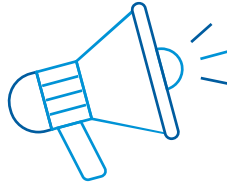May 2022

Part 1 of 2:
Survey Data

Part 1: Survey Data

Managing Workforce Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Local Government

Report prepared by MissionSquare Research Institute

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a December 2021/January 2022 national online survey conducted by MissionSquare Research Institute and Greenwald Research of 353 state and local government human resource managers, assessing their organizations' experience and approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs as part of their recruitment, retention, and workforce management efforts.

Key Takeaways

1 Workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion are a top or high priority for 56% of all respondents, with only 5% indicating it is not a priority.

2 26% have followed up on that commitment by adopting a strategic plan for DEI.

3 42% have formal programs or policies to support their DEI goals, with another 26% having informal programs or policies.

4 The most common focus of those programs or policies is around equitable treatment of employees (52%), and that is also the area where respondents feel they have been most successful in their efforts (70%).

5 K-12 employers and communities over 25,000 population are more likely to have adopted DEI policies or to have systems in place to measure their results.

6 Among formal data collection methods, the most common is around the hiring and retention of diverse staff (15%).

7 Senior leadership is viewed as being very or somewhat supportive of DEI efforts (69%), as are employees (65%).

8 Barriers to implementing DEI programs include lack of diverse candidates in the local labor market (87%); difficulty attracting or retaining diverse staff (85%); and factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing Great Resignation, and difficulty attracting and retaining employees generally (74%).

With an enhanced understanding of effective practices in the field, local government and school administrators can better steer their human resources policies and practices in a way that helps them address the ongoing challenges around employee recruitment and retention.

Introduction

In 2021, MissionSquare Research Institute released a report entitled **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Public Service Workforce**, which presented employment data for a range of public service occupations, showing the degree to which women and people of color were represented compared to their share of the overall public and private sector workforce. The report also detailed policy considerations around diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and how those could impact employee morale, retention, and productivity.

Beyond race, ethnicity, and gender, the report also explored other categories of workforce diversity, such as veteran status, disability, religion, LGBTQIA+ identity, language, national origin, educational attainment, criminal history, and intersectionality.

As a follow-up to that report, this survey and a related set of focus groups were fielded to allow for a more in-depth analysis of how DEI programs are being implemented in various types and sizes of local public sector employers. The survey was conducted from December 3, 2021 to January 14, 2022 by MissionSquare Research Institute ("The Institute") and Greenwald Research, with a total of 353 respondents identified as human resource decision makers in K-12 education and local government.

Survey Results

Sample Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the 353 survey respondents are displayed in Table 1.

The majority of survey respondents are male, White or Caucasian, and work in communities of less than 10,000 population or school districts with enrollments of fewer than 1,000 students. Respondents have a median age of 51.[1] Nearly half of respondents (42%) work in a rural area, with 27% working in a small town, 24% in a suburban area, and 7% in an urban area. Median tenure with their employer is six years.

The demographic characteristics of the survey sample generally align with the overall local government workforce profile. Of the approximately 11.1 million local government employees who worked across the United States in 2020, 6.1 million or 55% worked in K-12 education.[2] As of 2021, the total population of state and local government workers have a median age of 45 years; 61% are female; and 77% are White.[3] Looking at all municipal, county, and township governments, 83% have a population of under 10,000, while 47% of K-12 school districts have an enrollment of under 1,000, and 39% have an enrollment of 1,000-4,999.[4]

Table 1 **Sample Demographics**

Gender		HR Policy-Making Role		Years Working With Current Employer		Employer	
Male	53%	Primary Decision Maker	59%	Less than 1 year	4%	Local Government	50%
Female	47%	One of a Small Group of Decision Makers	29%	1 to 3 years	23%	K-12 Education	50%
Prefer to Self-Describe	<1%	Considerable Influence on Decisions	12%	4 to 8 years	35%	**For K-12: District Enrollment**	
Age		**Region**		9 to 10 years	6%	Less than 1,000	53%
Up to 40	14%	South	23%	11+ years	32%	1,000 to 4,999	34%
41-50	35%	Midwest	39%	**Area Population Size**		5,000 to 9,999	6%
51-60	38%	Northeast	23%	Less than 10,000	57%	10,000 to 24,999	5%
61 or older	12%	West	15%	10,000 to 24,999	21%	25,000 to 49,999	1%
Race/ethnicity		**Area Type**		25,000 to 49,999	10%	50,000 to 99,999	1%
White or Caucasian	90%	Urban	7%	50,000 to 99,999	4%		
Black or African American	4%	Suburban	24%	100,000 to 199,999	4%		
Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish descent	5%	Small Town	27%	200,000 to 499,999	2%		
Asian or Pacific Islander	1%	Rural	42%	500,000 to 999,999	<1%		
Native American	3%			1,000,000 or more	1%		
Other	1%						

Note: n=353; some figures may not total to 100% due to rounding or to dual responses selected for racial/ethnic identification.
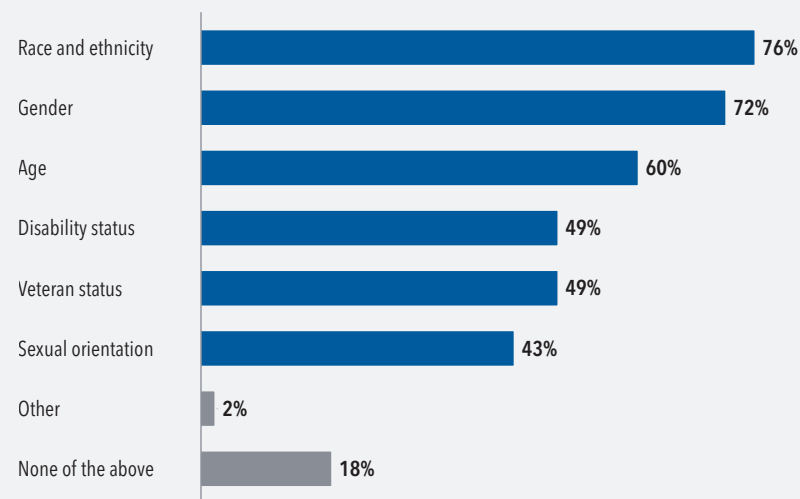
Definitions

Diversity, equity, and inclusion may be defined somewhat differently by each organization, but in general, their relationship to the workforce may consist of the following:

- **Diversity:** The extent to which people of varying backgrounds or demographic characteristics are represented as part of the workforce

- **Equity:** The treatment of those individuals who are already part of the organization in a way in which policies, employee development, and leadership opportunities apply to all in an equitable manner

- **Inclusion:** The engagement of all voices in an organization in a way that respects their diversity, encourages their self-expression and sense of belonging as part of the team, and involves them in policy development and decision making

Those topics may be the subject of stand-alone policies or reflect consideration of how these topics and various types of diversity may overlap. Such "intersectionality," for example, may include the ways in which an employee's race and sexual orientation, gender and age, veteran status and disability, national origin and religion, or other characteristics may impact their hiring, equitable treatment, or inclusion within the organization in ways beyond the impact of one characteristic on its own.

Federal protected classes are a baseline,[5] with some organizations or states potentially adopting additional policies, targeted recruitment efforts, or more detailed tracking. In Figure 1 most respondents indicated that they evaluated their workforce diversity in term of race and ethnicity (76%), gender (72%), and age (60%). Other characteristics may be the subject of American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, nondiscrimination policies, or local veteran hiring preferences, but they are less likely to be evaluated as part of employer DEI data analysis.

