



# BRIDGE

# 2.0

Benchmarking Race, Inclusion and  
Diversity in Global Engagement

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# AUTHOR'S NOTE

We are delighted to present the results of round two of the BRIDGE survey. It has been an extremely fulfilling two-and-a-half-year journey for those of us involved—from the realization in the summer of 2020 that there was a massive data gap related to DEI in the global development sector, to our grassroots effort to fill that gap in 2021 with BRIDGE 1.0, and now this follow-up survey in 2023 to determine if anything has changed. All of it has been a labor of love to create knowledge that could benefit all of us who work in this sector and ultimately to impact the work we do in service of others. While Social Impact led the effort, this study would not have been possible without the support we received from our Advisory Council. We are immensely grateful to all of them.

Even as we have seen some positive changes related to DEI in the global development sector over the last two years, as evidenced by our most recent survey, we also see that there is much more work to be done.

With the operating environment constantly changing due to legal, political, and societal shifts as well as competing priorities—implementing change that sticks is difficult and complex work.

We are very proud that within our sector, BRIDGE 1.0 made DEI data visible for the first time and by doing so raised awareness and sparked change at both the sectoral and organizational levels. It is our hope that BRIDGE 2.0 does all this and more. As a company dedicated to improving development effectiveness, we are great believers in the power of data and evidence to influence positive change. But that can only happen if the data are used. As such, our biggest call to action is that you engage with this report—read it, share it widely and use it as a springboard for discussion and action at individual, organizational and sectoral levels.

—*Shiro Gnanaselvam*  
President and CEO, Social Impact

## Shiro Gnanaselvam



Shiro is the President and CEO of Social Impact. With over 30 years of international development experience in program, operational and leadership roles, she has been a passionate advocate for using evidence and learning to make social programs more effective. Shiro is a board member of the Coalition for Racial & Ethnic Equity in Development (CREED) and the Professional Services Council where she co-chairs the DEI Working Group for the Council of International Development Companies.

## Brooke Hill



Brooke co-leads Social Impact's Equity Incubator a learn-do initiative that works at the intersection of data, learning, equity, and inclusion. She serves as the technical lead of BRIDGE and Project Director of the Managing Agency Priorities mechanism which supports equity, inclusion, and organizational development within USAID. She is a Senior Program Manager in SI's Strategy, Performance, and Learning division.

## Mateusz Pucilowski



Mateusz is the Vice President of SI's Evaluation, Research, and Analytics division. He is the Project Director of BRIDGE and led survey design and data quality oversight.

# ADVISORY COUNCIL BRIDGE 2.0

The BRIDGE 2.0 Advisory Council consists of industry leaders from the following organizations. Members helped shape BRIDGE 2.0 by advising on and supporting survey design, survey dissemination, analysis of data, and dissemination of results. We are also grateful to Professional Services Council/Council of International Development Companies and Society for International Development-United States for their support.



# ABOUT BRIDGE

## WHAT IS BRIDGE?

BRIDGE stands for Benchmarking Race, Inclusion, and Diversity in Global Engagement. BRIDGE is an institutional survey that explores diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) metrics, structures, and practices at the organizational level across United States (US)-registered organizations in the international development and humanitarian assistance sector. BRIDGE has become a social movement of organizations dedicated to using evidence to advance DEI goals within their organizations and at the sectoral level. The data from BRIDGE serves as a tool for our community to ground truth organizational practices with evidence and serves as a call to action to advance equity and inclusion in the sector.



See the **BRIDGE 1.0** Report [here](#).



## WHY WAS IT DEVELOPED?

For many organizations in the US, attention to DEI increased exponentially after the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 and the massive racial justice mobilization that followed. Like many organizations in the international development sector, Social Impact (SI) searched to find evidence at the sectoral level on the extent of the industry's DEI challenges. What we found, however, was a pronounced gap in publicly available sector-wide data on diversity.

While a number of strategic actions are needed to meaningfully address the legacy of structural racism and other inequities in our sector and the organizations within it, we believed that establishing an evidence base was among

the first steps needed. And, so we joined forces with others and set about to do this. The result was BRIDGE 1.0.

Having this data enables individual and collective action. Organizations can compare their own data to the industry benchmark and identify areas where they need to focus their efforts. At the sectoral level, the data points to gaps where joint action is required to achieve meaningful and lasting change. The data provides a basis for mutual accountability and ultimately contributes to changing the sector for the better. Further, BRIDGE 2.0 and future iterations provide time series trends of DEI metrics, distill what is and is not working, and serve as a real-time guide to advance DEI within organizations.

## WHAT WE LOOK AT

BRIDGE examines the state of diversity in global development organizations. It looks at the state of diversity along three diversity dimensions—race and ethnicity, gender, and disability—and at various organizational levels—staff, leadership teams, chiefs of party (COPs), boards, and chief executive officer (CEOs). It also compiles data on race and gender intersectionality at the CEO level. BRIDGE also explores governance structures (e.g., DEI focal points and Councils), policies (e.g., DEI policies), and practices (e.g., improvements in DEI data practices, level of transparency around DEI) that organizations have in place to support their DEI efforts. Finally, it explores opportunities and challenges that organizations face in advancing their DEI goals.

DISABILITY

RACE & ETHNICITY

GENDER

# METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENT PROFILE

In June 2023, Social Impact launched the BRIDGE 2.0 survey, two years after the initial benchmarking survey of 2021. Both iterations gather data on US-hired workforce composition and DEI practices for international development and humanitarian assistance organizations headquartered in the US. The 2023 survey also digs deeper into organizational governance arrangements and experiences

related to achieving DEI goals. Through these components, BRIDGE 2.0 allows us to observe trends in workforce diversity and DEI practices between 2021 and 2023, and enhances our understanding of what is and is not working so we can adapt and improve our organizational DEI practices based on evidence. See Annex 1 for more information about comparability between the two survey rounds

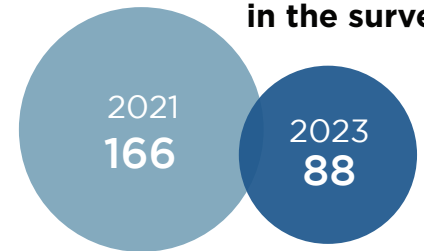
## WHO TOOK THE SURVEY?

The survey targeted US-based international development and humanitarian assistance organizations. Eighty-eight organizations responded to the 2023 and 166 organizations responded to the 2022 survey.

