

IPREX DEI Global Insights Report

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Executive Summary

In light of the spotlight on racial justice and equality, many businesses have taken an interest in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). As strategic counsel on internal and external communications, it is imperative that PR agencies are knowledgeable about DEI, how to communicate it and how to respond to issues.

The purpose of this **IPREX DEI Global Insights Report** is to conduct a snapshot of DEI challenges and opportunities facing IPREX firms, and to identify the most prominent best practices organizations can learn from to better promote DEI through marketing and communications across the world.

The report seeks to provide peer-to-peer guidance about how to build out internal DEI programs or external DEI consultation, and to recognize DEI isn't a one-time effort, but rather an integral standard that needs to be embedded into agency life – from recruitment to audits.

Key findings developed from the analysis:

1. [IPREX firms recognize DEI as a business driver and moral imperative.](#)
2. [DEI as subject matter is challenging for many firms and individuals.](#)
3. [IPREX firms are adopting internal DEI programs and operations at varying paces depending on a number of factors.](#)
4. [Firms diversify through intentional recruitment efforts and cultivating inclusive office culture.](#)
5. [DEI programs have more momentum in North America, different focus in EMEA and APAC.](#)
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Core implications and considerations for IPREX members to consider:

- Consider hiring a DEI consultant and undergoing training as a team.
- Conduct a diversity audit.
- Recruit talent in new ways.
- Build an in-house DEI committee/caucus.
 - Developing a DEI statement for the firm
 - Submit a team-wide DEI survey

- Conduct further best practice research of how like-organizations are recruiting retaining and considering equity
- Generate a Diverse Business Inclusion Plan,
- Memorialize and create transparency around DEI programs in-house
- Build accountability measures for office DEI.
- Consider DEI consulting only when ready.
- Recognize DEI is not a one-time effort.

The report was presented to the IPREX DEI Committee in November 2021. The report was published in December 2021.

Research Methodology Statement

Research was led by members of the IPREX Academy program on behalf of the IPREX DEI Committee. Methodologies included:

- Secondary research analysis for regional DEI trendlines as they relate to marketing communications. Sources cited at the end of the report. Research was collected and analyzed from May 1 to June 1, 2021.
- An online survey about DEI trends and observations made available to all IPREX members. All levels of agency management and staff were invited to participate. Survey data is based on an anonymous survey of IPREX members, fielded from June 16 to July 5, 2021. N = 38. The survey was promoted to the IPREX members via network-wide eNews, multiple postings on the IPREX internet platform and by word of mouth to IPREX committees from researchers in the 2021 IPREX Academy cohort.
- One-on-one key informant interviews were conducted with respondents to the online survey who indicated willingness to provide more insight in a Zoom call. Nine (9) respondents volunteered to be interviewed and provided qualitative feedback to researchers. Of the nine volunteers who participated in key informant interviews, four participated from one IPREX firm (DH) while all others were from different firms. Interviews were fielded from July 1 to August 30, 2021.

A note from the research team on participation and depth of response data.

It should be noted that the number of participants in both the digital survey and key informant interviews represent a limited collection of feedback from a small percentage of IPREX members. For context, the IPREX network holds over 1,300 individual members. Typical IPREX network surveys are also typically small, collecting an average of 35 responses.

While the research team is extremely grateful to those firms and individuals who volunteered their time and insight toward this report, the research team feels future studies on DEI will benefit from greater numbers of respondents and diverse perspectives shared. Feedback from this study reveals a handful of rich ideas to develop DEI programs, but this body of findings and the implications derived from them is reflective of a limited number of perspectives from a small array of IPREX firms.

Key Findings

1. IPREX firms recognize DEI as a business driver and moral imperative.

Many IPREX firms have implemented DEI programs into their internal operations. Many of those same firms indicated an even bigger reason to implement these programs as being the right thing to do — making their teams more diverse and inclusive, and creating more space for equity in the way teams are built.

Respondents indicated diverse organizations that are inclusive — making space for everyone at the table — are able to better communicate to diverse audiences. Firms are finding that customers, employees and potential employees place greater value on organizations that are socially progressive and proactively share their DEI values on their websites.

