within our institutions is to actively encourage open dialogue between students and faculty and staff as well as working toward promoting. You know, active listening amongst everyone that's involved. How do you promote it in the classroom? We talk about getting to know our students, practicing that cultural sensitivity, giving, ensuring that students have their freedom and flexibility, even though they still have to follow the laws of the land. And so it certainly is a challenge, but if you've got the principles in place We are working toward continuing to move forward with the promotion of universal diversity because we believe that when you lift everyone up, then we're all a better community together.”

How can I promote DEI in my organization? / How can I present to my board the need for DEI?

Crystal Allen Dallas: “I would go back to what I've been saying this entire call. One, being intentional, right? We understand the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and that that needs to be throughout, you know, the work that we're doing. Again, like Dr. Markey said, it's not checking a box. It's not just being performatory in our works, but really, how do we in bid these things in our everyday practices? How are we making sure that that lens is being applied to all the work that we do in our organizations?”

“One, you want to have board kind of buy-in and support, but I think even attending a session like this allows you to begin to leverage, to take back the tools, to take back the resources that you're being exposed to of why this is important in organizations, right? Additionally, I would say that Again, what are your goals? What are you trying to do and how are you doing that in a meaningful way is really important in presenting to your board as we've already talked about. It's bigger than just your organization.

“It's about the business community and that is diverse. So, if you are seeking to attract new members or even retain the ones that you have, there has to be some additional supports that are given there and some intentional measures that you're doing as an organization to ensure that that DEI practice is carried out.”

Dr. Nika White: “Yeah, I'd like to tag on to this question because there are a couple thoughts that are coming up for me that I think are important to socialize around. Oftentimes when individuals present a question like, how can I get my boards buy-in? How can I help convince them of the need? It is because they are aware that there's some resistance there. And so what I would offer up is that I think it behooves the individuals that are trying to build this strategy around broaching this conversation by being clear of what are those resistors and then leverage your strategy to try to address those resistors.

“It could be that it's just simply a lack of clarity. Sometimes when we don't know what we don't know, we shy away from it, right? And so resistance is often a lack of clarity. How do we address that resistance? We do so by clearly and consistently articulating the value of it, the goals, the strategy, how it's aligned with the mission of the



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organization, how it's going to help produce opportunity that maybe people aren't thinking of I also think that we have to be a lot more cognizant about how in which we're bringing new board members on, right, to our organizations.

“How are we making those appointments? Are we asking questions about their DEI leadership? And I see that very much understanding that you do not have to have DEI in your title in order for you to be a leader of DEI. And I would hope that all organizations that are looking for a governing body that's helping to drive the future of the organization to certainly have a lens of valuing DEI. So are we asking those questions? So that's what I would add to the conversation. Understand what those resisters are and let your strategy be informed by addressing those resisters.

“And then secondly, just making sure that we are being aware of who we're bringing onto our boards, right?”

Dr. Markey Pierre: “So I just want to, if I can, just add just a tad bit to that, because it's such an important conversation. As the first female black chairman of our Chamber of Commerce, one of the things that I had questions about was, does our board resemble the community in which we sit in? And having that real conversation intentionally, and if it doesn't, how do we make sure that it is truly represented so that those voices are included in that conversation? Once you're able to begin that process and you're able to bring them in, listen, I'm not saying that it's something that's easily done.

“I'm saying that it's something that's necessary. Because our chamber should look like the communities in which we live in. And to be able to create those opportunities so that you can have that conversation and to look at those types of practices, then we're going to need those diverse voices at the table to have those difficult, robust conversations as well. And so, beginning to ask that question, but it also means that we need to participate. One of the challenges that I faced was that we have a Shreveport Chamber of Commerce, a Bossier Chamber of Commerce, an African-American Chamber of Commerce.

“And so, I have resistance within my own community when we begin to have this discussion. And so it's not an isolated discussion about what's best for the community at large. We have to begin to be able to want to have that conversation and then to be committed to having that conversation consistently, not just today, because it was a topic of discussion, but as we build our strategic plans that are living and breathing documents, that it's encompassed as a principle within those plans as well.

“I love that you guys are just segueing right into the next section, where it is the challenges that are faced by trying to implement DEI initiatives.”

**Difficulty connecting. There are historic biases that we are working through./
Moving away from old perspective thinking./There are still areas of the country**



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that still don't wanna discuss these topics. They'll say they want to, but then they really don't. How do you bring it up when they don't show up to the conversation?

Dr. Nika White: “What’s coming up for me is that I think those of us who really value this work, and we are champions and advocates of it, if we aren't careful, sometimes we can fail to see that behavior change in and of itself is a win. And I say that because I think oftentimes we are wanting to immediately change hearts and minds. And that is a bigger feat, right? So I don't want us to underestimate the value of changing behavior. And so I'm relating it to this challenge question because I believe that if organizationally, You can implement systems, policies, procedures, protocol that holds people accountable to what you have as an organization determined to be those non-negotiables around how we should show up to this work.

“If people are willing to stay with that organization and align with those parameters, then that's a behavioral change. And then hopefully over time, maybe we are able to convince some shift in a mindset or in a heart, right? But I just wanted to offer that out because sometimes it does start with us just building the systems, the protocol, the behaviors that we are very clear about being in alignment versus those that are not in alignment and then holding people accountable.

“Accountability is something that a lot of people are challenged with, and I think that that is creating the challenges that we're seeing, you know, per this conversation we're having right now and some of the prompts that have been points of curiosity and tension maybe for members of this community that are asking questions around, you know, moving away from old perspective thinking and getting people to really kind of buy into the work.”