### Registration status

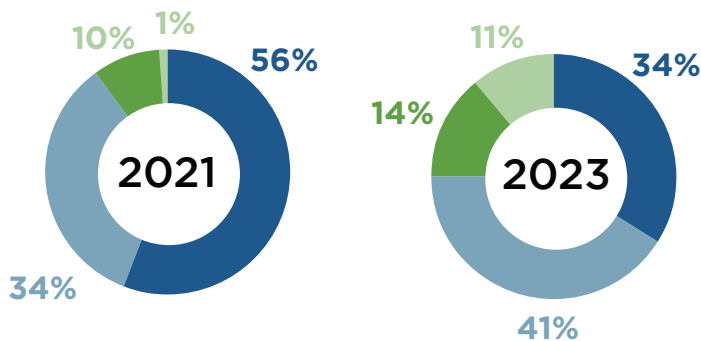


### Organizations in the survey

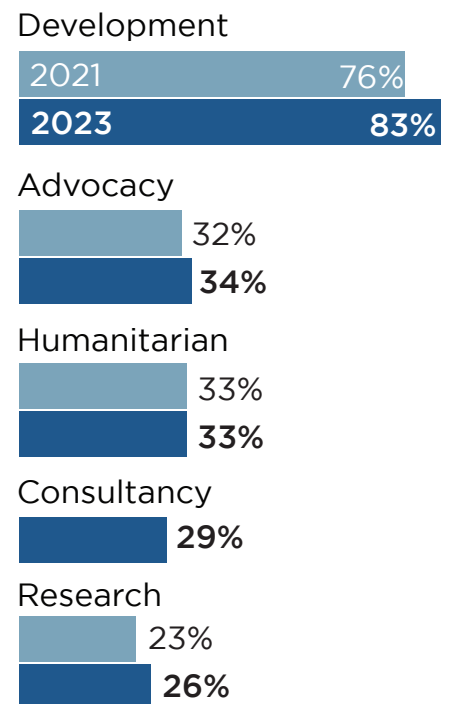


### Organization revenue by registration status

- Small non-profit
- Large non-profit
- Small for-profit
- Large for-profit



### Mission by sector



**72%**

of 2023 respondents made at least one external commitment to DEI.



# FINDINGS

Snapshot of  
DEI in Global  
Development

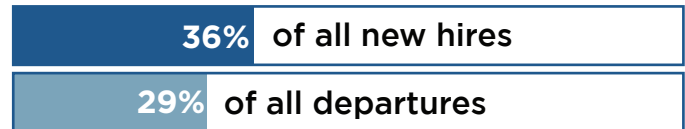
in 2023

# DEMOGRAPHICS

To account for the substantial variation in how organizations capture staff diversity data, we first ask responding organizations what specific categories they use to capture race, gender, and disability status. We then ask the proportion of these workforce demographic categories across five hierarchical levels—staff, chiefs of party (COP)<sup>1</sup>, senior leadership team, board, and chief executive officer (CEO) or equivalent. In the following sections, we provide an overview of findings for race/ethnicity, gender, and disability status.

**What does BIPOC mean?** *BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and people of color. This term is specifically used in the United States to center the lived experiences of people of color and recognizes the acute racialized systemic experiences of Black and Indigenous communities.*

**BIPOC individuals** have entered the global development workforce at only a slightly higher rate than they have left it.

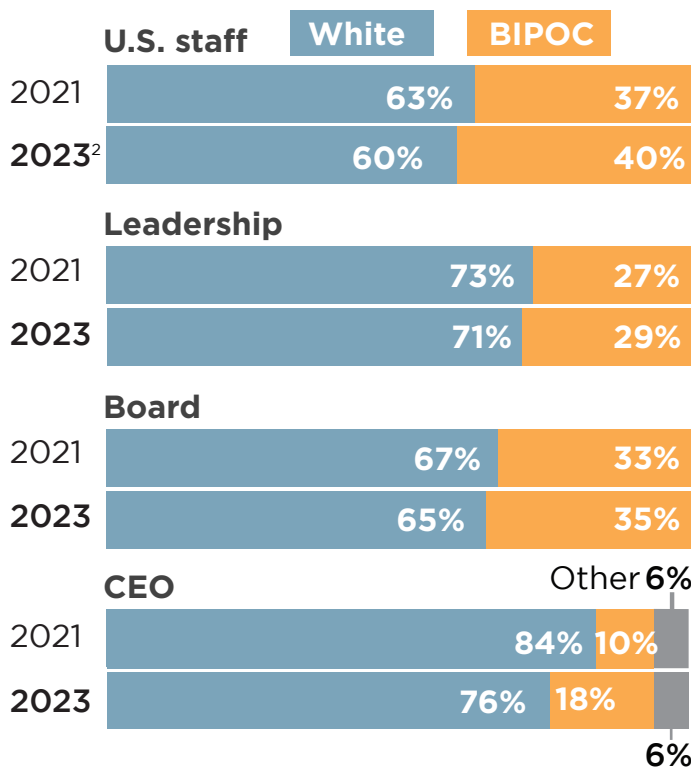


## RACE AND ETHNICITY

The development and humanitarian assistance industry continues to be comprised primarily of White employees, ranging from 76 percent of CEOs to 60 percent of staff. The one exception were COPs, which were majority BIPOC (54 percent). We find no difference in the

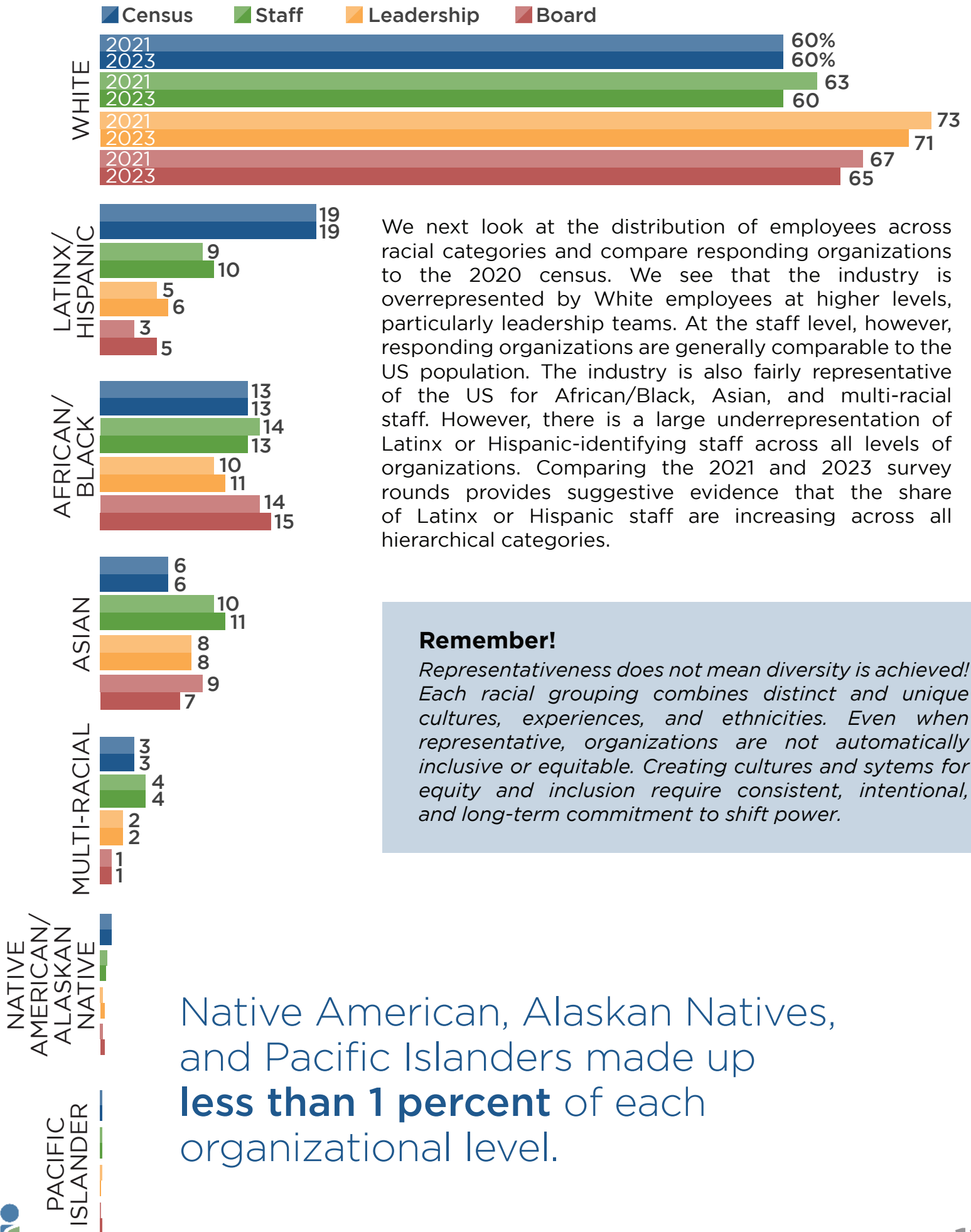
average racial diversity of staff and leadership teams among for-profit and non-profit respondents. However, for-profits had, on average, fewer BIPOC board members and were more likely to have a BIPOC CEO. Nineteen percent of leadership teams had no BIPOC members.

