



EMPLOYING A WORKFORCE THAT REFLECTS OUR COMMUNITIES

WASHINGTON EMPLOYERS

FOR RACIAL EQUITY

In December 2020, a coalition of CEOs and senior private sector leaders came together to launch **Washington Employers for Racial Equity** (WERE), a statewide coalition committed to building a racially equitable future.

All WERE members start by signing the **Commitment to Progress**, committing to collective goals and the work necessary to advance racial equity in their workplaces and communities. This work begins with a focus on equity for Black Washingtonians, with the ultimate goal of equity for all.

WERE members work to examine the impacts—positive or negative, intended, and unforeseen—of company and institutional processes, policies, and systems that influence the development and advancement of Black talent and Black businesses in Washington state. WERE seeks to learn from Black-owned businesses and Black workers about the intentional actions that companies can take to accelerate equity and share examples of best and promising practices.

SPOTLIGHT: **EQUITABLE HIRING AND ONBOARDING PRACTICES**

FOUR PERCENT OF THE COMBINED STATEWIDE WORKFORCE AT WERE COMPANIES IDENTIFY AS BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN. THIS MIRRORS THE PERCENTAGE OF THE STATEWIDE POPULATION THAT IDENTIFY AS BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN. HOWEVER, BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN TALENT IS UNDERREPRESENTED IN THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND REGION WHERE 85% OF THE WERE WORKFORCE IS EMPLOYED. ADDITIONALLY, BLACK TALENT IS UNDERREPRESENTED IN MANAGEMENT AND SENIOR LEADERSHIP.

WERE COALITION MEMBERS ARE COMMITTED TO EMPLOYING A WORKFORCE THAT REFLECTS THEIR COMMUNITIES. OUR COALITION AIMS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS THE BARRIERS BLACK TALENT FACE DURING RECRUITING, HIRING, AND ONBOARDING PROCESSES. THIS REPORT HIGHLIGHTS A SELECTION OF PRACTICES EMPLOYERS OF VARIOUS SIZES CAN EXPLORE TO SUPPORT HIRING AND SUCCESSFUL RETENTION OF BLACK TALENT, INCLUDING INTENTIONAL RECRUITING PROCESSES, OBJECTIVE SELECTION CRITERIA, AND PERSONALIZED ONBOARDING.

BARRIERS BLACK TALENT FACE IN GETTING HIRED

The number of Black Americans participating in the workforce is at its highest since 2005, but the unemployment rate for Black Americans (6.2%) is still nearly double that of white Americans (3.2%) and well above the national average (3.6%).¹ Black talent often encounter systemic barriers in hiring and employment.²

In reviewing existing national research, multiple barriers stand out:

1. BLACK TALENT FACE IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT BIAS THROUGHOUT THE HIRING PROCESS.

Black applicants begin to encounter implicit biases—or negative stereotyping in and outside of conscious awareness—at the very earliest stages of the recruiting and selection process. For example, applicants with a “Black sounding name” get fewer callbacks on average than similar applications bearing a “white name.”³ Black applicants who eliminate or downplay racial cues in their job applications—a practice known as “resume whitening” or “bleaching”—are 2.5 times more likely to get selected for an interview than Black candidates who do not eliminate or downplay racial cues in their application materials. This is as true for Black candidates who apply for job postings with pro-diversity employers as it is when they apply for job postings that don’t mention diversity at all.⁴

2. HIRING TEAMS TOO OFTEN BUY INTO THE MYTH THAT QUALIFIED BLACK CANDIDATES DO NOT EXIST, OR THAT THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH FROM WHICH TO CHOOSE.

Analysis suggests that in such a situation, Black candidates are struggling against the biases of employers who are bought into multiple fallacies including a belief that a single “most qualified” candidate exists in any objective sense; that Black applicants need to be more accomplished than their non-Black peers to be considered qualified; or that racial discrimination happens at the hands of a few bad actors rather than as a systemic practice.⁵ Any of these can lead to qualified Black candidates being unconsciously, unfairly, or prematurely screened out of the selection process.