Figure 1 **When it comes to evaluating workforce diversity, what group/population categories does your organization consider?** (Select all that apply.)

Category	Percentage
Race and ethnicity	76%
Gender	72%
Age	60%
Disability status	49%
Veteran status	49%
Sexual orientation	43%
Other	2%
None of the above	18%

Organizational Roles

All of those surveyed are human resources decision makers in their organizations, but the level of that authority and the scope of their work vary.

As shown in Figure 2, 59% are the primary decision maker, while others may either collaborate or influence that decision making.

Among those who work for K-12 schools, almost all (97%) served the entire school district, although some also reported responsibility for a single school, a consortium of schools, or some subset of workers (see Figure 3).

Almost all local government respondents (95%) also indicated that they served the entire workforce (see Figure 4).

Detailed Comparisons

Types of Diversity Considered				
Race/ethnicity	Population <10k	**66%**	Population > 25k	**95%**
Veteran status	K-12	**34%**	Local government	**64%**
	South	**33%**	West	**61%**
Disability	South	**34%**	West	**67%**

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

Figure 2 **Role in Decision Making on Human Resources Policy**

- **59%** You are the primary decision-maker
- **29%** You are one of a small group of decision-makers
- **12%** You have considerable influence on these types of decisions
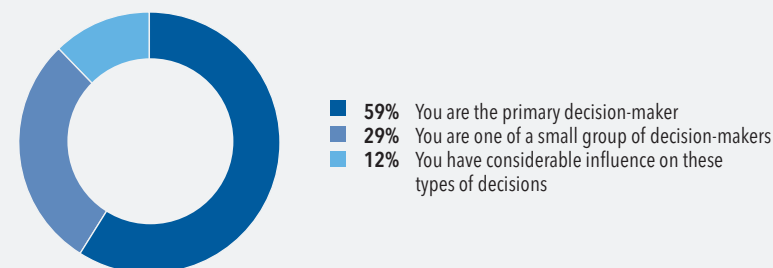
Figure 3 **Scope of Policy Responsibilities**
(K-12; select all that apply)

Entire school district	**97%**
A single school	**8%**
Certain segment of workers in a school district	**1%**
Consortium of schools	**1%**
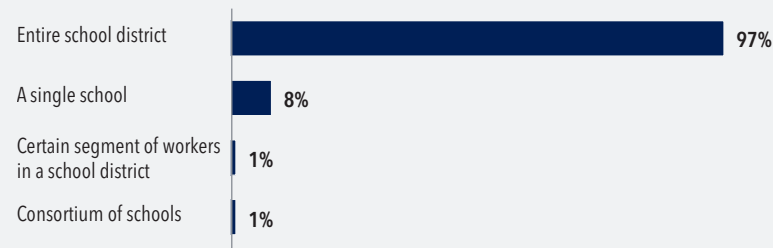
Figure 4 **Scope of Policy Responsibilities**
(Local government; select all that apply)

Entire local government workforce	**95%**
A single department or division	**6%**
Certain segment of workers	**2%**
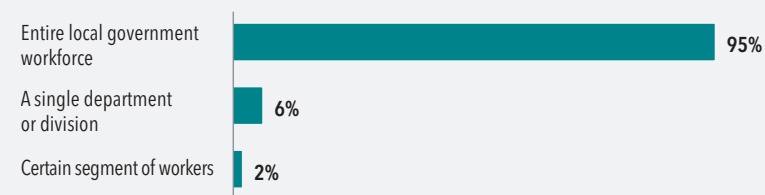
Note: Total exceeds 100% based on some for whom more than one response was applicable.

While the respondents may be the primary human resources decision makers, responsibility for DEI policy may also reside with other elected or appointed officials, as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5 **K-12: Who in your district is responsible for DEI programs/ policies?** (select all that apply)

Superintendent	89%
Principals	48%
School Board	43%
Director of Human Resources	24%
DEI committee	17%
Assistant Principals	14%
Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources	14%
DEI Officer, Equity Officer (or similar title for stand-alone position)	9%
Human Resources Specialist	6%
Assistant Director of Human Resources	2%
Other	6%

Figure 6 **Local Government: Who in your organization is responsible for DEI programs/policies?** (select all that apply)

City/county manager or CAO	54%
Director of Human Resources	43%
Human Resources Specialist	6%
DEI committee	5%
DEI Officer, Equity Officer (or similar title for stand-alone position)	4%
Assistant Director of Human Resources	4%
Head of Human Resources in each department	3%
Other	23%

Organizational Priorities

Although almost all respondents (95%) indicated that DEI is an organizational priority, the degree of that priority varies considerably, with 10% indicating it is a top priority and 46% indicating it is a high priority (see Figure 7).

Even where such a priority has been articulated, other actions by the organization may indicate the extent to which the DEI priority has been operationalized. For example, as shown in Figure 8 only 26% have a strategic plan for how to manage their DEI efforts.

K-12 respondents were much more likely to indicate that DEI was a top or high priority (70%) than were local government respondents (43%), and were also more likely to have adopted a related strategic plan (38% for K-12; 15% for local governments).

Figure 7 **How much of a priority is diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in your organization currently?**

10%	Top priority
46%	High priority
30%	Moderate priority
8%	Slight priority
5%	Not a priority
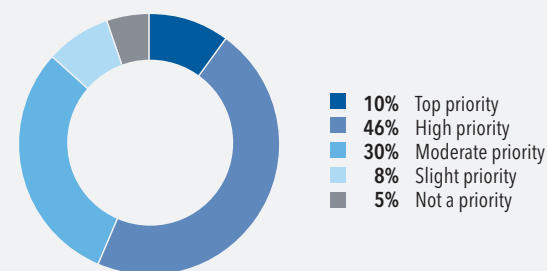
Figure 8 **Does your organization have a strategic plan in place regarding DEI?**

26%	Yes
74%	No
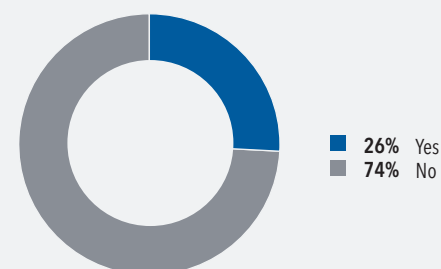
Adopted Policies

Beyond strategic goal setting, organizations may have an array of strategies in place to implement their DEI vision, which may range from formally adopted policies, statutes, or ordinances, to informal practices such as the methods by which human resources staff conduct routine outreach. As shown in Figure 9 at least 41% have some formal DEI policies, while another 26% have only informal policies, and 33% have no policies.

The establishment of those policies may tackle diversity, equity, and inclusion individually or may take the form of one consolidated program. Among survey respondents, the most common form of policy was to address equity within the workforce (52%), followed by diversity (48%; see Figure 10). The next most common approach was to adopt a consolidated DEI policy (41%). Stand-alone inclusion policies were the least reported approach, but were still present among 39% of respondents' agencies.