Customers, employees and potential employees expect companies to take positions on social issues and to genuinely champion DEI. They understand that to institute real change more must be done than implementing HR policies, marketing campaigns and PR statements.

Interviewed firms responded that there are business and ethical cases for DEI. It does seem that the two cases for DEI are intrinsically linked, as being an ethical company is good business, it also opens new business opportunities in responsible DEI consulting or campaign implementation.

- **SalterMitchell PR [Florida, United States]:** The firm works to achieve diversity that reflects the audiences that it serves. It also mentioned that clients are seeking to work with agencies that know how to engage and communicate with diverse audiences.
- **Asoviva [Japan]:** As DEI efforts are elevating in priority, the firm is preparing to engage more directly in DEI efforts in order to attract talent from other parts of the world, as recruitment is a current business challenge.
- **Walsh:PR [Ireland]:** The firm suggests that because DEI is driven by US global businesses and their media exposure it will soon be a priority in Ireland and therefore a business imperative.
- **LLYC [Spain]:** The firm prioritizes DEI at its core because it believes diversity is the right thing to do in society and business.
- **DH [Washington, United States]:** The firm is committed to providing a safe space for all employees to work. They are intentional about DEI in their work and ensure that their clients can reach as many audiences as possible across Washington state.

2. DEI as subject matter is challenging for many firms and individuals.

Respondents indicated that merely addressing DEI topics amongst peers within firms, from a top-down or middle-out capacity, is often challenging, provoking difficult ideas and conversations amongst employees. It is often challenging to discuss and acknowledge a firm’s past views (or the lack thereof) around diversity and inclusion, its present state and future aspirations. Firms recognize these conversations are incredibly important, but that they are often fraught with nuance and challenging revelations.

Attempting to build programs and structures that positively operationalize DEI into firms is also challenging, but starting somewhere, by acknowledging past shortcomings and future aspirations, is a positive place to start.

Interview quotes:

- **Nico Archer, DH:** “Change is what DEI is asking us to do — letting go of racist or harmful behaviors we’ve learned as a society. Some people relate in a defensive way because it requires admitting where they have internalized racist behaviors and/or they don’t want to undertake the hard work of change. DEI challenges people to look at things in a new or different way. The work starts inside — in our hearts and minds. Before hoping to make societal change, you have to make personal change.”

3. IPREX firms are adopting internal DEI programs and operations at varying paces depending on a number of factors.

According to a 2021 DEI-focused survey of IPREX members across the Americas, Europe, the Middle-East and Africa (EMEA) and the Asia Pacific (APAC) regions, nearly 70% of agencies are implementing DEI programs and 79% of respondents surveyed said recruiting diverse talent is a priority.

Survey data and interview insights revealed common factors driving the pace of adoption, including the various structures, resourcing and priorities of DEI programs:

- The region — DEI programs are largely an imperative among firms in the Americas, but less so in EMEA or APAC.
- Resources — Lack of available resources to dedicate to DEI committees or programs given other business needs (many firms have needed to focus resources on client projects and business development amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Size of the agency — Smaller agencies (often 10 or below) sometimes lacked human-power to execute DEI programs but are working to build strategy for how they can be built at scale.

- Existing staff representation — Many firms have taken a sobering look in the mirror since 2020, asking if their teams reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Many firms that did not feel their team was representative have felt more urgency to address DEI programs.

Examples include:

- **SalterMitchell PR [Florida, United States]:** Prior to 2020, the firm did not have a formal DEI program and instead understood diversity, equity and inclusivity to be organically nurtured as part of the firm’s DNA and values. The firm had always understood that their team needed to reflect the diversity of the areas where they work. With the events of 2020, the firm has been even more deliberate in addressing DEI in an operationalized capacity.
- **Gatesman [Pennsylvania, United States]:** The agency established a Diversity and Inclusion Employee Resource Group (ERG) in 2016. In 2020, motivated by the confluence of social unrest, the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing political divide, Gatesman evaluated the group and renamed it the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Caucus. As part of the renewed interest in the caucus with nearly 100 percent participation in informal DEI conversations, the firm then formalized its principles and developed more detailed focus areas for its efforts including education, action (through volunteerism) and amplification through new recruitment and retention practices in the firm. The Caucus will continue to advance internal efforts so DEI is integrated into the fabric of the agency’s culture and has started to offer strategic guidance and counsel to client DEI initiatives.
- **DH [Washington, United States]:** The firm had spent years designing campaigns to reach historically excluded communities but did not have its own DEI program for employees in place prior to 2020. It formed an employee-led committee to consider training, exercises and operational practices the firm could adopt to increase staff diversity, educate team members on the concept of equity and how it could be built into communications campaigns.