In comparing changes between the two BRIDGE rounds, we find suggestive evidence of slight improvement in racial and ethnic diversity across all employee levels in non-profits, measured as the proportion of BIPOC staff as compared to White staff. There was no evidence of longitudinal changes among for-profit respondents.



**of leadership teams had no BIPOC members.**





We next look at the distribution of employees across racial categories and compare responding organizations to the 2020 census. We see that the industry is overrepresented by White employees at higher levels, particularly leadership teams. At the staff level, however, responding organizations are generally comparable to the US population. The industry is also fairly representative of the US for African/Black, Asian, and multi-racial staff. However, there is a large underrepresentation of Latinx or Hispanic-identifying staff across all levels of organizations. Comparing the 2021 and 2023 survey rounds provides suggestive evidence that the share of Latinx or Hispanic staff are increasing across all hierarchical categories.

**Remember!**

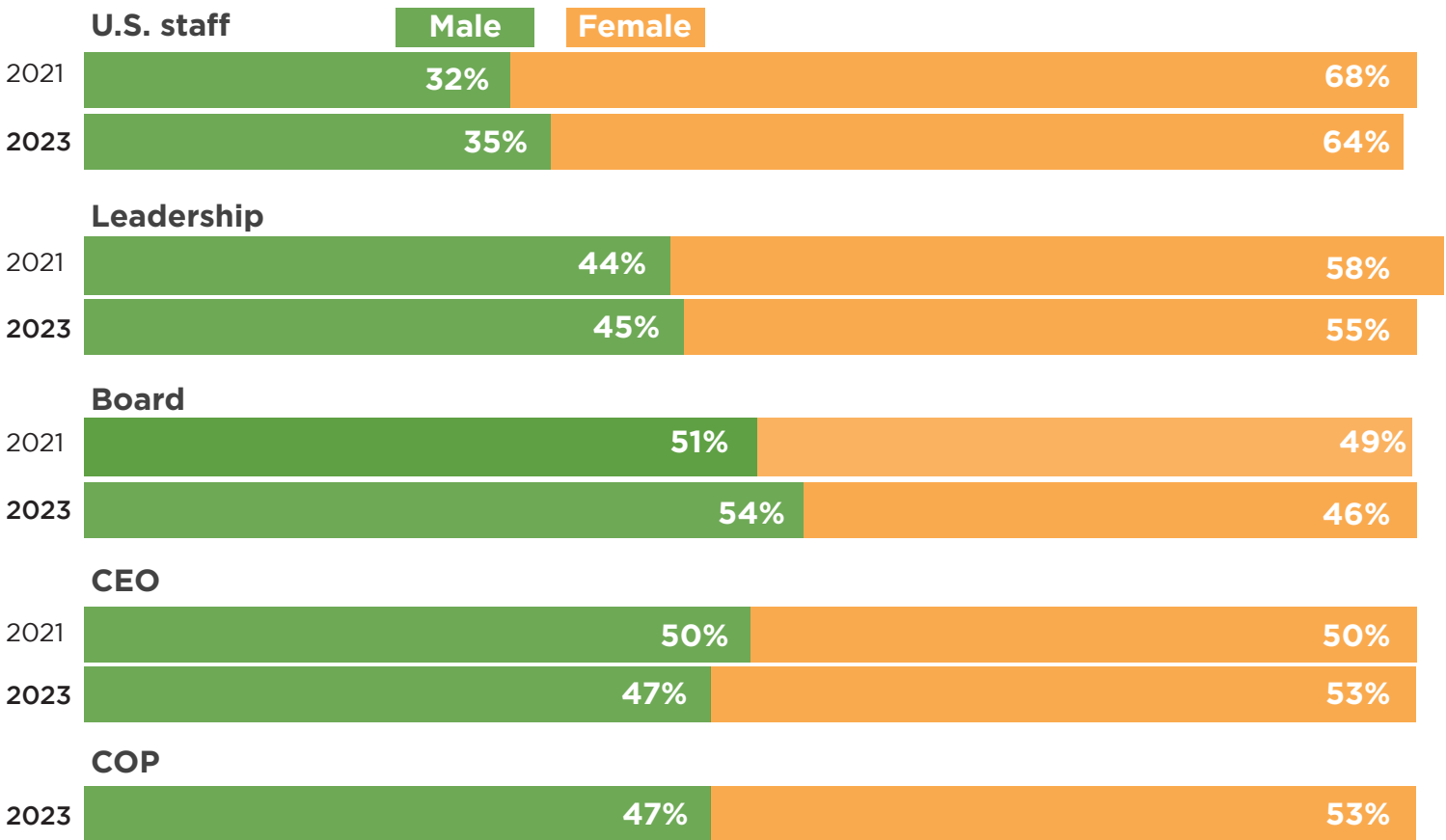
*Representativeness does not mean diversity is achieved! Each racial grouping combines distinct and unique cultures, experiences, and ethnicities. Even when representative, organizations are not automatically inclusive or equitable. Creating cultures and systems for equity and inclusion require consistent, intentional, and long-term commitment to shift power.*

Native American, Alaskan Natives, and Pacific Islanders made up **less than 1 percent** of each organizational level.

# GENDER

Relative to the US population, the industry is overrepresented by female employees at the staff and leadership team levels. Female representation decreases as organizational power increases but still remains in line with population levels even at the highest organizational levels. There is suggestive evidence that non-profits had a higher proportion of females on boards and at the CEO level than for-profits. Comparing the 2021 and 2023 BRIDGE rounds, we do not see any substantive changes in gender diversity.

In 2023, 3 percent of CEOs identified as gender diverse.



Note: Totals may be greater than or less than 100 because data provided by organization varies based on how they capture data.