Figure 9 **Does your organization currently have any formal or informal programs or policies in place related to workforce DEI?**

- **16%** Yes, formal programs/policies only
- **26%** Yes, informal programs/policies only
- **25%** Yes, both formal and informal programs/policies
- **33%** No
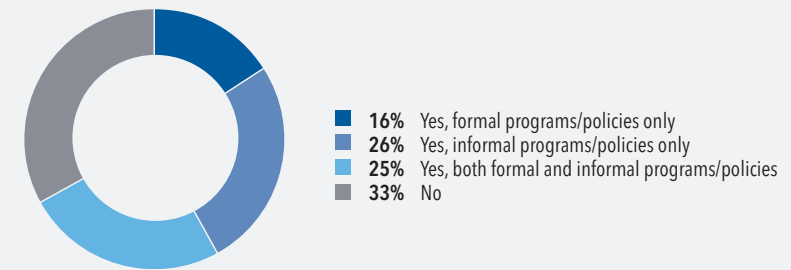
Figure 10 **Does your organization have programs/policies aimed at addressing workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion as separate issues?** (select all that apply)

Yes, to address equity in the workforce specifically	52%
Yes, to address diversity in the workforce specifically	48%
Yes, to address inclusion in the workforce specifically	39%
No programs/policies address DEI in the workforce in general	41%
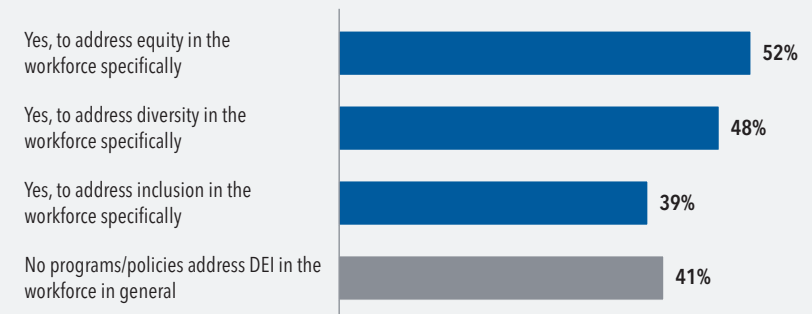
To drill down further into the nature of those policies, the survey also asked what specific policies were currently in place and which ones are under consideration (see Figure 11). The most common existing policies were those to promote gender equity via paid family leave or work flexibility for childcare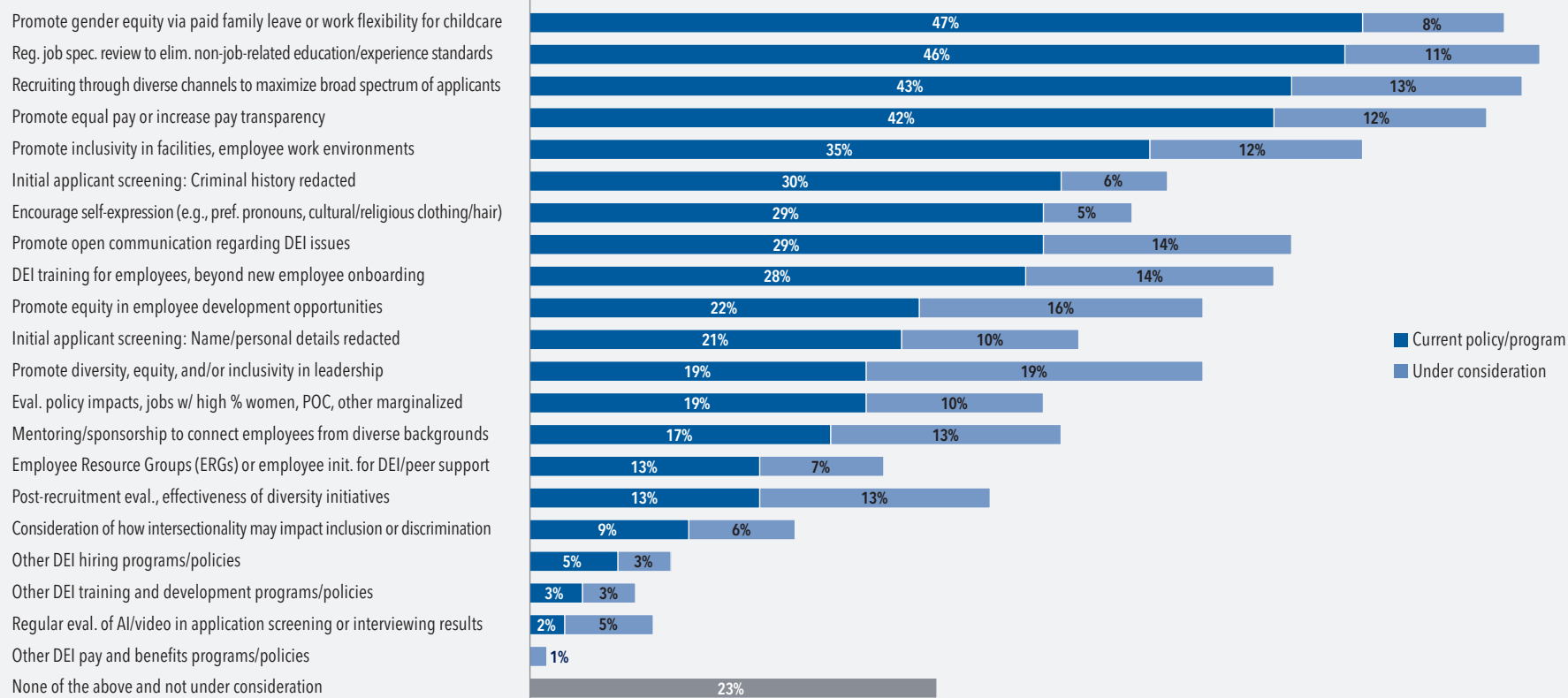 (47%), regularly review job specifications to eliminate non-job-related education or experience standards (46%), and recruit through diverse channels to maximize a broad spectrum of applicants (43%). Where programs were not yet in place, the highest percentages considering new programs were for promoting diversity, equity, and/or inclusion in leadership (19%) and in other employee development opportunities (16%).

Those indicating that they neither had any of these policies in place nor were considering such policies totaled 23%.

Figure 11 **Does your organization have any of the following programs/policies or are they under consideration?**

Policy	Current policy/program	Under consideration
Promote gender equity via paid family leave or work flexibility for childcare	47%	8%
Reg. job spec. review to elim. non-job-related education/experience standards	46%	11%
Recruiting through diverse channels to maximize broad spectrum of applicants	43%	13%
Promote equal pay or increase pay transparency	42%	12%
Promote inclusivity in facilities, employee work environments	35%	12%
Initial applicant screening: Criminal history redacted	30%	6%
Encourage self-expression (e.g., pref. pronouns, cultural/religious clothing/hair)	29%	5%
Promote open communication regarding DEI issues	29%	14%
DEI training for employees, beyond new employee onboarding	28%	14%
Promote equity in employee development opportunities	22%	16%
Initial applicant screening: Name/personal details redacted	21%	10%
Promote diversity, equity, and/or inclusivity in leadership	19%	19%
Eval. policy impacts, jobs w/ high % women, POC, other marginalized	19%	10%
Mentoring/sponsorship to connect employees from diverse backgrounds	17%	13%
Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or employee init. for DEI/peer support	13%	7%
Post-recruitment eval., effectiveness of diversity initiatives	13%	13%
Consideration of how intersectionality may impact inclusion or discrimination	9%	6%
Other DEI hiring programs/policies	5%	3%
Other DEI training and development programs/policies	3%	3%
Regular eval. of AI/video in application screening or interviewing results	2%	5%
Other DEI pay and benefits programs/policies	1%	
None of the above and not under consideration	23%	

For 16 of the 21 policies surveyed, K-12 respondents were more likely than local government respondents to indicate that they had such a policy already in place (see Figure 12). For example, 28% of K-12 respondents reported the use of mentoring or sponsorship programs to connect employees from diverse backgrounds, compared to 7% of local government respondents. Programs that were more common among local governments included redactions during initial application screenings of names (23% vs. 18%) or criminal histories (31% vs. 28%).