Interview quotes:

- **Shannon Baker, Gatesman:** “We established a DEI caucus in 2016, and after the death of George Floyd, a lot of agency staffers raised their hands to re-engage with the program. We had nearly 100% participation in coffee chats about DEI topics and then formalized what the group stood for. We started by creating a pledge and refining our key areas of focus to include education, action and amplification. Since then, the team has volunteered time, hosted agency-wide educational gatherings, and expanded its paid holiday calendar to include Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth, and consulted clients on best practices in representing diverse people in advertising, among many other things.”

- **Fese Elango, DH:** “I think what I've seen from Diversity and Inclusion work from an agency standpoint with clients is the work has shifted from the mile-wide focus to more mile-deep, allowing communities to play a role and have ownership in the way their stories are shown.”
- **Yusuke Yamanaka, Asoviva:** “Conversation level — in general agencies — I have seen the rise of DEI as a global trend. Environment, social responsibility are both really big with our clients right now. They are talking a lot more about this now than they did before. Our agency is adjusting and taking into account these topics as trends. Japanese society has been dealing with Asian appropriation in our own campaigns and in those from other nations. Our workforce and organizations in Japan need to do more to learn about and apply the latest initiatives in terms of DEI, but we are recognizing that and making changes. Still at the beginning of that process. There is a conversation we're having about how we're diversifying in terms of gender, ethnicity. At Asoviva, we are beginning work on initiatives to address these things.”

4. Firms diversify through intentional recruitment efforts and cultivating inclusive office culture.

Building a diverse employee pool requires planning, deliberate recruitment tactics, inclusive job descriptions and creating an inclusive work environment and culture. Organizations also should cultivate diverse leadership, in addition to the general employee pool, that is representative of the population.

The firms interviewed for this project differed in many aspects; however, they all are attempting to be very intentional in hiring. In the U.S., firms are trying to hire more racially diverse talent, while international firms are seeking to hire more intentionally for gender diversity.

Although nearly all of survey respondents (79%) said recruiting diverse talent is a priority for their agency, only 18% rated their agencies a 4 or a 5 in how well they are doing so. This gap points to the challenges many agencies face with recruitment and the opportunities to create programs that live up to their good intent.

For example, when asked about methods of recruiting diverse talent, roughly two-thirds (67%) said they are using internship programs. However, the difficulty of finding and connecting with qualified talent emerged as a theme in the research, which may point to the need for more partnerships to build the pipeline and expand networks, beyond the traditional college internship program.

Agencies may benefit from exposing young people to the PR field even earlier than college, perhaps through high school or middle school outreach or mentorship.

Organizations must also hold themselves accountable to DEI efforts in recruitment by setting measurable goals and KPIs. These firms also are using the diversity makeup of their teams as a marker of DEI “success” whether formally or informally.

- **Gatesman [Pennsylvania, United States]:** In this U.S. based agency, the firm is attempting to match the diversity of the state in which they operate. It has employed tracking metrics related to the demographics of job candidates and of vendor firms. If the general demographic makeup of the firm matches that of the community, then that is the measure of success of the firm’s DEI goals.
- **LLYC [Spain]:** The firm does not have quantitative metrics against which to measure diversity goals however does employ qualitative measures such as periodic employee interviews and questionnaires.