3. COMPANIES RELY ON SOCIAL NETWORKS AND PERSONAL CONNECTIONS TO FILL POSITIONS.

Many organizations rely heavily on their current employees’ social networks and personal connections to fill available positions, an approach that has been overwhelmingly known to exclude Black talent.⁶ This practice can limit a Black applicant’s access to organizations where the majority of employees, and their professional networks, are white.⁷ More than one-third of workers nationally received a referral for their current job. However, men of color are 25% less likely, and women of color are 35% less likely to be referred for a position than white men.⁸

4. BLACK TALENT OFTEN DON’T FEEL THEY BELONG IN AN ORGANIZATION.

Research shows that Black and other employees of color feel pressure to create “facades of conformity” at work. Black workers often find it difficult to trust their colleagues and leadership teams, and often lack the psychological safety needed to thrive when they are in a racial minority amongst their colleagues. They often experience unwritten rules and cultural and social norms that explicitly exclude them, which can inhibit bonding and the establishment of trust amongst their peers and leaders. They often suppress some of their values and perspectives and feel unable to bring their whole selves to work, believing they should nod in agreement with company values and norms as a survival strategy.⁹

Understanding the barriers Black applicants face helps employers to identify potential solutions to advance racial equity and support increased engagement and representation for Black employees in the workplace. This report highlights a selection of actionable practices, informed by case studies and researched best practices, that employers can deploy during the recruiting, hiring, and onboarding processes.

USE INTENTIONAL RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE BLACK TALENT AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO APPLY

With more Black workers in the workforce than ever before, there is no shortage of talent for employers to tap into. The challenge is knowing how to recruit with intention and focus.

Three strategies for exploration:

1. PARTNER WITH BLACK NETWORKING GROUPS AND HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

As employers seek to increase diversity inside their companies, it is essential to ensure the talent pools from which they are drawing are diverse and representative of the community. Predominately white universities, which have been the cornerstone of workforce recruiting for generations, do not admit an equitable number of students of color relative to white students.¹⁰ This means companies need to broaden their recruiting outreach to include educational institutions, both 2- and 4-year programs, that serve students of color. Partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) is one way to do this. Additionally, Black networking groups both at universities and within the community offer an opportunity to tap into established referral networks outside the organization that offer broader racial and ethnic representation. Organizations like [Tabor 100](#) and [Black Business Warehouse](#) in Washington state work directly to support recruiting and connections for people of color and women and specifically support Black-owned businesses.

2. RETHINK REFERRAL SYSTEMS AND LEVERAGE EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERG) TO EXPAND TALENT SEARCH OPPORTUNITIES.

In a previous report we shared the importance of employee resource groups (ERGs) for Black talent already in an organization. ERGs can also be an effective tool for connecting with and recruiting new talent. When ERG members are willing to make referrals for a company, they indicate positive feelings about the organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and that they feel comfortable bringing additional racially diverse talent into the company.

3. ENSURE RACIAL DIVERSITY IN EVERY CANDIDATE POOL.

Diverse slate hiring is a talent acquisition strategy where employers require that a diverse pool of qualified candidates be cultivated before beginning the interview process. A diverse slate ensures that people from systemically underrepresented groups interview for all open positions and encourages hiring teams to develop practices that connect them to the most racially diverse talent pool.¹¹

PRACTICE IN ACTION:



Lease Crutcher Lewis, a construction company based in the Pacific Northwest, began its DEI work in 2012, and grassroots committees were established in 2017. After investing in an external DEI consultant, Lease Crutcher Lewis identified in 2020 that its recruitment strategies were not effective in building a diverse workforce. Led by the CEO, the company

set a goal to increase its female and employee-of-color demographics by 10% year over year for the next three years as part of its long-range planning goals. The company recognized it needed a goal to hold itself accountable and drive recruitment of more diverse talent.