Figure 12 **Does your organization have any of the following programs/policies?** (K-12 vs. local government)
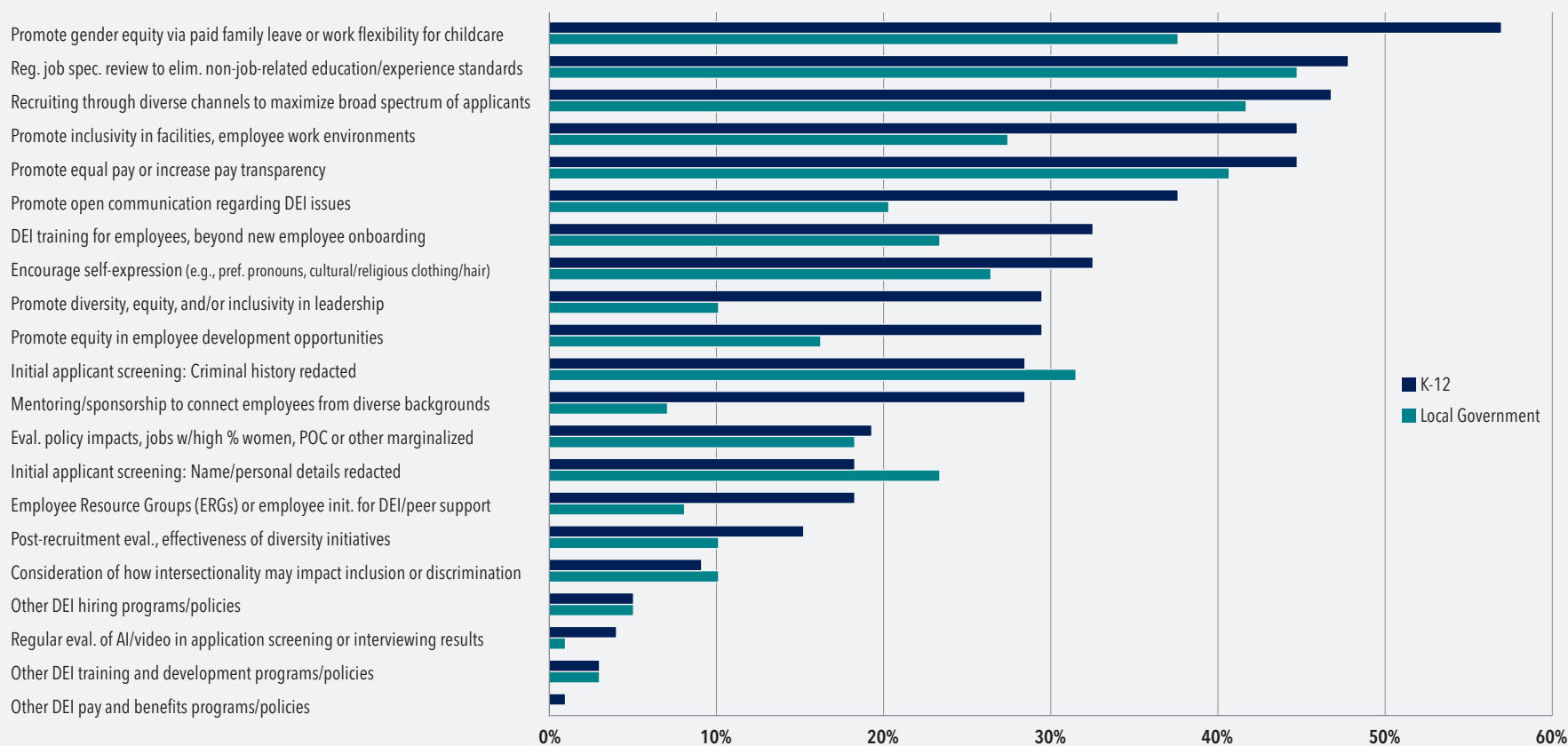
Detailed Comparisons

Some of these differences may correlate to the diversity of larger or urban population centers.

Policies In Place				
Encourage self-expression	South	13%	Northeast	44%
	Small town/rural	24%	Urban	40%
Recruit through diverse channels to maximize broad spectrum of applicants	Population < 10k	34%	Population > 25k	56%
Promote equal pay or increase pay transparency	Northeast	27%	South	50%
Policies Either in Place or Under Consideration				
Post-recruitment evaluation of the effectiveness of diversity initiatives	Population < 10k	19%	Population > 25k	42%

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

Regarding the greater emphasis being placed on gender equity, family leave, and childcare flexibility by K-12 employers, this may relate to the disproportionate employment of women as teachers in elementary and middle schools (80%) and secondary schools (59%).[6]
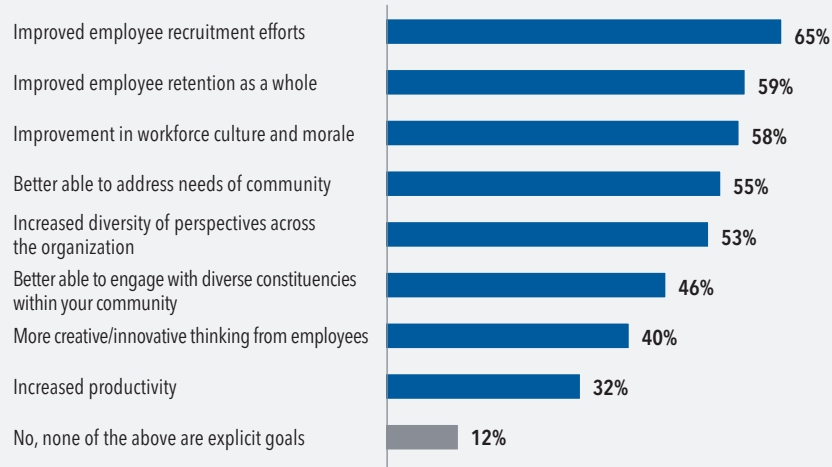
Other differences between K-12 education and local government with respect to DEI policies may relate to leadership, internal or external stakeholder engagement, employee awareness, or other factors, which are discussed in more detail to the left.