## DISABILITY

In 2023, employees with one or more disabilities comprise about 10 percent of staff and leadership teams, but substantially less (2 percent) among boards and CEOs. Additionally, a large proportion of responding organizations reported not knowing the disability status of their staff, particularly at more senior levels. For example, half of respondents did not disclose the disability status of their CEO in both the 2021 and 2023 survey rounds. This high degree of “don’t know” responses was hypothesized as being driven by respondents not wanting to identify CEOs (this is the only employee category filled by a single individual). However, the phenomenon of respondents not knowing the disability status increased between the two survey rounds in other employee categories. For example, whereas all responding organizations reported knowing the disability status of their staff and boards in 2021, by 2023 the corresponding figures for “don’t know” were 20 percent and 66 percent. Given the increase in these responses, it is not possible to identify changes in the proportion of staff with disabilities across any of the organizational levels or to compare non-profit and for-profit respondents. We also conclude from this phenomenon that organizations have greater awareness of what it means to have a disability—specifically, that disabilities can be invisible—which has led to improved practices in how organizations report disability data.

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Comparing the intersection of race and gender among CEOs, we see a fairly large increase in the proportion of BIPOC males (from 6 percent to 10 percent) and BIPOC females (from 4 percent to 8 percent) between the two survey rounds. This comes primarily from a reduction in White male CEOs (from 44 percent to 32 percent). However, because the absolute number of BIPOC CEOs remained the same between the two rounds while the number of responding organizations declined, we feel the increase in the proportion of BIPOC CEOs might be overstated.

“Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves... they create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking.”

—Kimberlé Crenshaw

10%

**of staff or leadership teams have one or more disabilities in 2023.**

50%

**of respondents did not know the disability status of their CEO in both the 2021 and 2023 survey rounds.**

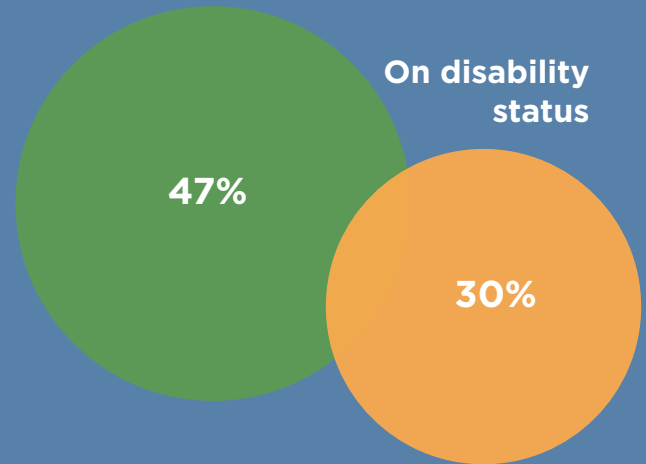
# CHANGES TO HOW ORGANIZATIONS CAPTURE DATA

Since 2021, one-third of organizations reported changing the demographic categories they use to collect workforce composition data. The most common examples respondents provided of these changes included:

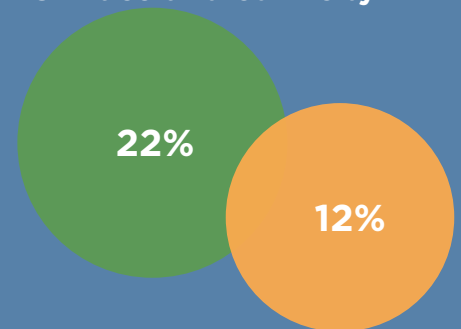
- Updating gender categories, which included adding gender options, write-in options, and pronoun-selection.
- Updating race and ethnicity categories. Specifically, organizations increased the number of options and sub-categories, such as including Indigenous, and offered write-in options. Organizations also included definitions as guidance.
- Updating disability categories including self-identification and accessibility needs requests.

## Organizations that DO NOT capture data

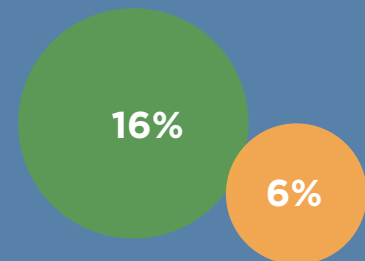
● 2021 ● 2023



## On race and ethnicity



## On gender



Although the 2023 data shows that more organizations capture demographic data compared to 2021, the improvement may be a result of this latest iteration including more large organizations, which are subject to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reporting requirements when headcount exceeds 50 employees for government contractors and 100 employees for others.

# GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

## POLICIES, STRATEGIES, STRUCTURES

### POLICIES

Between 2021 and 2023, there is an increased prevalence of DEI policies for both non-profits and for-profits. For-profits are more likely to have DEI policies. As illustrated in the graph to the right, 81 percent of for-profits in 2023 reported having a DEI policy compared to 31 percent of non-profits. Eighty percent of organizations with policies in 2023 published these in 2020 or later.

Eighty-three percent of responding organizations in 2023 have human resource-led DEI initiatives and programming. Of these organizations, 80 percent have DEI trainings, 98 percent have hybrid or remote working options, and 83 percent have disability accommodations. Less common, 37 percent have mentorship programs and 27 percent have partnerships with minority serving institutions.

### FOCAL POINTS

Half of all organizations have a DEI focal point. Sixty-nine percent of large organizations with 100 or more employees, have DEI focal points compared to 54 percent of smaller organizations. Most focal points report directly to the CEO, at 56 percent and 14 percent report to their Senior Leadership Team or Chief Human Resource Officer. When asked how effective the DEI focal point was in achieving their mission, 90 percent of responding organizations rated as “very” or “somewhat effective.” Larger organizations were more

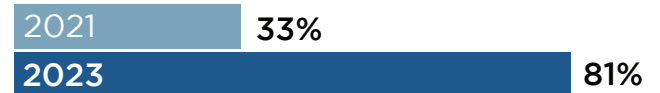
Most organizations added DEI policies in 2020 or after.