The company took steps to analyze its current recruitment strategy and build processes for improvement going forward, including:

Removing biased language in job postings. Given that many times a job application is an applicant's first encounter with a company, setting the right impression—one of belonging—is important. With the help of outside experts, Lease Crutcher Lewis audited its job postings for biased language and learned to add words like collaborative, team-oriented, and words or phrases that center learning and growing. This helped improve written job postings/descriptions and removed language that unintentionally signaled bias towards a certain racial, age, or gender group

Getting clear and honest about the requirements for a position. Bringing a different lens to recruitment allowed conversations with hiring managers about credentials, skills, or experiences that are not required for a role or position, which may be a barrier for a great applicant to apply. From Lease Crutcher Lewis' perspective, analyzing the job requirements to ask for what is truly needed of an applicant doesn't mean lowering the bar, but instead removes unnecessary barriers for skilled applicants to enter the application process. For example, if an advanced degree could be replaced by years of work experience, then the company chose to amend that requirement in the hiring process.

Getting creative and diversifying recruitment pipelines. Lease Crutcher Lewis partners with local unions and pre-apprenticeship programs to bring people from all backgrounds, including women and people of color, into the trades. This includes supporting programs that provide opportunities to people who were formerly incarcerated and educate high school students about careers in the trades. Additionally, Lease Crutcher Lewis realized that if it was going to recruit from Northwest colleges, where the construction and engineering programs do not typically have racially diverse student demographics, chances of hiring Black talent would be low. Lease Crutcher Lewis purposefully began recruiting from universities that have racially diverse student bodies in their construction and engineering programs like Louisiana State University and Purdue University.

“THE WAY WE WERE WRITING OUR APPLICATIONS MAY HAVE BEEN LEAVING A SPECIFIC GROUP OF APPLICANTS OUT, WHERE THEY ALREADY CAN'T SEE THEMSELVES WORKING FOR THE COMPANY.”

- BART RICKETTS, CEO

“WE DIDN'T WANT OUR DEI GOALS AND COMMITMENT TO BE SEPARATE FROM OUR WORK, WE INSTEAD INTEGRATED THESE GOALS INTO OUR THREE-YEAR PLAN AND ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN.”

- BART RICKETTS, CEO

IN 2022, 43% OF SALARIED NEW HIRES AT LEASE CRUTCHER LEWIS WERE FEMALE AND/OR BLACK AND PEOPLE OF COLOR.

FOUR RECRUITMENT CHANNELS THAT LEASE CRUTCHER LEWIS USES:

1. Organized labor channels
2. Second-chance training programs
3. Education and exploration programs starting in high school
4. Universities that serve majority people of color

ESTABLISH OBJECTIVE SELECTION CRITERIA

Beyond recruiting, establishing an equitable process is one way to address bias in the hiring process. Behavioral science research indicates the most effective ways to weed out bias are:¹²

- 1. STANDARDIZE HIRING PROCESSES:** By creating standardized procedures that apply to all job applicants, employers eliminate the opportunity for implicit biases or improvisation by the interview or hiring team, which leads to favoring some groups at the expense of others.
 - 2. SET OBJECTIVE HIRING CRITERIA:** Hiring criteria and candidate requirements should be clear, objective, and established in advance so that positions are not adjusted during the hiring process to fit a particular candidate.
 - 3. USE NEUTRAL LANGUAGE:** Coded language in job descriptions can unintentionally signal bias and discourage applications from people of color.
 - 4. HAVE RACIALLY DIVERSE INTERVIEWERS:** A diverse interview team that includes evaluators of different races and ethnicities can help reduce opportunities for racial bias. Employers should include interviewers representing diverse racial backgrounds at each step of a candidate's screening and interview process to independently assess candidates.
 - 5. STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH SCORECARDS:** Subjectivity—and thus the opportunity for implicit bias—can be reduced through structuring interviewing, which asks applicants the same predefined questions and scores them according to a predetermined rubric.
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PRACTICE IN ACTION:



Microsoft

In June 2020, Microsoft made a five-year commitment to address racial injustice and inequity with its Racial Equity Initiative, which includes a focus on increasing representation and strengthening inclusion.

Through its investment in this work, Microsoft has created a standardized interview process across the company that includes:

Inclusive hiring training: Microsoft enhanced its interview and hiring processes with updated inclusive hiring training required for all managers and available to interviewers. The hiring training courses include topics like inclusion, bias, and screening. This training provides insights and tools to hiring managers and a more consistent experience for candidates being interviewed.