Interview quotes:

- **Mallory Peak, DH:** “We set a number of goals and recruitment targets that we work to meet. Throughout the year we arrange a number of trainings on DEI topics and talk together about what type of client work we want to attract, work that aligns with our values. Overall, we try to be intentional with everything we do.”
- **Heidi Otway, SalterMitchell PR:** “Be intentional in your hiring. That may require you to first audit your firm to see if DEI is truly practiced or not. Depending on what you discover, you may need to reckon with the fact that your agency hasn't been or isn't diverse or inclusive. Once you acknowledge the facts, you can take steps to adjust your approach to hiring with DEI top of mind. See where the deficiencies are and intentionally work to fill those areas where you're lacking in the diversity of your staff. It's natural for me to bring in people who look like me, I'm Black. I also look at the demographics of Florida and make sure I am hiring a mix of people who reflect the people we serve across the state. Everyone on our staff is empowered to help identify diverse talent and invite them to apply for open positions on our team. For example, the staff knows we are always looking for practitioners who speak other languages, especially Spanish as well as Haitian-Creole. It's ingrained in them to look for diversity and seek it out based on the work we're doing.”
- **Annie Blake Burke, DH:** “Our DEI initiatives are led by an internal committee and focus on team connectedness, creating an inclusive culture through specific team building exercises, enhancing our knowledge and understanding of equity concepts and best practices through our partnership through trainings with subject matter experts and consultants. We also have revamped our recruitment efforts. We’ve looked critically at how we are recruiting, where we are putting the word out and who in the community we are partnering with to share information about open positions. We’ve also reevaluated what criteria people need to meet to apply for roles at DH (e.g. a college degree is not a must-have anymore if someone has great work experience).”

5. DEI programs have more momentum in North America, different focus in EMEA and APAC.

In the US, where protests following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor generated substantial social justice activism and action, agencies have begun adopting more robust and intentional DEI-focused programs and efforts. Some of these programs have been extensions of existing diversity and inclusion operations within firms, and others have been introduced as newer programs and initiatives to IPREX agencies since 2020. US-based firms are responding to the events of 2020 by introducing intentional DEI programming, including DEI training in the office and encouraging conversation and education among staff.

International IPREX firms did not report formal programs for increasing DEI efforts, but did indicate a focus on achieving closer gender representation in offices. Firms in EMEA and APAC and other regions are also more recently beginning to incorporate DEI into their operations.

- **Asoviva [Japan]:** In Japan, firms are at the discovery phase of DEI. The firm is at the beginning of their process of applying the latest in DEI initiatives. The firm is currently focused on achieving gender representation as a priority, driven as both a moral imperative and a workforce reality as its population continues to experience contraction.
- **Walsh:PR [Ireland]:** In Ireland, ethnic diversity is growing but currently 82.2 % of the population are Irish and white. The firm has focused more on gender diversity as a current priority. DEI is recognized as important but has not yet been formalized into any program. As DEI conversations continue to elevate in other cultures, the team expects that more formal programs will be initiated in the coming years.
- **LLYC [Spain]:** DEI is baked into the culture and identity of the firm. The firm has global offices, but in general, the company has the value of diversity ingrained into the firm's operations and culture.

These three firms in particular have not yet built out specific diversity programs into their operations, but are working toward specifics in the months to come.

Interview Quotes:

- **Oscar Iniesta, LLYC:** “The pandemic brought new attention to DEI but LLYC has always been sensitive to DEI efforts. It is always trying to get its people involved in DEI efforts. The company has a foundation that is comprised of staff from around the world that steer the company's DEI efforts. Before the pandemic, these activities were in motion. Part of the vision of the company is to make the world better. LLYC believes a communications company has even more responsibility. Race or skin color is not as much an issue for LLYC on the global scale. LLYC is diverse because it is in 30 countries but they feel diverse and think diverse. The priority is to generally try and make the world better. DEI focus is more so on gender and sexual orientation.”

- **Yusuke Yamanaka, Asoviva:** “We don’t have any specific DEI operations for ourselves yet but we are looking at what the industry is doing. We saw a Japanese goal of working to achieve 30% of female board representation by 2030 from Keidanren, an alliance of large corporations. We are paying attention to goals and trends like this.”
- **Jim Walsh, Walsh:PR:** “DEI is not a huge focus in our business at present because there is not a lot of diversity in Ireland. Mostly, it is the gender balance which is very skewed. It is very rare to have a male working in PR in Ireland at entry level. With a population of 5 million people, 12 percent are non national; Black people are around 1.5%; Asians are 2%. DEI is seen as important but not formalized. We have always considered ourselves to be an equal opportunity employer, but it is more difficult to get male employees. DEI is currently not a huge, formal part of our company mission - rather it is taken as a fact. Based on previous history and key areas of focus like corporate governance, we can anticipate that an issue that is a big area of focus in the US will likely be more formalized in Ireland in three to four years.”