#### Percentage of organizations with DEI policies

##### Non-profit



##### For-profit

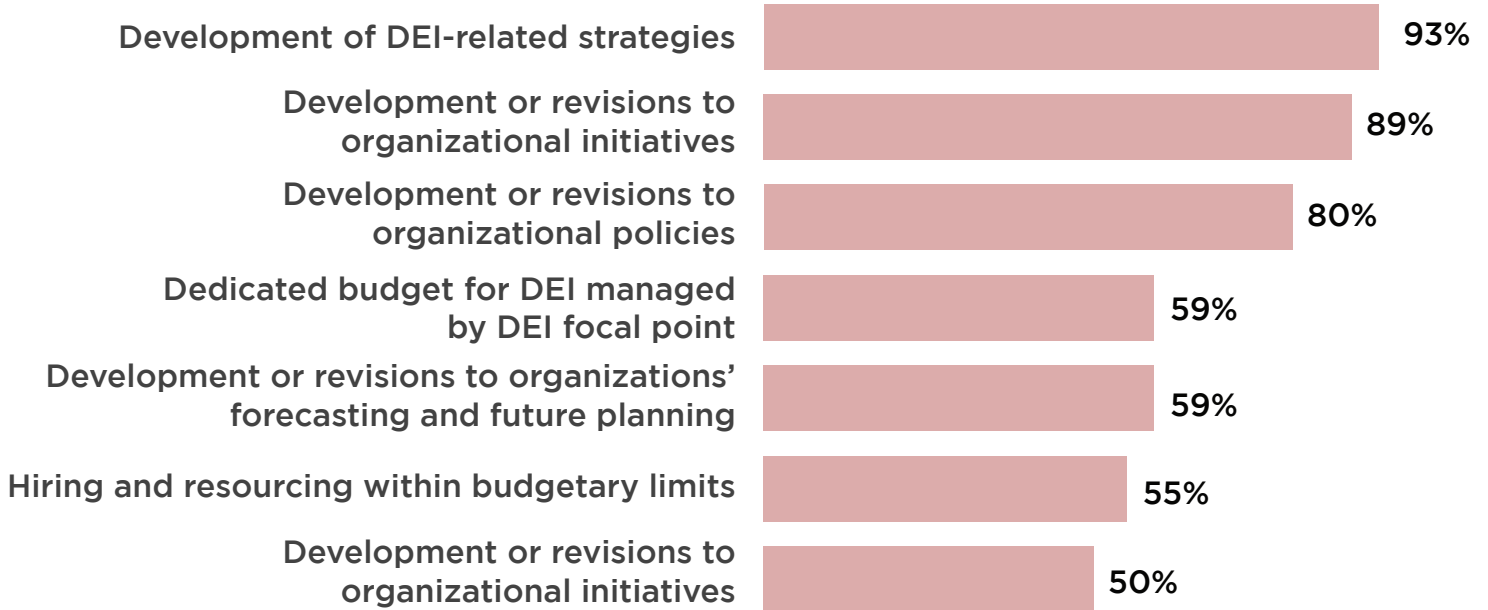


*We defined the DEI focal point as someone like a Chief Diversity Officer or similar whose responsibilities are primarily or include oversight of the internal organization's policies and practices to advance DEI.*

likely to consider this position more effective than smaller organizations. Ninety-five percent of the focal point positions were created in 2020 or later. Many respondents reported challenges with the role being a new position. Organizations reported resistance or lack of buy-in for the role as well as lack of dedicated budget and staff to effectively achieve their goals. While 93 percent of focal points have authority over developing DEI-related strategies, only 59 percent have dedicated budgets.



## DEI Focal Point Authorities



## DEI COUNCILS

Fifty-four percent of organizations have a DEI Council, with councils more common in large organizations. Eighty-nine percent of responding organizations rated the councils as “somewhat” or “very effective.” For-profits were more likely to rate as effective compared to non-profits. Organizations reported that a major challenge they encountered was their lack of power to drive change. Cited examples included the lack of authority to make corporate-level decisions, lack of independence, and the absence of accountability mechanisms. Additionally, DEI Councils lacked internal sustainability, with many positions having high-turnover and unclearly defined roles and responsibilities. Councils could not make systemic change but were often relegated to time-bound tasks such as event or training coordination.

## METRICS

There was a slight increase in the prevalence of organizations that had internal DEI metrics with 32 percent of organizations in 2021 and 37 percent in 2023 having internal DEI metrics. These metrics included organizational targets for gender, race, and ethnicity, for recruitment and retention, and proportion of BIPOC in leadership. To support these metrics, organizations updated recruitment and performance appraisal processes and created requirements around board and executive team hiring. Thirty-eight percent of organizations have succession plans, and of those, only 15 percent have DEI requirements in those succession plans. Those requirements included specifications for age, ethnicity, gender, region, and disability.

**54%** of organizations have a DEI Council

**37%**

of organizations in 2023 have internal DEI metrics





# TRANSPARENCY

We asked responding organizations about their practices in sharing staff diversity and diversity disaggregated salary data. As demonstrated in the graphic below, we find an increase in the overall proportion of organizations that report sharing workforce gender and racial composition data within their organizations. There was substantial variation in these trends across different sizes and registration types (i.e., for-profit and non-profit), with larger organizations generally more likely to share this staff composition data

irrespective of registration status.

Conversely, we see a large reduction in organizations reporting sharing this information externally between the two survey rounds. This phenomenon was largely consistent across registration status and organizational size.

Finally, we find very limited sharing of gender and race disaggregated compensation data internally. While low among non-profits, this practice was very rare among for-profits (only 3 organizations).

## Share gender composition internally

### Non-profit



### For-profit



## Share race composition internally

### Non-profit



### For-profit



# OVERARCHING CHALLENGES

Organizations were asked about tensions and challenges they experienced in implementing their DEI policies, initiatives, and structures<sup>3</sup>. Organizations consistently reported the following:

## 1 Lack of Resources and Competing Priorities

Organizations consistently reported lack of time, bandwidth, staffing, and budgets dedicated to DEI. Organization leadership teams face many competing and time-sensitive priorities, which affect and, at times, conflict with the prioritization of DEI efforts.

## 2 Stuck in the Planning Stage

Over the past few years, organizations created strategies, structures, and policies to advance their DEI goals. However respondents experienced challenges in moving from the planning stage to the action and implementation stage. Many DEI focal points and Councils were newly established and had to develop new processes and authorities and figure out how to integrate into existing organizational operations.

“We’re still figuring that out.”  
—2023 responding organization

## 3 Operating in a Global Context

### ○ Lack of Global Strategy

Organizations reported a lack of clarity in how to apply global equity or localization policies across their offices. At the most basic level, organizations did not have data on their workforce demographics outside US-offices, or if the data existed, they did not know how to interpret the data considering local contexts. Critical operational and logistic barriers prevented smooth integration of DEI and localization policies including, for example, language differences, time zones, varying holidays and state-provided leave, pay equity, equitable hiring, and performance appraisals. Organizations reported the need for a strategy, plan, or templates to follow for guiding global policies and implementation.

“My organization and I have no clue where to even start with expanding DEI from our HQ office globally throughout our field offices.”

### ○ *Legal and Cultural Differences*

Organizations faced challenges in applying universal DEI standards when these standards conflicted with legal and cultural regulations in some operating countries. For example, organizations that work in Uganda were extremely limited in their ability to roll out global Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transsexual, Queer, or Questioning (LGBTQ+) policies. Some organizations with faith-based missions faced similar constraints with applying inclusive policies for LGBTQ+ employees and were met with dissent from internal organizational leadership and staff.

### ○ *Lack of DEI-Dedicated Global Resources*

Though lack of resources was already mentioned above, it warrants a separate mention specifically for the acute resource demands for implementing a global DEI effort. According to respondents, these resourcing issues were more pronounced because global DEI or localization efforts were relatively new and did not have defined operational processes. The individuals leading these efforts did not have the institutional knowledge or, at times, recognized authority, to effectively implement these efforts.

### ○ *US-Centric Perception of DEI*

For many organizations, their DEI policies, language, and concepts are grounded in US-framing and language. For example, many DEI initiatives have a focus on race, but this framing is less applicable in countries that are more racially homogenous but diverse in other aspects such as ethnicity or religion. Organizations reported that some non-US offices and leadership do not view DEI as a global initiative, and that in some cases, there is not global buy-in.

# Con stitu tions

# RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES REMAIN UNDER-REPRESENTED IN POSITIONS OF POWER

The share of BIPOC individuals at the leadership team and board level is largely unchanged from the 2021 baseline levels, though there is likely a small increased prevalence of BIPOC CEOs in 2023, which is almost entirely driven by the for-profit sector.