Goals and Results

The extent to which organizations are implementing DEI policies is in part a reflection not only of the priority placed on DEI, but also of the organization's goals and motivations.
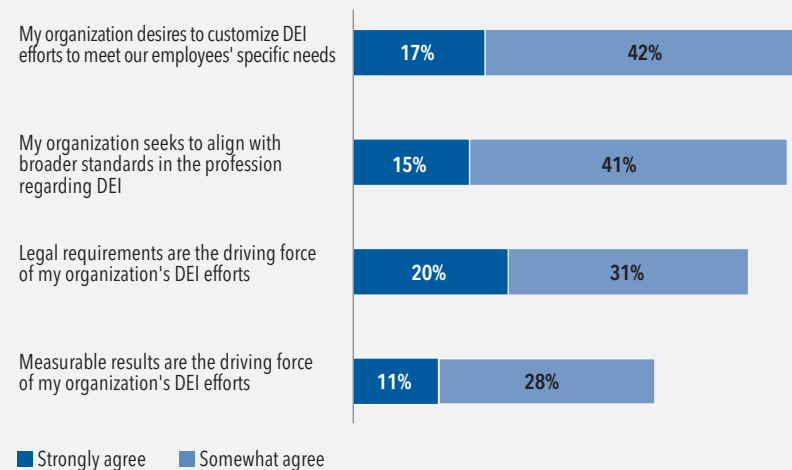
Figure 13 displays a range of organizational goals, with the possibility that two or more goals may be applicable. For example, while 65% identified a goal of improved recruitment and 59% were aiming for improved retention, some of those organizations may also be motivated by the possibility of increasing creativity (40%) or productivity (32%).

Regarding the intensity of organizational motivations, where legal requirements are the driving concern, the focus may be more on what is required for minimum compliance with federal, state, or local mandates. The survey data shows that 20% of respondents strongly agree that legal requirements are a driving concern, with a total of 51% indicating they agree or somewhat agree with that statement (see Figure 14). By contrast, 59% agree or somewhat agree that they desire to meet their employee's specific needs, and 56% agree or somewhat agree that they are seeking to align with broader standards in the profession.

Figure 13 **Are any of the following explicit goals for your DEI efforts?** Please select all that apply.

Improved employee recruitment efforts	65%
Improved employee retention as a whole	59%
Improvement in workforce culture and morale	58%
Better able to address needs of community	55%
Increased diversity of perspectives across the organization	53%
Better able to engage with diverse constituencies within your community	46%
More creative/innovative thinking from employees	40%
Increased productivity	32%
No, none of the above are explicit goals	12%

Figure 14 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your organization?**

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree
My organization desires to customize DEI efforts to meet our employees' specific needs	17%	42%
My organization seeks to align with broader standards in the profession regarding DEI	15%	41%
Legal requirements are the driving force of my organization's DEI efforts	20%	31%
Measurable results are the driving force of my organization's DEI efforts	11%	28%

■ Strongly agree   ■ Somewhat agree

Detailed Comparisons

Worth noting here is that while some organizations in smaller population areas are less likely to relate DEI policies to goals of improving recruitment or increasing a diversity of perspectives, those in small town/rural areas were more likely than those in urban areas to identify DEI policies as relating to goals to increase productivity. That mix of motivations can also be seen in K-12 organizations being more likely to agree with statements that they seek to align with broader standards in the profession or to achieve measurable results.

Regarding legal compliance being a driving force for policy, while there is some variation shown above between employers in urban and small town/rural areas, across all regions, population sizes, and the K-12 and local government professions, at least 40% of each of cohort agreed with that statement.

Explicit Goals				
More creative or innovative thinking	Northeast	**28%**	West	**56%**
Increased diversity of perspectives	Population <10k	**45%**	Population >25k	**69%**
Improved recruitment	Population <10k	**58%**	Population >25k	**77%**
Increased productivity	Urban	**20%**	Small town/rural	**37%**
Better engagement with the community	Small town/rural	**41%**	Urban	**58%**
Other Considerations				
Seek to align with broader standards in the profession	Population <10k	**50%**	Population >25k	**74%**
	Local government	**45%**	K-12	**67%**
Meet employees' specific needs	Local government	**50%**	K-12	**68%**
Driving force: Legal requirements	Urban	**40%**	Small town/rural	**57%**
Driving force: Measurable results	Local government	**31%**	K-12	**46%**

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

The lowest-rated statement on organizational goals was on obtaining measurable results (39% at least somewhat agree), which may stem from more limited efforts to establish related performance measures or to track such data on a routine basis. Assessments of results show some of these data limitations, as more than 25% indicated that the goals shown in Figure 15 are either not tracked or it is too soon to tell whether they have been successful. On the positive side, 70% feel they have been successful in improving equity in the workforce and 65% feel they have improved inclusion in the workforce.
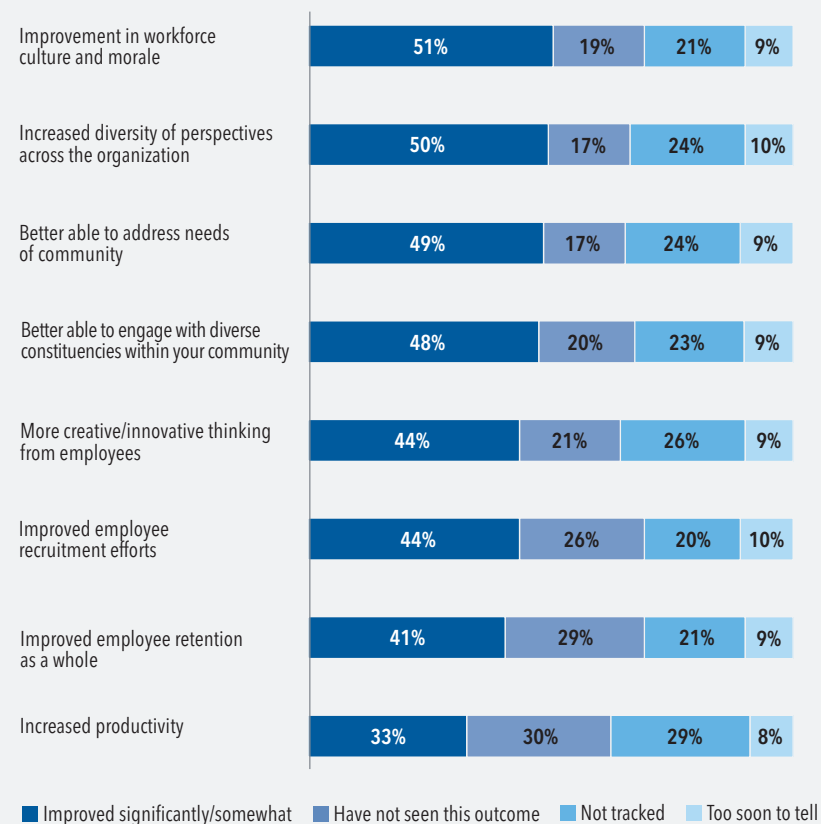
Recruiting a diverse workforce remains a challenge, with 27% of respondents indicating their efforts have not been successful. This may relate in part to larger recruitment issues during the Great Resignation, but may also stem from more localized workforce demographics.

Approximately half of respondents indicated that DEI efforts have led to improvements in workforce culture and morale, diversity of perspectives across the organization, and improved ability to address community needs (see Figure 16). As with Figure 15, there were large percentages (30% or more) indicating that they were either not tracking the identified impacts or that it was too soon to tell.

