

Top Insights from  
**Building an Equitable and Inclusive Culture in the Tech Industry**  
***Industry Collaboration***  
An Aspen Institute Roundtable

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*“The solution [to ensuring diverse representation across the industry] lies in our answer to the question, ‘Are we clever enough to collaborate?’”*

Now is the time for tech leaders to use their unprecedented power to advance goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their own companies and across the industry. Bringing together senior DEI practitioners, the Aspen Institute’s Tech X Talent Project seeks to guide and support this process. On January 27, we convened the third and last dialogue of a series on how to advance and promote a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture in the tech sector.

The first session covered interpersonal behaviors, the critical actions that managers and other company leaders must or must not take to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. The second examined methods for building inclusive environments, ensuring pay equity, and enhancing performance management.

In the final installment, we addressed industry-wide goal-setting and actionable steps to drive sector change. Below are insights from that conversation:

1. **Take a collective policy position to stand against racial inequality.** Beyond barriers in the workplace, employees who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are impacted by systemic issues at the societal level. Racism manifests in income inequality, education disparities, safety and security, and more. The tech industry must stand against this injustice by supporting federal legislation and other policies that will positively impact the broader communities of its workers of color (e.g., higher minimum wages and affordable housing). Also crucial, the sector can widen the talent pipeline if it funds education for students who do not have equal access to resources, as well as provides mentorship opportunities for youths. Many organizations are doing good work around education and training.
2. **Set and work toward shared goals to foster substantive progress at scale.** Tech needs to create a common denominator by identifying specific objectives toward which the entire industry should strive, particularly for hiring, retention, and promotion. This collaborative approach will be good for business as shareholders increasingly seek large-scale impact. As part of this process, the sector will need to account for the stage of development in which a given company might be (e.g., small startup versus major conglomerate). It will also need to provide context for its aims long-term, answering questions such as: is the goal population parity or some other measurement? Relatedly, tech needs to pool its research and other resources to build a repository of best practices so that companies can learn from one another.

3. **Establish credibility by unifying behind measurable standards.** To build the trust of investors, employees, the public, and other stakeholders, performance from company to company must be normalized. The industry needs to compare apples to apples, and as such, it should develop shared standards for reporting as well as collectively publish progress data. Tech also needs to develop a common lexicon and define key terms, such as “leader” and “manager” and what it means to serve in a “tech role.” This way, the sector can speak with one voice and widely advance relevant, measurable goals. Identifying a transparent model for accountability is also key to success. One way to achieve this vision of unity is by studying the sustainability community, particularly its [Global Reporting Initiative](#), and partnering with relevant civic and academic groups.
4. **Focus on processes, prioritizing outcomes over intentions.** A commitment is only as strong as its manifestation. Once the industry establishes clear shared objectives, it needs to identify the systems and procedures that will most likely lead to meaningful results. In this phase, it will be fruitful to study cognitive and organizational psychology, because at the heart of processes are the people who implement them.
5. **Hold senior and executive leadership accountable.** Diversity, equity, and inclusion cannot be delegated. While HR directors and Chief Diversity Officers should be held accountable for progress, so should the broader leadership team. For example, there are clear lines that tech CEOs need to draw to drive widespread progress, and it is time for those who serve in this role to personally put their names on the hook. Executives should meet annually, commit to the sector’s shared goals, and be made accountable for achieving results. Going further down the chain of command, employees at the VP level and above should receive regular, individualized DEI training. They should be held accountable for both actively participating in those experiences and following through on their learnings. Leaders who neglect their commitments should face repercussions, with the potential for strong disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
6. **Leverage the industry’s existing model for broad-based coalitions.** There are deep pockets of DEI excellence in individual companies, but overall, the sector is failing. This is in large part because tech prioritizes competition over collaboration. Yet, tech already successfully collectivizes around a number of other issues, jointly making decisions about how browsers should work and more. Take, for example, the Internet Engineering Task Force — an open, international community of network designers, operators, vendors, and researchers focused on the evolution of the internet’s architecture. The industry should adapt this model specifically for diversity, equity, and inclusion, but in doing so, it must ensure that participants have skin in the game.
7. **Ensure ubiquitous training for practitioners.** Frequently, DEI leaders have to learn on the job because in-depth industry-wide training does not yet exist, and approaches often vary from company to company. One skillset all practitioners must master, for example, is empathy and relationship-building. Whether via college curriculum or an independent nonprofit-led initiative, the tech sector needs to train the trainers. Equally importantly, CEOs should receive their own training and be as knowledgeable on the core issues as Chief Diversity Officers. In addition to commitment, they also need to have the vernacular to get buy-in from across their organization. DEI challenges are complex, and if leadership does not address them in a nuanced way, they could fail to gain the dedication of their employees.