Why is this the case? One reason for the lack of, or minimal, change at the CEO level is that at senior levels, shifts typically take longer to materialize because attrition is often slower and consequently opportunities to enter these levels open up more rarely. However, recent reporting has indicated that there has been a significant uptick in CEO resignations in the last year—as much as 50 percent overall compared to the previous 12 months and even higher, 85 percent, in the government/non-profit sector. If this trend was also reflected in the global development sector, the limited increase in BIPOC CEO representation under these unusually favorable circumstances with ample opportunity to enter the CEO ranks is quite troubling and might be explained by the conclusion we draw below.

19 percent of leadership teams in 2023 were **entirely White.**

The lack of growth in BIPOC representation at the leadership team level is also cause for concern as is the finding that roughly one in five organizations had all White leadership teams both in 2021 and 2023 (19 percent of responding organizations in 2023 and 21 percent in 2021). It might suggest that even the small increases in BIPOC representation at the CEO level in the private sector might not be sustainable over time. If leadership teams are where future CEOs are developed, coached, and mentored, there must be robust BIPOC representation in this group so that they even have a chance at competing for the top job. This remains an area that requires sustained attention.

# THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR REMAINS PREDOMINANTLY WHITE AND FEMALE, INCLUDING AT THE TOP

The global development sector in the US remains predominantly female. At staff levels, women are overrepresented relative to the general population. At higher levels in organizations the share of women drops off but is still at, or slightly above, population levels and significantly higher than in other industries. Our sector should be proud of this achievement which significantly outperforms the norm. For example, among Fortune 500 companies, only 11 percent had female CEOs in 2023<sup>ii</sup>. Among all US organizations, women accounted for only 29 percent of CEOs<sup>iii</sup>.

However, even though our sector leads in terms of representation of women at the highest organizational levels, the same does not hold true when an intersectional lens is applied. While the share of BIPOC CEOs may have increased since the last BRIDGE survey they are still underrepresented relative to population comparisons. This is particularly the case for female BIPOC CEOs who account for only 8 percent of CEOs in our sector even though more than half of all CEOs are female. Much more work remains to be done on this front.

53% of US global development organizations had a **female CEO** vs. 11% of Fortune 500 companies

Finally, we also noted advances in the categories used to collect gender data. Specifically, more organizations are using non-binary gender categories, and this is even showing up in the gender data that are reported (for example in BRIDGE 2.0, 3 percent of organizational leaders were reported to be gender diverse). While the changes are relatively small and not universally applied, they are important steps towards making diversity data itself more inclusive.

## DISABILITY REPORTING SHOWS SIGNS OF GREATER AWARENESS

Similar to race/ethnicity and gender, we saw little to no change in disability status data that were reported in BRIDGE 2.0 compared to 1.0. The biggest change was at the board level where there was a significant increase in “I don’t know” responses in 2023. We believe that this is evidence of much greater awareness about what is and is not a disability and that not all disabilities are physical and/or visible to others. Because many organizations probably do not collect self-reported demographic information from their board, individuals responding to the survey armed with greater awareness about disability chose the “I don’t know” response rather than making an independent determination about board members’ disability status.

The biggest change was at the board level where there was a significant increase in **“I don’t know”** responses in 2023.

## ORGANIZATIONS HAVE INVESTED IN ESTABLISHING GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES FOR DEI

This is the area where we saw the most improvement across the two survey rounds, particularly among for-profit organizations and larger organizations. From establishing DEI policies, to appointing DEI focal points to incorporating DEI into organizational strategies and values, organizations have invested substantially since 2021 in building the foundation for DEI. As an indicator of this effort, we saw, for example, that 80 percent of organizations who reported having a DEI policy, said that they had published it in the last two years. We feel that these steps are highly significant because they involve foundation building that will in turn enable shifts at the outcome level—more diverse staff, more inclusive practices, and eventually culture shifts—in the future. Additionally, we feel these are shifts that are enduring and cannot be easily undone. The increases in internal (within organization) transparency on DEI issues was also a positive development, particularly alongside the shifts in governance structures, because it increases accountability and ensures that organizations will stay the course.

We feel these are shifts that are enduring and cannot be easily undone.



# THERE ARE MODEST IMPROVEMENTS IN HOW DIVERSITY DATA ARE CAPTURED

The BRIDGE survey provides suggestive evidence that organizations are improving how they capture workforce composition data, with 33 percent of organizations changing their demographic categories to be more inclusive. These improvements will better represent the gender, racial and ethnic, and disability identities of staff.

Improvements not only included more options, but also, included more inclusive practices such as defining terms, offering the selection of pronouns, and offering write-in options.

33 percent of organizations  
are changing their demographic  
categories to be **more inclusive.**

# COMMITMENT TO DEI REMAINS BUT COMPETING PRIORITIES AND RESOURCE LIMITATIONS ARE A SEVERE IMPEDIMENT TO MAKING PROGRESS

The international development sector is committed to DEI efforts, but DEI is not consistently prioritized over other critical and time-sensitive needs. Three-quarters of responding organizations were signatories to sector-led DEI commitments and approximately half reported that they have individuals specifically dedicated to leading internal DEI policies as well as DEI Councils. Most organizations have DEI policies and human-resource led initiatives to support internal DEI practices. While this commitment is essential for progress, qualitative responses consistently highlighted resource limitations and competing priorities as the key barrier to effectively advance equity and inclusion. Specifically, respondents did not have enough time to effectively coordinate, plan, and implement their DEI efforts, did not have the budget or staff to carry out these efforts, and were dealt too many priorities to strategically effect change. These findings are consistent with the 2023 CEO Insights on NGO Futures Report  by InterAction, which shows a steady decline in CEO's prioritization ranking of DEI, from second in 2021, to fifth in 2022, and finally to sixth in 2023. Even so, 78 percent of 2023 CEOs agreed that DEI is a priority from their organization which is a similar proportion to the 2021 and 2022 responses. The BRIDGE survey itself is a reflection of these competing priorities and limitations.

In 2021, when community-drive to seek DEI solutions was at a precipice, the survey received 166 responses. In 2023, we received 88 responses. Though the response rate on the second round of BRIDGE was significantly lower than in initial round, our initial launch event had 276 registrants with a highly engaged and participatory audience, and additional requests and planning for follow-on events with donors and implementing partners alike. Organizations continue to highlight their desire and genuine interest in the data, but even setting aside time to take the survey (which was longer in the second iteration) was a barrier some organizations could not overcome.

These resource constraints are especially pronounced in the global development community.

Based on the responses, organizations face so many unknowns in engaging in the global DEI space that they become stuck in the planning and scoping stage, unable to move to implementation. As a sector, we do not have globally accessible and validated workforce diversity data, a unified language on how to discuss DEI without the US-centric framing, or guidance on what applying global DEI policies look like.

# THERE ARE TENSIONS BETWEEN GLOBAL DEI, LOCALIZATION, AND DOMESTIC DEI THAT NEED TO BE RESOLVED. BUT ALSO MANY POINTS OF SIMILARITY.

Though DEI initiatives have been widely supported within the development sector, this support is not universal nor without complication. From BRIDGE results, we saw that organizations are dealing with tensions between global DEI and localization on the one hand and US-centric DEI constructs, language and practices on the other. On a day-to-day basis, they are struggling with where DEI ends, and localization begins which manifests in the search for answers to practical but critical questions such as: How do you have pay equity in a global organization? How do you offer equitable benefits? How do you understand what diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility looks like in each operating country? How do you factor in local power dynamics? How do you operate in countries with legal and cultural barriers counter to your organization's DEI principles? How do you account for time-zones and the dominance of the English-language?

