

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

The Continuing Case for Employing DEI Initiatives

David Gray, Grants Coordinator
Greenville Technical College
Greenville, SC

GPC Competencies: 2: Knowledge of organizational development as it pertains to grant seeking, 3: Knowledge of strategies for effective program and project design and development.

Abstract

Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) remains a critical driver of industry competitiveness, innovation, and long-term organizational success. Research consistently shows that DEI fosters stronger market positioning, enhances customer and employee engagement, and contributes to financial growth for grant-supported organizations. However, in environments where DEI initiatives face resistance or outright opposition, grant professionals and organizational leaders must find innovative ways to integrate inclusive practices while aligning with broader institutional goals. This paper outlines practical strategies for grant professionals to frame DEI regarding business performance, regulatory compliance, and workforce development. It also provides insights on crafting persuasive grant narratives emphasizing DEI's measurable impact without triggering resistance. Successfully advocating for DEI in challenging climates requires a combination of strategic messaging, data-driven justification, and the ability to connect DEI principles with an organization's core mission and values.

Introduction

Despite growing political and cultural opposition in some sectors, the case for continuing—and even expanding—DEI initiatives remain strong. Organizations prioritizing DEI consistently outperform their competitors in market share, innovation, employee satisfaction, and financial growth. Yet, in an era where DEI efforts are scrutinized, defunded, or rebranded, grant writing and program development professionals must navigate these challenges with agility.

Grant professionals can adopt the following strategies for effectively communicating DEI's benefits to key stakeholders—clients, supervisors, and boards—and crafting responses to DEI-related questions in grant applications. The goal is to integrate inclusive practices that align with organizational priorities and demonstrate that DEI initiatives are integral to workforce and community development efforts.

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

Strategy #1: Reframing the Conversation

- **Focus on Business Outcomes:** Highlight how diverse perspectives drive innovation, improve problem-solving, and enhance market competitiveness. Frame DEI as a strategy for achieving better business results rather than a moral or political imperative. Organizations seeking funding should highlight how diverse teams enhance problem-solving, drive creativity, and improve customer engagement.
- **Use Neutral Language:** When direct DEI terminology triggers resistance, consider using alternative phrasing such as:
 - “Inclusive leadership” instead of “equity”
 - “Workplace excellence” instead of “diversity”
 - “Collaboration and innovation” instead of “inclusion”

These adjustments allow organizations to maintain their DEI commitments while aligning with existing corporate language.

- **Expand Definitions of Diversity:** DEI is not just about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation – it also includes factors like:
 - Neurodiversity (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum disorder)
 - Physical disabilities
 - Linguistic diversity (e.g., English as a Second Language)
 - Socioeconomic backgrounds
 - Lived experiences, such as military service or recovery from substance use disorder

This broader framing reduces resistance while keeping inclusion efforts intact.

Strategy #2: Embedding DEI in Broader Organizational Initiatives

- **Workforce Development and Talent Retention:** Implement mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives that naturally support DEI goals without being labeled as such. Leverage grant funding to provide upskilling opportunities for underrepresented groups, reinforcing the business case for an inclusive talent pipeline.

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

- **Customer-Centric Approaches:** Advocate for market research on diverse customer bases, framing it as a competitive advantage. Instead of directly referencing DEI, focus on how accessible product design and multilingual services improve the customer experience.
- **Build Inclusive Policies Without the Label:** Focus on fairness and meritocracy in hiring, promotions, and performance evaluations. For example, implement blind hiring practices or standardized evaluation criteria. Research suggests that blind recruitment effectively reduces bias in hiring (Vivek, 2022), while standardized evaluation criteria help mitigate performance-reward bias (Castilla, 2008), leading to better talent acquisition and retention.

Strategy #3: Leverage Data and Metrics to Build the Case

Data is a powerful tool for demonstrating DEI's impact. For instance, research indicates that people with disabilities have roughly \$1.2 trillion in disposable income (Girkar, 2024), and LGBTQ+ individuals hold an estimated \$3.7 trillion in global purchasing power (Wolny, 2019). Companies with gender-diverse leadership teams are 25% more likely to outperform their competitors financially (Dixon-Fyle, Dolan, Hunt, & Prince, 2020). By presenting DEI as a revenue-driving strategy, grant professionals can gain buy-in from skeptical stakeholders.