Crystal Allen Dallas: “I would just say, too, that as you're looking at the protocols and the procedures that align with where the organization is going, asking yourself, you know, continually prompting those and understanding that, you know, this still is a journey, right? And so, it does take some time. I would also say, to the point about the resisters, that understand that the work that you do when you do it is not always going to be received by every individual and you cannot let that stop you. You know, I think we will all agree on this panel if we've all had our share of resisters and you know hearing Markey talk about, I was there with her so I had an opportunity to experience the thing but what I want to lift up is that think about on the other side what is possible.

“Because of Dr. Markey standing in the gap and being the first African American board chair for the organization at that time, they've now had several. And so, the benefit of what is possible on the other side is very, very important. And I would just say persist. I know it may not be easy. This is not going to be easy. Let me say that. But it's worthwhile work and lean into organizations like the Chamber, like Institute, like-minded people who are doing the work, one, for support, but two, understanding what is working in other places that you can then implement in your area in some form or fashion.”



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Dr. Markey Pierre: “If I can just jump right back into this, it's really, you know, when you start talking about the old way of thinking and the challenges that we face, look at what outcomes are you looking for? And talking about what makes us a better community, what makes our business better. And it is ultimately, I believe, those principles that follow diversity, that follow equity, inclusion, and sense of belonging that make us this greater nation. Sometimes I think we forget that. And I just wanted to raise that up.

“Yeah, as Crystal was sharing, something came to mind for me that I think is really important, and that is we have to find ways to strategically and meaningfully get people proximate to the lived experiences of those who are different from them. And I think one of the greatest ways to do that is for us to lean more into vulnerably sharing stories. I love when people can share their stories because as we're listening, we're hearing the feel words, right? And we're connecting to those feel words.

“And the reason that I wanted to bring this up is because one of the prompts was related to someone in the audience mentioning difficulty in connecting, right? We connect by building relationships. We build relationships by listening to stories and allowing the empathy and the compassion of those stories to fuel us to want to care even deeper. And that takes getting proximate. So, we have to get out of our bubble and we have to be willing to go to those places and to go to those individuals who are different from us to learn more about them.

“And it's through that that we're building up a rapport, we're building up this greater heightened sensitivity and awareness to want to engage deeper into this body of work.”

How can people look at being more inclusive and being intentional and try to ensure that they don't do something that makes somebody feel uncomfortable or missing the mark?

Dr. Nika White: “You know, when I hear stories like this, I tend to, you know, I'm curious about, well, if you were doing an event that was for the benefit of different races coming together, then why not? Have like a committee of individuals that are across all those different races where you are asking questions, you are using them maybe as a soundboard to the extent in which they have the emotional capacity and the willingness to be a sounding board. We are too reactive and I think that we need to be more collaborative on the front end for these communities in which we're trying to ally for. And so those strategic partnerships are really critical.”

Crystal Allen Dallas: “When we got this question, just seconds, I just am aligned with what you said, Dr. Nika, and I really encourage everyone on this call is to not only reach out for specific events, but make that reach out as just a part of what you do, your standard operating practice that whatever we're endeavoring to do as an organization, we are reaching out to community. Yes, and where they have capacity and can support and give feedback, great, but let's reach out even when there's not an event. I used to work for a nonprofit, and the thing that we would hear all the time is like, hey, we only hear from you when you need something.



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“We only hear from you when you need something. So let's reverse that. Let's start just reaching out and as we build community and as we become, you know, proximate to others who are different from us, that is also a part of the journey and the learning experience and an opportunity to ensure this type of thing does not happen, you know, in the future because we have to be building trust too. We've talked about being intentional, we've talked about relationships, but trust is at the core of that and we do that over time.”

Dr. Markey Pierre: “All I can say is ditto, ditto, because each of you have really touched on it. It's inclusivity. And so, you know, the question is a bit vague. And so I asked that question myself when I saw it. Did you have a committee and was it an inclusive committee at the very onset of this to act as a sounding board? And as you said, Crystal, please don't just call me when you want to do this because this is a, in my mind, I'm just going to be frank, this is a stunt to show that we're working together, but are we working together consistently throughout the year on multiple events?”

“And so it's bringing people in intentionally to have the conversation, to have the dialogue. As I tell my students, all relationships matter. They are important. That's how you get to know. An individual and understand what they are going through. You may not truly understand everything, but you gain a perspective on how they're dealing with it. And then you learn how to respect them and what they are doing. It all goes back to once again, I said, the fundamental component of DEI is respect.”

Recruiting new diverse members and volunteers.

Rudy Flores, IOM: “It is exactly what you're saying. It sounds like it's, you know, doing the outreach and having a conversation, including them in not just a quick ask, but you know, like if you start to reach out and talk about, oh, we're thinking about doing this strategy, getting their feedback, that leads to probably somebody being your board member or being on your committee.”

Crystal Allen Dallas: “So I would just say as a former membership development director, all those things, Rudy, seeing who's at the table, who do we need at the table, being open and innovative to new things. So, here's what I would say.”

Dr. Nika White: “For someone to ask this question, it almost leads me to believe that right now there's a lack of diversity or representation across key groups. And so, I'm going to tell you what not to do instead of what precisely to do. And that is, do not go to that group that is lacking diversity to say, bring us some individuals. Because you're going to get more of the sea of sameness is how I refer to it, right? You're gonna need to break out of that mold because we gravitate to people who are like us, people who maybe our kids attend the same school, maybe we go to the same place of worship, maybe we live in the same community, and you're just gonna continue to attract the same type of individuals. And so, I'm gonna answer by giving you what not to do.”