6. Success in DEI relies upon commitment from leadership.

Organizations, and especially their leadership, must prioritize DEI and be genuine in their efforts. DEI must be value-driven, not virtue signaling.

Both in the US and internationally, IPREX firms agree that successful DEI programming - formal or informal - starts from the top down, and is often led from the middle and to the outside by employees. Leadership and management must be honest, open and encouraging, creating space for employees to have conversations about DEI and lead programs to foster it. Buy-in of these programs from leadership is essential for change to happen.

- **SalterMitchell PR [Florida, United States]:** Leadership is being more honest about individual experiences with DEI topics, and more open in conversation in general.
- **LLYC [Spain]:** Management buy in and encouragement is essential.

Interview Quotes:

- **Yusuke Yamanaka, Asoviva:** “We are thinking about how we can recruit other diverse people who are non-Japanese living in Japan and attract more people from other parts of the world. Gender equality is going to be a big focus for us. Senior staff is all male currently so we’re having conversations about hiring senior director people to the agency who are female and how we can do that. Many companies are beginning to hire female candidates into leadership positions which is great.”
- **Nico Archer, DH:** “We’ve built DEI elements into our consulting processes as standard. We ask clients where there are gaps and bring the equity lens wherever we can. You have to be brave as a business and push clients to make change even when it is uncomfortable for them. It is critical for leadership to be invested in having authentic, real

conversations about DEI and to empower employees to take a leadership role in driving programs.”

7. Organizations are moving beyond diversity, also aiming for equity and inclusion.

Many respondents indicated they are building programs not simply on diversity, which had been a cornerstone of recruitment in prior years, but also considering how they are building office/team cultures around equity and inclusion in order to retain employees. Firms are recognizing that equality (meeting people on purely equal terms without regard to their unique needs) is not equity (meeting people where they are to address their needs, often in the face of systemic challenges arrayed against historically excluded groups). Making this distinction has been important for many firms, and impacts the ways in which they are reaching out to promote open positions into more diverse communities—meeting them where they are.

Creating spaces that feel welcome to everyone helps with retention, but also benefits from recognizing the lived-experience of all employees who can inform client and campaign strategies. Diverse organizations that are inclusive, where everyone has a seat at the table, are able to better communicate to diverse audiences.

- **Asoviva [Japan]:** Asoviva noted that the culture of an organization must be primed to welcome diversity so that a diverse workforce can be hired and supported. In other words, the workplace must not only be diverse in makeup, but inclusive in practice.
- **Gatesman [Pennsylvania, United States]:** Gatesman also remarked that while diverse team members are entering leadership roles, there is the long-term goal to ensure that this same group of people is supported within the overall culture.

Interview Quotes:

- **Annie Blake Burke, DH:** “Would like to see more people of color in specialist positions. We would like to diversify our DEI best practices, making it a natural process that’s embedded into our agency. We still have lots to do, but we are hopefully on the right track, including working to promote positions with the help of community-based organizations.”

8. Successful DEI in PR means authenticity and determination.

Public-facing efforts to promote greater equity and inclusion have not necessarily matched internal corporate practices or culture, especially within certain industries. Audiences require authenticity from brands and organizations.

For IPREX firms and their leaders, this means focusing on employee-led initiatives—rather than leadership mandates—to organically build authentic internal DEI programs. Employee-led

initiatives include empowering team members across hierarchies to participate or lead DEI Committees, to head up employee surveys and participate in forming questions, to analyze results and generate internal DEI plans with those insights. Employees are often asked to lead conversations with leadership and the team about current states and future states in a firm's DEI journey based on their own observations.

US firms also agree that the emphasis on DEI, and the supporting messages, must be authentic, whether internal or externally facing. In addition to authenticity, these firms note that the challenge will be to maintain this momentum and energy, while staying committed to the mission of DEI.