Specific focus areas for interviewers: Each interviewer is assigned a specific focus area (e.g., job skill capabilities, management, subject matter expertise, and an area of focus). This enables the interviewer to focus on the competency of the desired skill set, ask the same questions of each candidate, and communicate that perspective on each applicant to the rest of the interviewers in the interview loop.

Collective conversation: After each interview loop, the interview team holds a collective conversation to debrief and share their recommendations, and a final decision is made by the hiring manager.

“IT'S IMPORTANT FOR APPLICANTS TO SEE AND FEEL CONNECTED TO COMMUNITY, RIGHT FROM THE START”

**- ELIZABETH WAN,
GENERAL MANAGER,
HUMAN RESOURCES**

In the past five years, Microsoft has seen meaningful year-over-year progress in Diversity and Inclusion as highlighted in the annual [Diversity and Inclusion Report](#). As of June 30, 2022, Microsoft was 116% of the way to its goal for Black and African American people managers (below director level), and 92% of the way for Black and African American directors+ (people managers and individual contributors). Additionally, it is 46.5% of the way for Hispanic and Latino/a people managers (below director level), and 57.6% of the way for Hispanic and Latinx directors+ (people managers and individual contributors).

THESE COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCED HIGHER GROWTH YEAR OVER YEAR IN 2022 THAN THE 18.2% GROWTH FOR MICROSOFT'S BROADER BUSINESS IN THE U.S:

BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN	+46.3%
HISPANIC AND LATINX	+29.1%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER	+22.7%
MULTIRACIAL	+24.9%

PERSONALIZE ONBOARDING TO CREATE A FEELING OF BELONGING

The work isn't over once Black employees are hired. After an intentional and equitable recruitment and selection process, companies must take the necessary steps to onboard their new Black employees and create a sense of belonging from the first day. Research shows that nationally, 69% of employees are more likely to stay with a company for three years if they experience great onboarding,¹³ but only 12% of employees strongly agree that their companies perform well when onboarding new hires¹⁴ and some organizations report a 20% attrition rate in the first 45 days.¹⁵

Inclusive onboarding is vital to employee happiness, engagement, and an overall sense of belonging. Every action a company takes—or doesn't take—contributes to an employee's feelings of inclusion.

Best practices to explore in personalizing the onboarding process for new employees:

- 1. LEARN HOW YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE OPERATES.** Every person is different, so it's critical to understand the best way to integrate the new hire into the team. Find out their expectations of the position, how they like to be managed, and their general work style. When managers understand these aspects, they can help create a sense of psychological safety for their new employees and make adjustments as needed.¹⁶ Better onboarding can also include customizing parts of the experience for the specific employee. For example, connecting with a new Black employee via a welcome message from a prominent Black leader.
- 2. PAIR A NEW EMPLOYEE WITH AN ESTABLISHED MEMBER OF THE BUSINESS.** Buddy systems are proven to help new employees maximize their productivity and job satisfaction¹⁷—a necessary head start considering that women of color in particular receive less support and sponsorship.¹⁸ Employee resource groups (ERGs) can be great resources for finding peer buddies or mentors positioned to support a smooth transition. Pairing with someone who has shared life experience can help ensure that an employee has an ally from day one.
- 3. PROVIDE A ROAD MAP FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT.** The onboarding process provides a great opportunity to showcase the different programs available for new employees so they can begin to see themselves creating a community with other employees and growing professionally within the company. Employers can build career development into the onboarding process by demonstrating how new employees can contribute to the company while advancing their own career goals. This should include introducing new employees to people across the company, so they are aware of where to go for support and leadership.

PRACTICE IN ACTION:



The Seattle Seahawks is an organization within the National Football League (NFL) of approximately 300 employees, including 54 professional football players. In the NFL, the racial demographics of the players on the field are very different from the demographics of the front office staff.