Conceptually, DEI and localization are inherently connected in the objectives of shifting power, creating equity and promoting inclusive practices. Meaning, shifting power to those systemically excluded—whether at an individual level, like ensuring that BIPOC women and gender-diverse employees hold positions of corporate strategic leadership, or at a global level, like decentralizing

How do you have **pay equity** on a global level?

How do you offer **equitable benefits**?

organizational budget from a Western-based home-office to offices in the countries of operation. Operationally, DEI and localization are often separated due to earmarked budgets and organizational structures and staffing needs. These distinctions can be helpful to provide focused attention and do not fundamentally conflict. However, given the similarities between the two, as well the absence of a universal understanding of how these terms are operationally integrated, leads to confusion, unhelpful siloing, or implementing paralysis.

# CALL TO ACTION

Based on the findings of BRIDGE 2.0 and the conclusions we have drawn, we present a series of recommendations for our community. The recommendations fall into two categories: Those that require action at the sectoral level and those that require action at the organizational level. We caveat these recommendations by noting that we are not DEI experts but rather passionate advocates for greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in our own organization and in our industry.

We view this **call to action** as a starting point for engagement, not the whole solution.

## SECTORIAL ACTIONS

### 1 DEVELOP A SECTOR-WIDE FRAMEWORK THAT ALIGNS DEI AND LOCALIZATION

We believe such a framework is essential if the global development sector is going to maintain continued focus on both DEI and localization as well as other related issues such as gender equity and social inclusion. Though DEI and localization have many common features such as their focus on shifting power, equity, and inclusion, these two highly complementary initiatives have found their place in the development space in ways that are not always complementary —DEI is perceived as US-centric and internal to organizations; localization (as well as gender equity and social inclusion) is what happens in programs and therefore is geographically centered in the countries that are traditionally the recipients of development funding. Ultimately these equally important and necessary efforts end up competing for resources, brain space, and attention among those that seek to advance both.

A common framework would leverage the commonalities of the two approaches and be built around the shared goal of making development more impactful by shifting power and prioritizing equity, inclusion, and belonging. These would become the common terminology of the effort. Core principles might also be needed (for example, these could stem from existing concepts of Do No Harm, Nothing about us without us, Abolition and Liberation theories, and Indigenous practices) to ensure applicability across countries as well as to organizations and programs alike. A common framework would not replace localization and DEI initiatives but rather be the overarching glue that connects these complementary efforts and enables them to move forward in a more coordinated and synergistic way.

While this would not be easy, we believe it is crucial to ensuring that not only DEI but also localization endure and work in harmony rather than in competition with one another. Funders and associations that represent the international development and humanitarian assistance community would need to play a key role in crafting such a framework.

## 2 FUNDERS MUST SUPPORT POWER SHIFTING WITHIN US GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS AS MUCH AS THEY SUPPORT POWER SHIFTING FROM US ORGANIZATIONS TO LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS.

Funders have enormous leverage to bring about change in global development organizations and programs because they control the purse strings. USAID has recently leveraged its power to radically shift attention to localization in the implementing partner (IP) community. However, its focus on DEI has mostly been internal to its own organization and hardly, if at all, to hold its partners accountable for changes within theirs. While associations within the IP community like InterAction and the Coalition for Racial & Ethnic Equity in Development (CREED) have stepped in to formulate pledges and encourage the community to make commitments to change, the results of BRIDGE 2.0 show quite clearly that change is very slow to come and that organizations are stuck at the foundation building stage, unable to move to implementation. The non-profit community in particular is struggling on this front.



For example, funders could create incentives by asking IPs to publicly disclose their equity and inclusion efforts and organizational diversity profile. Progress over time on indicators such as BIPOC representation in management teams and Boards might even become factors considered in making new awards in the same way that having a cooperating country national as a COP is increasingly being prioritized.

**Change is very slow** to come and organizations are stuck at the foundation-building stage, unable to move to implementation.

### 3 HELP ORGANIZATIONS, PARTICULARLY SMALLER ONES, WITH RESOURCES TO ADVANCE DEI.

Smaller organizations are particularly impacted by the challenge of moving from planning to implementation of DEI efforts without the resources or staff to make progress.

Industry associations have a critical role to play in addressing this challenge by building up platforms and networks and using them to share tools, resources, and knowledge so each organization doesn't have to start from scratch.

Many industry organizations already have platforms (such as CREED's Learning Hub, and InterAction's Resources)  and are starting to collate this information.  As these platforms continue to grow, they should prioritize practical solutions that will help organizations to move from thought to action more quickly —road maps, templates, tools. Rather than waiting for a “best practice” to emerge, these platforms can share emerging practices. A small organization with three different examples of DEI policies to draw from when crafting their own is in a much better position than one that is waiting until the perfect policy emerges.

Rather than waiting for a “**best practice**” to emerge, these platforms can share emerging practices.

Industry Associations can also establish networks of individuals at different organizational levels who are supporting or championing DEI initiatives. Virtual communities can work well, connect people who are geographically dispersed, and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and tools. However, such groups need a leader who can manage the community, seed conversations, and keep it active. Network building could also help to broaden the cohort of DEI champions within organizations. Currently, DEI efforts are often dominated by executive-level champions. While this is necessary to signal the criticality of DEI, these are also often the busiest individuals in any organization. As such, the group of champions must become broader and communities of practice, virtual or otherwise, can be a great way to foster more involvement, engagement and leadership by mid-level staff. This might also help to unlock the paralysis that is keeping organizations from moving from strategy to action as evidenced by the survey.

# 4 DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A LONG-TERM PLAN TO ENSURE A DIVERSE PIPELINE OF TALENT FOR THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR.

With the US Supreme Court ban on affirmative action ending race-conscious university admissions, the supply chain for global development talent is likely to become less racially diverse. Research focused on states that had previously banned affirmative action in public university admissions showed a permanent talent loss that impacted Black and Latinx students at three times the rate as White students. With the ban on affirmative action and tertiary educational programs that typically feed the development and humanitarian assistance sector being already predominantly White, the coming years are likely to result in an even greater preponderance of White candidates for global development jobs.

Creative sectoral solutions are needed to ensure that the talent pipeline continues to become more diverse despite the changes in the law. These solutions can include the following:

**1 Reconsider the need for a graduate degree:** To be promoted in the international development industry, and sometimes even to be hired, a Master's degree is often required. We need to examine the necessity of this practice. Generally, most of our work is refined in real-time, experience-driven professional environments rather than in the classroom. This shift will need to be accompanied by, or perhaps driven by, a change in our industry culture which is biased towards demonstration of high levels of educational attainment. Critically, this change cannot occur without funders and donors leading the way by reducing or eliminating certain education criteria from requirements.

**2 Partner with Minority Serving Institutions (MSI):** The development industry currently has a clear bias towards certain universities. By increasing our focus on acquiring talent from universities that serve traditionally marginalized populations like Tribal Colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, we can expand not only the racial and ethnic diversity of our organizations but also inject diversity in thought and perspective. Beyond partnerships focused only on talent acquisition, long-term industry level partnerships could help MSI's to create programs and concentrations that are relevant to the global development sector.