Strategy #4: Cultivate Grassroots Efforts

- **Employee Resource Groups:** Encourage informal networks that foster peer support and collaboration.
- **Peer-Led Training:** Promote workshops on cultural competence, emotional intelligence, and teamwork as part of professional development.
- **Focus on Community Engagement:** Partner with external organizations that support diverse communities. Frame this decision as a corporate social responsibility rather than DEI.

Strategy #5: Engage Leadership and Gain Internal Buy-In

For DEI efforts to thrive, leadership support is crucial. Grant professionals should:

- Identify executive allies who understand the value of diverse perspectives.

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

- Frame DEI initiatives as part of broader organizational success metrics like employee engagement, productivity, and financial performance.
- Use success stories from industry leaders to illustrate DEI's business impact.
- Share how diverse teams and/or inclusive practices have positively impacted the organization, using examples that resonate with stakeholders.

Strategy #6: Stay Compliant While Innovating

Navigating legal and regulatory challenges requires adaptability. Organizations should:

- Stay informed about local and federal compliance requirements.
- Integrate inclusive practices under legal workforce protections and corporate social responsibility rather than DEI branding.
- Monitor the evolving legal and cultural landscape. Be ready to pivot strategies while maintaining a commitment to fostering an inclusive workplace.

This approach allows organizations to sustain DEI efforts within restrictive environments.

Strategy #7: Promote Psychological Safety

Encourage an environment where employees feel valued and heard. Research indicates that inclusive leadership enhances employees' sense of meaningful work by creating psychological safety and encouraging learning from errors (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). Psychological safety also positively impacts team learning behaviors and productivity (Patil, Raheja, & Mittal, 2023).

Strategy #8: The Business Case for Sustaining DEI Efforts

Despite rising ideological opposition, leading companies continue investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion due to clear, evidence-based advantages across financial performance, innovation, workforce engagement, and brand integrity.

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

Three Corporate Case Studies

1. Apple Inc. – Reaffirmed its DEI commitment by rejecting shareholder proposals to dismantle its DEI programs (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 2025).
2. Costco Wholesale Corporation – Defends its DEI policies as essential to workforce engagement and customer satisfaction (Tabassum & Kerber, 2025).
3. Ancestry & MITRE Corporation – Both organizations use data analytics to guide DEI implementation (Ancestry.com, n.d.; Knight, 2024). Ancestry tracks demographic data and fosters inclusivity via Employee Resource Groups, while MITRE integrates DEI metrics into its innovation and performance systems to ensure alignment with strategic goals.

Commonly Known Benefits of Sustaining DEI

1. Financial Performance
Companies in the top quartile for gender and ethnic diversity on executive teams are 33–39% more likely to outperform industry peers financially (Dixon-Fyle, Dolan, Hunt, & Prince, 2020). Diversity positively correlates with profitability and value creation (Kang et al., 2016).
2. Innovation and Decision-Making
Diverse teams generate 19% more innovation revenue (Lorenzo et al., 2018), and inclusive teams make faster and more effective decisions (Rock & Grant, 2016). Gender and racial diversity also improve creativity and solution quality (Page, 2007).
3. Talent Attraction and Retention
Organizations that demonstrate DEI commitment are more attractive to Millennials and Gen Z talent, with inclusive cultures boosting retention by 3–5 times (Deloitte University Press, 2017; Shore et al., 2011).
4. Employee Engagement and Productivity
Psychological safety in diverse workplaces promotes three and a half times greater innovation potential and stronger performance outcomes (Bersin, 2015; Edmondson, 1999). Inclusive cultures lead to two and one thirds higher cash flow rates per employee (Dixon-Fyle, Dolan, Hunt, & Prince, 2020).

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

5. Risk Management and Brand Equity

Companies with diverse boards are more likely to be rated highly for ethics, less prone to fraud, and better able to respond to reputational challenges (Credit Suisse Research Institute, 2016; Post & Byron, 2015).

The DEI commitments of Apple, Costco, Ancestry, and MITRE reflect a broader strategic trend: organizations that sustain DEI realize measurable advantages in innovation, financial performance, workforce engagement, and public trust. Academic literature affirms these outcomes, underscoring that supporting DEI is not just an ethical choice, but also an economically sound and competitively essential one.

Conclusion

While the political and cultural landscape surrounding DEI is shifting, its business value remains undeniable. Grant professionals and program designers must navigate this environment with strategic messaging, data-driven justification, and alignment with organizational priorities. By embedding DEI principles into the broader workforce, and market-driven and innovation strategies, organizations can sustain inclusive practices while driving measurable success. Despite resistance, the most forward-thinking institutions continue integrating DEI, not as a political statement, but as a competitive advantage.