Figure 15 **How successful have your organizations' efforts been towards...?**

	Very/Somewhat successful	Not successful	Not tracked	Too soon to tell
Improving equity in the workforce	70%	4%	20%	7%
Improving inclusion in the workforce	65%	6%	23%	7%
Retaining a diverse workforce	58%	15%	20%	7%
Recruiting a diverse workforce	48%	27%	18%	7%

Figure 16 **To what degree have you seen the following improvements as a result of your organization's DEI efforts?**

	Improved significantly/somewhat	Have not seen this outcome	Not tracked	Too soon to tell
Improvement in workforce culture and morale	51%	19%	21%	9%
Increased diversity of perspectives across the organization	50%	17%	24%	10%
Better able to address needs of community	49%	17%	24%	9%
Better able to engage with diverse constituencies within your community	48%	20%	23%	9%
More creative/innovative thinking from employees	44%	21%	26%	9%
Improved employee recruitment efforts	44%	26%	20%	10%
Improved employee retention as a whole	41%	29%	21%	9%
Increased productivity	33%	30%	29%	8%

To ensure that respondents would have the opportunity to share details on other types of programs, while also indicating what was most successful, the survey also included an open-ended question (see Figure 17). The most common efforts cited as being most successful were general focuses on diverse hiring (21%) or inclusive behavior (14%). The two concrete programs cited most were intentional targeting of diverse candidates (14%),[7] and internal training in unconscious bias and equity (12%).

Several of the comments shared also reflected the challenges to implementing a successful workforce DEI initiative, such as not having enough applicants (particularly amidst the Great Resignation) or that it was too early to tell what efforts have been achieving results. In addition, 18% of respondents indicated they are not currently focused on DEI programs.
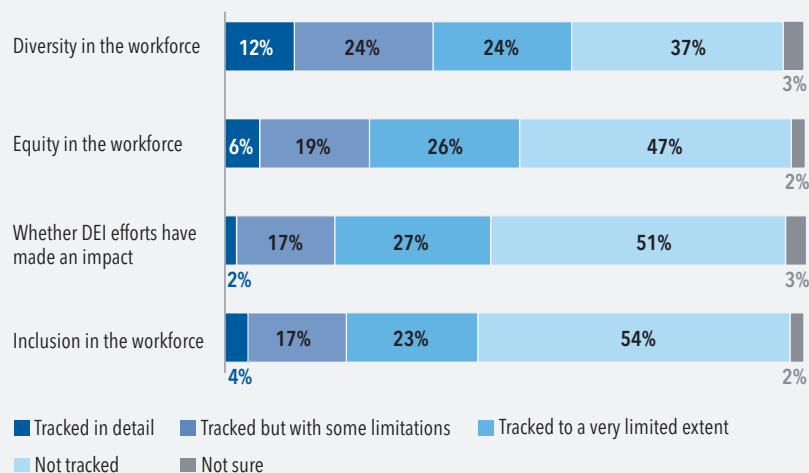
Figure 17 **In your own words, what have been the most successful workforce DEI programs/policies your organization has implemented and why?**

Category	Percentage
Explicit focus on diverse hiring	21%
General internal commitment to inclusive behavior (informal)	14%
More intentional targeting of diverse candidates	14%
Internal training in unconscious bias/equity	12%
Want to implement DEI, but not enough applicants to worry about	7%
Better pay/benefits to attract diverse/nontraditional candidates such as leave and work from home policies	7%
Implementing recommendations from outside community groups and task forces	7%
Hiring the best person for the job regardless of race, gender, etc.	7%
Redacting resumes/paying more attention to nontraditional qualifications such as extracurriculars	7%
Creating internal committees focused on diversity initiatives	6%
Too early to tell, only beginning to implement DEI policies	6%
Internal mentoring program for new hires	5%
"Grow your own" programs, helping internal candidates gain qualifications	3%
Establishing internal officer (such as director of DEI) to focus on initiatives	2%
Don't know	1%
Other	1%
Not currently focusing on DEI	18%

Digging deeper into the "too early to tell" category, the survey also asked about the extent to which organizations were collecting data on their DEI efforts. Figure 18 shows that while a total of 61% of respondents were tracking workforce diversity to some degree, only 12% were tracking this in detail, with another 24% tracking it with some limitations, and 24% tracking it to a very limited extent.

The higher percentages indicating that an organization is not tracking data for equity (47%) or inclusion (54%) may relate to the need to employ more indirect means to obtain such data.

Figure 18 **To what extent does your organization track data that allows you to evaluate…?**

	Tracked in detail	Tracked but with some limitations	Tracked to a very limited extent	Not tracked	Not sure
Diversity in the workforce	12%	24%	24%	37%	3%
Equity in the workforce	6%	19%	26%	47%	2%
Whether DEI efforts have made an impact	2%	17%	27%	51%	3%
Inclusion in the workforce	4%	17%	23%	54%	2%

Detailed Comparisons

Areas where organizations have deemed themselves to have been successful in their DEI efforts may in part be driven by the collection of quantitative data or may also be based on more informal assessment methods (see further discussion below accompanying Figure 19).

The greatest variations in evaluations here are on recruitment of a diverse workforce and improving inclusion. For a further exploration of potential factors inhibiting results, see **Barriers to Implementation** below.

Very or Somewhat Successful				
Recruiting a diverse workforce	Northeast	**36%**	West	**68%**
Improving inclusion	Local government	**54%**	K-12	**75%**
Improved Significantly Or Somewhat				
Productivity	Urban	**16%**	Small town/rural	**41%**
Addressing the needs of the community	Local government	**37%**	K-12	**61%**
Culture and morale	Local government	**41%**	K-12	**61%**
Not Applicable				
Not currently focusing on DEI	K-12	**8%**	Local government	**28%**
	Population > 25K	**6%**	Population < 10K	**25%**