- **SalterMitchell PR [Florida, United States]:** The firm has observed that many organizations are trying to understand DEI through training and consulting. They also are incorporating DEI into their missions, visions and values. And while admirable, the firm reinforces the need for that message to be authentic and actually carried out.
- **DH [Washington, United States]:** The firm has observed companies that have adopted DEI positive messaging or incorporated diversity into communications that could be misconstrued as virtue signaling or tokenization if not followed up by demonstrable action. The firm has noticed that many brands are working reactively and not proactively when it comes to prioritizing DEI and hopes to see sustained diversity programs and campaigns.
- **LLYC [Spain]:** The firm has worked with other organizations on defining their corporate purpose. The next step is to authentically implement the corporate purpose into the company.

Interview Quotes:

- **Shannon Baker, Gatesman:** “We didn't mandate participation in our DEI caucus across the agency because we knew this had to be employee-led and people had to join willingly. But it was important that leadership demonstrated our support publicly for what this group was doing. That committee reports a DEI newsletter internally to our team, reporting on all aspects of DEI in our firm and things we're learning and working on with clients.”
- **Mallory Peak, DH:** “We established a DEI committee, which includes many junior and senior team members. Its purpose is to review and brainstorm how DH can improve recruitment, attract new employees and make sure our agency is supportive and responsive. DH also implemented a training program with guest speakers for workshops every month, we embrace cultural activities and make space to unpack DEI concepts, like in our anti-racism book club which is voluntary. We also have an award-winning internship program that we promote widely to connect with communicators of color. DH also re-evaluated our vendor relations, media list and relationships to intentionally look where we can partner with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People Of Color) businesses.”

- **Oscar Iniesta, LLYC:** “(I) recommend to get staff involved in the DEI initiatives and projects, encourage them to be in the group that is discussing these issues, involve the whole company in decisions. Management needs to create the proper culture. At LLYC, the leaders are pioneers in great diversity programs. The chairmen have always been trying to create the right impressions and a path for diverse issues. In the end it is a vocation.”

9. Firms are helping clients communicate about DEI and respond to DEI issues.

Following the events of 2020, US firms were tapped to provide counsel on clients’ DEI programs and issues related to DEI.

Agencies feel they must first focus on internal initiatives and best practices prior to advising clients.

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents (65%) said they provided DEI counsel to their clients in the past year. When asked to identify the challenges they observe as their clients implement DEI programs, several themes emerged, including not knowing how or where to get started; a disconnect between “talking the talk” and “walking the walk”; a lack of diversity within the leadership at the organization; and, for some, a lack of recognition that diversity and inclusion are issues that should be addressed.

There is an opportunity for PR firms to not only provide DEI counsel to their clients, but to help advocate for change within their organizations. PR leaders can help ensure DEI efforts are authentic and meaningful, and can help well-intended organizations know where and how to start.

- **Gatesman [Pennsylvania, United States]:** The firm has worked both on clients’ internal communications and external communications. While many of our clients are open to proactive communications regarding their DEI efforts, we are seeing other organizations steadfastly avoiding DEI topics for now. For those being proactive in terms of DEI, these are largely one-off projects, and they are facing challenges with aligning messaging with actions and with displaying “enough” support for DEI issues. The firm also works with clients who need counsel or guidance when it comes to DEI issues.
- **SalterMitchell PR [Florida, United States]:** The firm has helped clients respond to criticism of not being diverse or inclusive. The firm also has helped clients build their own DEI programs in consultation with DEI trainers and experts.

Internationally, firms are not being asked by clients to address DEI campaigns or issues.

- **Asoviva [Japan]:** The firm has worked on several gender equality efforts. In Asia, most corporate boards are populated with men, but companies are expected to diversify as

expectations evolve. As a whole, however, DEI is not really a used concept and clients are largely not seeking counsel on how to diversify, even in terms of gender.

- **LLYC [Spain]:** The firm has worked to create corporate purpose statements for several clients that includes language related to diversity in some cases. Some companies are working actively toward equality and are receptive, others are not.
- **Walsh:PR [Ireland]:** Clients are not seeking DEI counsel.