References

Ancestry.com. *Diversity, equity & inclusion*. Retrieved June 25, 2025 from <https://careers.ancestry.com/diversity-equity-inclusion>

Castilla, E. J. (2008). Gender, race, and meritocracy in organizational careers. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(6), 1479–1526. <https://doi.org/10.1086/588738>

Bersin, J. (2015, December 6). Why diversity and inclusion will be a top priority for 2016. Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/josh-bersin/2015/12/06/why-diversity-and-inclusion-will-be-a-top-priority-for-2016/>

Credit Suisse Research Institute. (2016, September). The CS Gender 3000: The reward for change. https://evolveetfs.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Credit-Suisse-Reward-for-Change_1495660293279_2.pdf

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

Deloitte University Press. (2017). Rewriting the rules for the digital age. *Diversity and inclusion: The reality gap* (pp. 107-118). <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/central-europe/ce-global-human-capital-trends.pdf>

Dixon-Fyle, S., Dolan, K., Hunt, V., & Prince, S. (2020, March 19). *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>

Girkar, U. (2024, November 11). *Why should businesses design good for better accessibility to people with disabilities?* World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/>

Kang, E., Cheng, P., & Gray, S. J. (2016). Corporate governance and board diversity: Evidence from Australia. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 138(2), 317–336.

Knight, R. (2024, October 23). As some companies scale back on DEI, others double down on their efforts. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/companies-data-driven-strategies-tools-refine-dei-belonging-efforts-decisions-2024-10>

Lorenzo, R., Voigt, N., Tsusaka, M., Krentz, M., & Abouzahr, K. (2018, January 23). *How diverse leadership teams boost innovation*. Boston Consulting Group. <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/how-diverse-leadership-teams-boost-innovation>

Page, S. E. (2007). *The difference: How the power of diversity creates better groups, firms, schools, and societies*. Princeton University Press. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-05886-000>

Patil, R., Raheja, D. K., & Mittal, A. (2023). The power of psychological safety: Investigating its impact on team learning, team efficacy, and team productivity. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 16(3), 23–36. <https://doi.org/10.2174/18743501-v16-230727-2023-36>

**STRATEGY PAPERS
COMMITTEE**

Joshua Einhorn, Ed.D.
Editor
Sean Kirby
GPA Publications
Committee Chair

GPA Strategy Papers offer practical solutions to current and emerging issues facing grant professionals. The GPA Strategy Papers Committee accepts concept proposals on a quarterly basis and uses a double-blind peer review process.

Members and nonmembers may submit concept proposals and have electronic access to approved papers.

Articles in this publication represent the opinions and views of the author(s) only.

www.grantprofessionals.org

Post, C., & Byron, K. (2015). Women on boards and firm financial performance: A meta-analysis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(5), 1546–1571. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0319>

Rock, D., & Grant, H. (2016, November 4). Why diverse teams are smarter. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>

Shafaei, A., & Nejati, M. (2023). Creating meaningful work for employees: The role of inclusive leadership. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 35(2), 189–211. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21512>

Shore, L. M., Cleveland, J. N., & Sanchez, D. (2011). Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 21(4), 221–234.

Tabassum, J. & Kerber, R. (2025, January 23). Costco shareholders reject call for review of diversity programs. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/costco-shareholders-vote-against-proposal-report-diversity-programs-2025-01-23/>

U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. (2025). Apple Inc. financial report. <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/320193/000130817925000008/aapl4359751-def14a.htm>

Vivek, R. (2022). Is blind recruitment an effective recruitment method? *International Journal of Applied Research in Business and Management*, 3(3), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.51137/ijarbm.2022.3.3.4>

Wolny, N. (2019, June 10). *The LGBTQ+ community has \$3.7 trillion in purchasing power; Here's how we want you to sell to us*. Entrepreneur. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/>

Author Biography

David Gray holds a master's degree in public administration from a joint program between Clemson University and the University of South Carolina. He has 32 years of experience researching, writing, and administering federal and state grants. For 20 years, he also served as a funding officer specializing in comprehensive local and regional planning, affordable housing, and public services. David has successfully mobilized over \$90 million in public and private grant investments throughout his career, supporting initiatives that foster economic development, workforce advancement, and inclusive community growth. He can be reached at David.Gray@gvltec.edu.