**3 Cultivate mentorship and apprenticeship pipelines:** Mentorships and apprenticeships are successful ways to provide opportunity to traditionally marginalized populations. These programs don't need to only focus on the university level but can start in high school or community colleges to open up pathways to the international development sector.

# ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIONS

## ACT INTENTIONALLY TO SHIFT POWER

This recommendation is one we made after the first round of BRIDGE, and we feel compelled to repeat it considering the findings that representation on the three diversity dimensions we looked at in the survey haven't really shifted over the last two years. We learned in particular that racial minorities remain underrepresented in the corridors of power—in leadership teams, at the CEO level, and on boards. To remedy this may take time, but organizations must act intentionally now. Steps to consider include:

**Leadership succession planning with a racial equity lens. This includes active sponsorship, coaching and mentoring for rising leaders who are from under-represented communities.**

**CEO/Board term limits. This is a strategy to open up senior positions that typically turn over infrequently so that there are opportunities for more diverse leaders to step up to the plate. Without this, the fruits of leadership succession planning efforts might take a very long time to realize.**

**DEI policies that enable and support the above. Most BRIDGE respondents noted that their DEI policies supported diversity recruitment. But policies must also cover engagement, retention, and advancement for under-represented groups so that internal super stars can also move into positions of power.**



## KEEP FOCUSING ON ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHANGE.

Ensuring accountability for improvements in DEI are necessary to both drive and sustain change.

High-quality data about staff diversity as well as staff experience (including equity and inclusion) are the fundamental building blocks for accountability. Paired with greater transparency, even internally within the organization, can promote a culture of accountability. BRIDGE 2.0 showed promising, early signs of improvement on both fronts—organizations are investing in better data, and organizations are being more transparent, particularly about the diversity composition of their staff, if not so much about equity in compensation. We encourage global development organizations to continue on this path.

## START MOVING FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION

Our final recommendation for global development organizations is that they need to start moving from strategy to action. This is necessary to eventually shift the needle on outcomes. The improvements in the structures and governance arrangements for DEI from BRIDGE 1.0 to 2.0 were significant, particularly among for profits and larger organizations (both for-profit and non-profit). These improvements are significant because they signal long-term commitments and enduring change. It's easy to implement a one-off initiative and then forget about the issue; it's harder to unwind something that has been built into your organization's strategy and is governed by a policy. However, just having a policy in place or a goal in a strategic plan is not enough. Those policies and strategies must be implemented to shift DEI outcomes. Seek help from others. Lobby industry groups to create platforms for knowledge and resource sharing that you can help you. And lean into action with the intention of learning and adapting.

# ANNEX1: METHODOLOGY

## APPROACH TO COMPARING THE TWO ROUNDS OF BRIDGE SURVEYS

Interpretation of BRIDGE data are complicated by two factors stemming from the voluntary nature of the survey.

First, the 166 participating organizations in 2021, and especially the 88 respondents in 2023, represent a minority of the international development and humanitarian assistance industry. Unlike representative surveys that can make population inferences from relatively small samples, the lack of random sampling in BRIDGE makes the small sample size a larger constraint. Second, the decision of an organization to respond to the survey is likely correlated with how much an organization prioritizes DEI (i.e., self-selection bias). Specifically, the more an organization invests in and supports DEI objectives, the more likely they are to take the time to complete the survey. The product of these two phenomena creates challenges in generalizing findings to the industry as well as comparing trends across survey rounds.

To assess the extent of sampling bias, we compared key organizational characteristics across the two rounds. As described in the Methodology and Respondent Profile Section above, there were a number of substantial differences in the responding

organizations in the 2021 and 2023 datasets. Most importantly, the first round had a much larger number of total respondents, a larger proportion of non-profit respondents, and a larger proportion of small organizations. Conversely, several organizational characteristics exhibited a high degree of stability across the rounds (e.g., organizational age, organizational mission). We conclude that (i) the samples are not representative of the population at either round to confidently make conclusions about the industry as a whole, and that (ii) the two samples are sufficiently distinct that direct comparisons of the full sample between the two rounds are not valid.

To reduce sampling bias in assessing time trends, we identified organizational characteristics that most strongly correlated with DEI outcomes and structured our analysis as comparisons of sub-populations. Specifically, we found that an organization's registration status (i.e., non-profit or for-profit) and size (annual revenue captured in four bands) were highly predictive of DEI outcomes. We subsequently created eight sub-groups across which we conducted direct comparisons between the two rounds.

## BRIDGE respondent sub-populations used in analysis

Non-profit	For-profit
<\$10M	<\$10M
\$10M-\$50M	\$10M-\$50M
\$50M-\$100M	\$50M-\$100M
>\$100M	>\$100M

For a given outcome, if we find a clear pattern across these eight sub-groups, we have more confidence that there is a real time trend. For example, if all or almost all sub-groups show movement in the same direction (e.g., having published a DEI policy), we conclude that there is suggestive evidence that the industry experienced a similar phenomenon (though we can't calculate a confidence interval or point estimate around the population parameter). If, instead, there is no clear pattern across the sub-groups we conclude that there is no trend and any differences between the 2021 and 2023 samples are a function of sampling error<sup>4</sup>.

# ANNEX 2

# ACRONYMS

**BIPOC** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

**BRIDGE** Benchmarking Race, Inclusion, and Diversity in Global Engagement

**CEO** Chief Executive Officer

**CIDC** Council of International Development Companies

**COP** Chief of Party

**CREED** Coalition for Racial & Ethnic Equity in Development

**DEI** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

**DEIB** Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

**IP** Implementing Partner

**LGBTQ+** Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transsexual, Queer or Questioning

**MSI** Minority Serving Institutions

**PSC** Professional Services Council

**NGO** Non-Governmental Organization

**SI** Social Impact, Inc.


**SID** Society for International Development


**USAID** United States Agency for International Development


**US** United States


# ANNEX 3


## REFERENCES AND ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup>Constantz, Jo. Bloomberg. “CEOs are leaving their jobs in record numbers in what is the executive suite version of The Great Resignation.” Fortune, 19 Oct 2023 

<sup>ii</sup>“Women CEOs in Fortune 500 companies, 1995-2023.” Pew Research, 14 Jan 2015 

<sup>iii</sup>“Women in the labor force: a databook.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, Mar 2022 

<sup>iv</sup>Mitchell, George. Willig, Deborah. “2023 CEO Insights on NGO Futures: Adapting in a Changing World.” InterAction, 9 May 2023 

<sup>v</sup>Amy Lutz, Pamela R. Bennett, Rebecca Wang. “State Bans on Affirmative Action and Talent Loss Among Blacks and Latinos in the United States.” Ethnic Studies Review 28 July 2020; 43 (2): 58-76. doi. 

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<sup>1</sup>COP demographics was asked in the 2023 survey only.

<sup>2</sup>The 2021 survey did not gather diversity data on COPs.

<sup>3</sup>Organizations were only asked about DEI global and localization challenges in the 2023 BRIDGE survey.

<sup>4</sup>This report presents findings from the first round of analysis. We plan on conducting more robust, regression-based analysis in 2024 with these datasets.



# BRIDGE

# 2.0

Benchmarking Race, Inclusion and  
Diversity in Global Engagement