Interview Quotes:

- **Mallory Peak, DH:** “Mostly internally – it’s important to get our own house in order before telling other people what to do. But clients are asking for more advice on how to make their communications more equitable. Many of our clients are pushing for strategic counsel on DEI, particularly government and nonprofit clients who want to reach historically excluded populations. They are feeling urgency to address equity but aren’t sure where to start or how to authentically reach communities they have perhaps not engaged effectively before.”
- **Oscar Iniesta, LLYC:** “There are so many clients it is hard to say. There are a lot that sympathize with the need/push for equality and the firm’s attitude. But there are some that are not as receptive, and while they believe future companies must act like LLYC, they have not necessarily found themselves to be part of that movement. Some are on LLYC’s level, some are not, some don’t even bring it up.”
- **Oscar Iniesta, LLYC:** “We work with companies on purpose, we say to them ‘it is very good to put in black and white your good intentions. It is good to write what you feel about the world and ethics.’ But this is not enough. Do you really believe this? Are you able to download this into every single corner of your company? If you can’t, you won’t be honest and you won’t change attitudes. You can write whatever, but if you don’t have a program to actually implement what you wish to see, you will not see change.”
- **Jim Walsh, Walsh PR:** “They [clients] aren’t really asking. DEI is very much focused on the US. If there is work on this front, it is likely to be in relation to the annual report from a bigger company that has a local presence in Ireland.”
- **Fese Elango, DH:** “We advise clients not to simply change a social media profile photo for Pride Month, or APAI Month, or Black History Month — hold onto those values and representations of people all year long. Demonstrate how those values are longstanding, not just along a single month or milestone. Brands are often working behind the trends reactively and not proactively. If there were already policies and initiatives in place before a hate crime or microaggression that may arise within their company, they have more credibility to respond to those issues than making them up statements and values when reacting to a crisis. Brands need to be intentional about creating campaigns that don’t perpetuate stereotypes. Really bad marketing campaigns do damage — the LeBron James King Kong ad was 2008, but not that long ago, and it did real damage. Having diverse voices making decisions for ad campaigns will stop that bad marketing from making it to the airways. The Pepsi Jenner ad wouldn’t have happened with a more

diverse team making that creative. Ensure you have representation across your team to make marketing content, don't just rely on a single majority working a firm making content. Lean on research from lived experience in the communities you want that message to reach, let them inform the creative directly.”

10. Clients or prospective clients are approaching DEI with mixed success.

Many respondents indicated their clients, and other organizations in their regions, are in a similar place with incorporating DEI into their internal and external communications — largely in a discovery phase, beginning to operationalize programs like DEI statements and limited actions to help recruit talent from historically excluded communities.

Those brands who are folding DEI into their branded content stand to benefit from consumer affinity if their words are met with commensurate action to benefit historically excluded communities. Those brands who merely offer words without action are often frowned upon by both consumers and IPREX strategists.

Several IPREX firms are recognizing that clients need consulting in this space and are building campaigns with new equity-based communications models in mind (activating community partners to lead as strategists and message carriers to historically excluded communities).

Interview quotes:

- **Fese Elango, DH:** “Lululemon is not perfect but they have been doing a better job at showing diverse people in their brand campaigns and online platforms, which is new to this year. You used to only see skinny white women and men. Now you're seeing a good mix in terms of race and size. That is a big shift for a brand like that, I was impressed by that visual variety and I think it took courage to authentically fold that into their brand. Girlfriend Collective, based in Seattle, is doing a good job publicly showing diversity statistics in their company and being transparent about it, which gives them credibility to talk about diversity as a value and incorporate that into their brand. They show followers on their Instagram page where money is going to, which is Black-owned businesses and nonprofits they support directly. They are avoiding virtue-signaling and tokenization which is something more companies need to emulate.”
- **Heidi Otway, SalterMitchell PR:** “Ben & Jerry's is doing a great job stating their values and acting on them. They are a leader in equity values nationally.”
- **Yusuke Yamanaka, Asoviva:** “Lush, a cosmetic retailer, has been folding diversity into their brand messaging in Japan, supporting PRIDE and showing support for same-sex marriage. They are working toward inclusivity by renaming key their products, e.g. a creme Miss Gorgeous to Gorgeous, among others.”