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

Detailed Comparisons

K-12 organizations are both more likely to be tracking their DEI efforts and more likely to be doing so using formal written surveys. Both local government and K-12 organizations employ other data sources, from informal discussions and observations to analysis of mandated data collection.
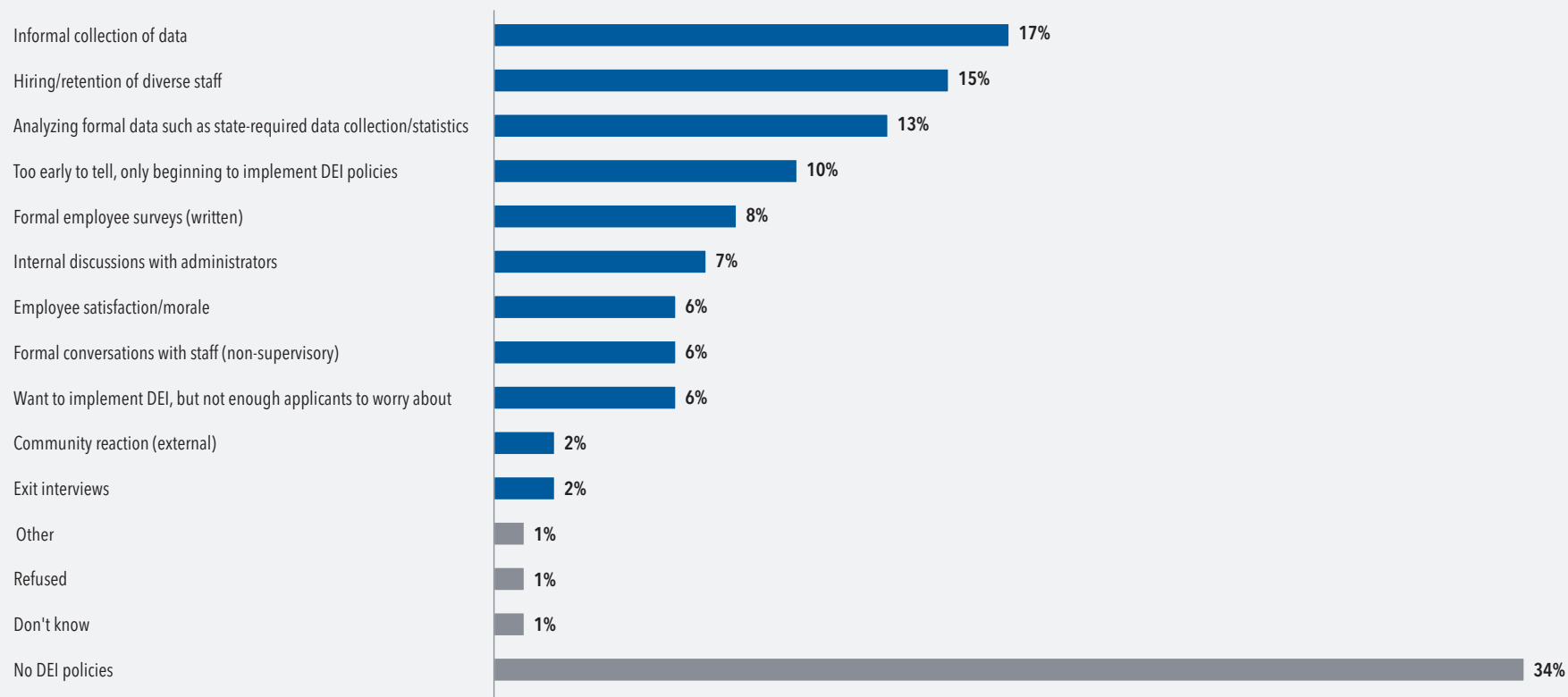
Tracking (to any extent)				
Inclusion	Local government	**27%**	K-12	**61%**
Equity	Local government	**37%**	K-12	**66%**
Whether initiatives made an impact	Local government	**32%**	K-12	**60%**
Diversity	Local government	**49%**	K-12	**73%**
	Population < 10K	**53%**	Population > 25K	**77%**
	Small town (excl. rural)	**52%**	Urban	**68%**
Methods of Evaluation				
Formal surveys	Local government	**2%**	K-12	**14%**
Formal conversations with staff	Local government	**2%**	K-12	**10%**

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

Figure 19 shows further detail about such methods, with 17% of respondents citing informal data collection (e.g., via anecdotal observation or conversations), 13% analyzing state-level data, and 8% conducting employee surveys. There were also significant percentages indicating that they had no DEI policies in place (34%) or that it was too early to assess their policies' success (10%).

Figure 19 **In your own words, what has been your organization's approach to evaluating the success of workforce DEI programs/policies?**

|	
Informal collection of data	17%
Hiring/retention of diverse staff	15%
Analyzing formal data such as state-required data collection/statistics	13%
Too early to tell, only beginning to implement DEI policies	10%
Formal employee surveys (written)	8%
Internal discussions with administrators	7%
Employee satisfaction/morale	6%
Formal conversations with staff (non-supervisory)	6%
Want to implement DEI, but not enough applicants to worry about	6%
Community reaction (external)	2%
Exit interviews	2%
Other	1%
Refused	1%
Don't know	1%
No DEI policies	34%

Internal and External Policy Environments

Regardless of the policies that may be adopted, the ability to focus on DEI is tied to the level of support from organizational leaders and other stakeholders. Figure 20 shows that 69% of respondents feel that senior leadership is either very or somewhat supportive, followed by 65% of employees. Support from internal stakeholders is slightly lower (55%; representing unions, employee resource groups, or other internal constituencies).

While external stakeholders in the preceding figure showed the lowest levels of support (53%), this may stem in part from a lack of awareness.

Figure 20 **What has been the reaction from the following parties regarding your organization's workforce DEI efforts?**

	Very supportive	Somewhat supportive
Senior leadership	42%	27%
Employees	27%	38%
Internal stakeholders	24%	31%
External stakeholders	24%	28%
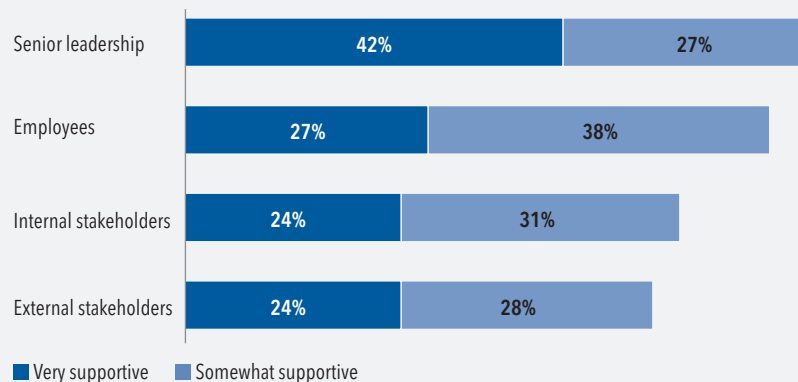
Detailed Comparisons

K-12 organizations report higher levels of support than local governments among senior leadership, internal stakeholders, and employees, as well as greater awareness by employees regarding their employer's DEI efforts. Employers in larger communities are also more likely to have support for DEI efforts from among internal and external stakeholders.

Very/Somewhat Supportive				
Senior leadership	Population <10k	60%	Population > 25k	83%
	Local government	60%	K-12	78%
External stakeholders	Population <10k	45%	Population > 25k	70%
Internal Stakeholders	Population <10k	47%	Population > 25k	71%
	Local government	45%	K-12	65%
Employees	Local government	57%	K-12	72%
Very/Somewhat Aware				
Employees	Local government	40%	K-12	64%
Broader community	Rural	31%	Urban	50%

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

As seen in Figure 21, 52% of employees are deemed to be very or somewhat aware of workforce DEI efforts, while the same is true for only 38% of the broader community.

Barriers to Implementation

Barriers to DEI implementation are displayed in Figure 22. Lack of diverse candidates within the local labor market is the most commonly cited, with 87% of respondents saying this was either a significant barrier or somewhat