Around 70% of players in the NFL are men of color, while 70% of the NFL's front-office jobs are held by white men. Thirty percent of front office jobs across the league are held by women, and a smaller percentage are Black women. Knowing that representation is needed to uplift, support, and embrace this community, the Seahawks organization intentionally created opportunities to build a culture of belonging for Black women within the organization.

“BLACK GIRL LUNCH” welcomes new Black women to the Seahawks in an intimate setting. During weekly lunch dates, Black women in the organization come together in a free and open conversation space to talk about what's going well, what's hard, and how they can show up for each other. Programs like this offer:

- **An affinity space that creates safety and a sense of belonging.** The ability to have a space already created for new employees makes a difference. It gives new, and existing, employees of color a place to quickly develop relationships and connect with other Black employees who have experience in that workplace. Similar to Employee Resources Groups (ERGs), affinity spaces can be influential in retaining Black talent, which is key for building an internal pipeline of leaders of color.
- **A recruitment tool that shows workers of color that the company is committed to inclusion.** Creating affinity groups and communities within an organization allows employees to build community and connect with other Black employees, signaling a real commitment to the inclusion of all workers. Many potential employees want to not only read about an organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion but also see how that organization is living out those values.
- **Exposure to other Black leaders. Black Girl Lunch enables Black employees to see people who look like them in leadership positions and develop authentic relationships with leaders of color.** This indicates to new employees that there are growth opportunities at this organization and that their talents are valued. In addition, being in spaces with executive leaders allows younger Black talent to develop mentoring relationships and get advice and visibility.

EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK ON BLACK GIRL LUNCH

“HONESTLY, IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT AND MADE ME FEEL EVEN MORE COMFORTABLE... I KNEW BY JOINING THAT I WOULD BE A PART OF A WONDERFUL TEAM. I FELT LIKE ALL THE BOXES CHECKED OFF FOR WHAT I DESIRED AND REQUIRED IN A NEW EMPLOYER.”

“HAVING A BLACK GIRLS' LUNCH HAS ALLOWED ME TO HAVE A SAFE SPACE WITHIN THE CORPORATE WORLD. THIS CREATES AN ENVIRONMENT FULL OF NETWORKING AND TEAM BONDING WITH OTHER LIKE-MINDED, PROFESSIONAL BLACK WOMEN. I HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED TO OTHER WOMEN WHO ARE NOW MY MENTORS. THEY HELP ME NAVIGATE THE WORKPLACE AS A RECENT GRADUATE. BEING PART OF A COMPANY THAT UNDERSTANDS THE VALUE OF GIVING PEOPLE OF COLOR A SAFE SPACE HAS ALLOWED US TO CREATE A SISTERHOOD AND BOND THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME.”

BLACK GIRL LUNCH HAS BEEN A SUCCESS IN ITS FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION. NOT ONLY HAS IT CREATED A SPACE FOR EXISTING EMPLOYEES TO DEVELOP DEEPER CONNECTIONS, BUT NEW BLACK EMPLOYEES HAVE SHARED HOW IMPACTFUL IT HAS BEEN FOR THEM TO FEEL A GREATER SENSE OF BELONGING AND HOW IT ENCOURAGED THEM TO ACCEPT A JOB AT THE ORGANIZATION, KNOWING RIGHT AWAY THEY HAD A COMMUNITY TO JOIN.

FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE HIRING CULTURE

WERE members are working to ensure that the diversity of their workforce is representative of the diversity in their communities and that their companies are actively fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace culture. Every recruiting, hiring, and onboarding interaction is an opportunity to advance these goals and support a sense of belonging for all potential employees – particularly Black and other candidates of color who have historically been excluded. That work starts with the first interaction a Black candidate has with a company and continues well beyond the hiring decision. As a coalition, our intention in showcasing these examples—intentional recruiting, use of objective selection criteria, and personalized onboarding—is to catalyze employer actions to identify and remove barriers for Black workers and build an equitable future for all.

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EQUITY

WERE focuses its efforts where we can have the most impact – the workplace. Follow our efforts & download additional policy and practice resources at EMPLOYERS4EQUITY.ORG/RESOURCES.

This report was built in partnership with social impact consulting firm **Kinetic West**.



KINETIC WEST

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