- **Nico Archer, DH:** “We’ve reached the critical tipping point. DEI is at the forefront, and it will stay there. As it becomes more and more a part of the fabric of how we do things, I see the conversation accelerating. We must adapt and make the change that is required of us to shed racist and harmful ways of doing business. Because the landscape is shifting so dramatically, companies who do not start this journey will be so far behind the curve they won’t be able to recover. If we don’t find a way to lead, as communicators, we are all going to fall behind.”

Implications and Considerations from the Research Team

Key ideas for IPREX firms to consider as they build out internal DEI programs or external DEI consultation offerings based on best practices revealed from IPREX peers in this report:

- **Consider hiring a DEI consultant and undergoing training as a team.** There is no shortage of qualified consultants who specialize in helping organizations audit themselves for diversity and inclusivity of their culture, to train their staff on language and ways to engage historically excluded communities, and to help companies have safe, brave conversations about ways the organization can improve. Many IPREX firms have undergone training with consultants and would be happy to pass along trusted contacts.
- **Conduct a diversity audit.** Companies need to ask the question — how does your current team reflect the diversity of the community where you work, and the communities you serve/reach with your communications campaigns? Do we employ members of the communities who bring real lived-experience those communities face which can bring humanity, empathy and resonance to the work you produce? Start with a survey of your team asking them to identify as they will, and compare the data to the demographics in your region.
- **Recruit talent in new ways.** As companies look to hire in the future, they need to consider equity-based recruitment strategies like reaching out to community-based organizations in their region who serve historically excluded groups, and ask for strategies to promote positions to those communities with their help. Consider longer recruitment windows to allow more time for diverse communities to review your company's positions. Submit a DEI statement with all position promotional materials to let potential candidates know you are a DEI friendly firm with a commitment to hiring diverse talent.
- **Build an in-house DEI committee/caucus.** Ensure representation from across the organizational hierarchy, and create an open, friendly invitation for all interested to participate in whatever ways they have energy. Task this committee with things like:
 - Developing a DEI statement for the firm (to be approved by leadership *and* the entire staff)
 - Submit a team-wide DEI survey asking how diverse the team currently is, where the firm can improve and what ideas they have to make the team more diverse and inclusive in its culture.
 - Conduct further best practice research of how like-organizations are recruiting diverse talent, retaining employees and considering equity as part of its communications strategies in building campaign strategies and creative.
 - Generate a Diverse Business Inclusion Plan, memorializing the actions the agency has taken to operationalize DEI into the business. Record your hiring practices, internship programs designed for historically excluded communities,

team trainings, onboarding for new employees, cultural touchpoints that formally discuss DEI and any other ways in which the firm actively promotes DEI.

- **Build accountability measures for office DEI.** The success of a DEI program will be dependent on its ability to measure and track the success of individual efforts. Consider an annual review of your workplace demographics compared to regional demographics or the demographics of the communities you serve to ensure they are moving closer toward matching up. Track the industry and community-based organizations you are engaging to promote positions to diverse candidates. Survey employees annually (at a minimum) to gauge how included they feel, and measure year-over-year shift. Setup mentoring sessions with leadership and employees, or peer-to-peer, and challenge them to ask about current office diversity and inclusion, and/or how they perceive equitable processes making it easier for historically excluded community members to achieve success within the agency. Whatever you do, create visible, reportable means to track progress on DEI in your firm.
- **Consider DEI consulting only when you're ready.** In time, you can leverage your team's increasing experience on this subject as consultants who can help answer client questions on DEI challenges. But be mindful of your team's current diversity and experience developing equity-based campaigns before you begin marketing DEI consulting services, and be careful not to claim expertise regarding DEI methodologies for cultural understanding of communities to which you have no lived-experience on your team. Once you have this representation and experience, consider tactful ways to engage organizations who may be struggling with DEI operations in their internal or external communications and offer guidance.
- **Recognize DEI is not a one-time effort.** It's a constantly evolving discussion, bigger than any one firm and the initial steps you take to address it. External factors and events will continue to set a broader climate around DEI issues, so continue to challenge your team for reflections on how you're doing as an employer to make space for diversity and inclusion, and how you approach equity as a firm in the ways you recruit and the campaign creative you develop. Commit to the long-haul and your team will believe in your commitment, and be more likely to participate in authentic ways.

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