Figure 21 **In your opinion, how aware are the following groups of your organization's workforce DEI efforts?**
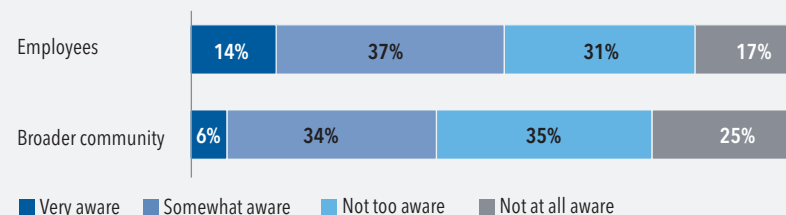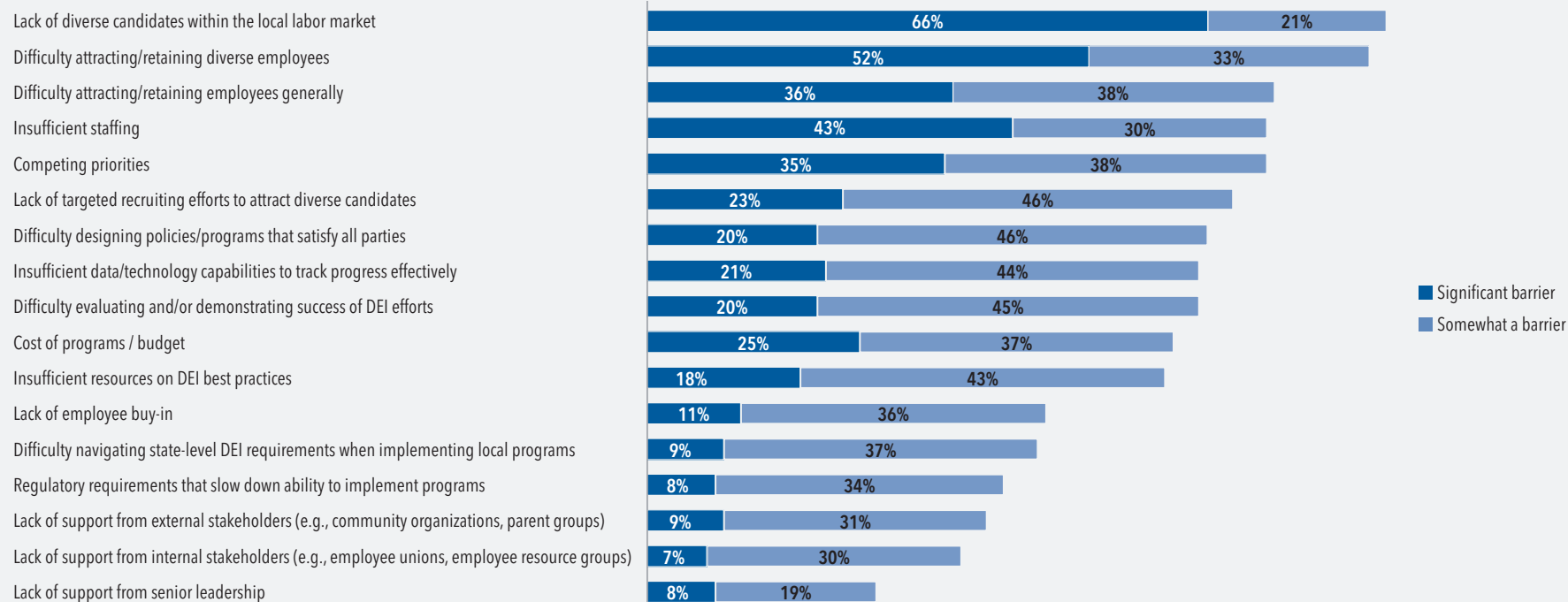
	Very aware	Somewhat aware	Not too aware	Not at all aware
Employees	14%	37%	31%	17%
Broader community	6%	34%	35%	25%

Figure 22 **To what degree are the following barriers for implementing workforce DEI programs and policies at your organization?**

Barrier	Significant barrier	Somewhat a barrier
Lack of diverse candidates within the local labor market	66%	21%
Difficulty attracting/retaining diverse employees	52%	33%
Difficulty attracting/retaining employees generally	36%	38%
Insufficient staffing	43%	30%
Competing priorities	35%	38%
Lack of targeted recruiting efforts to attract diverse candidates	23%	46%
Difficulty designing policies/programs that satisfy all parties	20%	46%
Insufficient data/technology capabilities to track progress effectively	21%	44%
Difficulty evaluating and/or demonstrating success of DEI efforts	20%	45%
Cost of programs / budget	25%	37%
Insufficient resources on DEI best practices	18%	43%
Lack of employee buy-in	11%	36%
Difficulty navigating state-level DEI requirements when implementing local programs	9%	37%
Regulatory requirements that slow down ability to implement programs	8%	34%
Lack of support from external stakeholders (e.g., community organizations, parent groups)	9%	31%
Lack of support from internal stakeholders (e.g., employee unions, employee resource groups)	7%	30%
Lack of support from senior leadership	8%	19%

of a barrier. Overcoming such barriers may depend on expanded recruitment strategies, as well as consideration of options for remote work that might open doors to diverse staff from further away who might not need to plan an immediate relocation prior to joining the team.

Of note in this figure is that the difficulty in attracting and retaining diverse employees (85%) is just ahead of the difficulty of attracting and retaining employees generally (74%) – a challenge affecting the larger economy as both public and private sector employees reconsider their career and personal priorities in the face of the pandemic and the Great Resignation.

For more information on hard-to-fill positions in state and local government, see also the Institute's annual workforce survey, conducted in collaboration with the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) and the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE).

Detailed Comparisons

The cost of DEI programs was identified as at least somewhat a barrier for 81% of employers in communities over 25,000 population.

Aside from COVID-19, the other factors most likely to have made maintaining a diverse workforce at least somewhat more difficult were a long history of non-diverse representation in specific occupations (an issue for 78% with a population over 25,000, and 74% of urban respondents) and lack of diversity in the community (an issue for 74% in the Northeast).

Significantly or Somewhat A Barrier to DEI Implementation				
Cost of programs	Population <10k	**58%**	Population > 25k	**81%**
Lack of support From external stakeholders	Local government	**30%**	K-12	**51%**
	Urban	**29%**	Small town/rural	**46%**
Lack of support from senior leadership	K-12	**17%**	Local government	**35%**
	Urban	**16%**	Small town/rural	**30%**
Significantly or Somewhat More Difficult to Maintain a Diverse Workforce				
Lack of diversity In the community	South	**52%**	Northeast	**74%**
Long history of non-diverse representation in specific occupations	Population <10k	**56%**	Population > 25k	**78%**
	Small town/rural	**60%**	Urban	**74%**
COVID-19	Population <10k	**59%**	Population > 25k	**79%**

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

Figure 23 **To what degree have the following made it more difficult or easier for your organization to maintain a diverse workforce?**

Factor	Significantly more difficult	Somewhat more difficult	No effect
Lack of diversity in community overall	35%	31%	30%
Long history of non-diverse representation in certain occupations	29%	35%	33%
COVID-19 pandemic	24%	38%	35%
Large numbers of employees at retirement age/retiring at the same time	12%	31%	45%
Presence of institutions in the community that draw a diverse population and potential workforce	9%	16%	65%
Automation changing the workforce in significant ways	2%	17%	76%

■ Significantly more difficult   ■ Somewhat more difficult   ■ No effect

The question of policy implementation aside, the survey also asked about the impact of various factors on the ability to maintain a diverse workforce. The lack of diversity in the community overall was the top response (66% significantly or somewhat more difficult; see Figure 23), but this was much lower than the percentage that indicated that the lack of diverse candidates impacted DEI policy implementation (87%; see Figure 22 above).

Other factors making the maintenance of a diverse workforce more difficult included a long history of non-diverse representation (64%) and the COVID-19 pandemic (62%).

Current and Future Representation

Influenced by both historical hiring patterns and proactive DEI efforts, Figures 24 and 25 display the extent to which the current workforce reflects the community in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. Regarding gender, 76% of respondents feel their workforce reflects the community very well or somewhat well. By comparison, 63% feel that way regarding racial/ethnic representation.

While 66% of respondents in Figure 23 said that the lack of sufficient numbers of diverse candidates in the local labor market was a significant barrier to maintaining a diverse workforce, Figure 25 would seem to indicate that despite the difficulty of reaching such candidates, the existing diversity of the surrounding community is not as well represented in the workforce as it could be.

Figure 24 **How well does your workforce mirror the community it serves in terms of gender?**

- **32%** Very well
- **43%** Somewhat well
- **14%** Not too well
- **4%** Not at all well
- **6%** Not sure
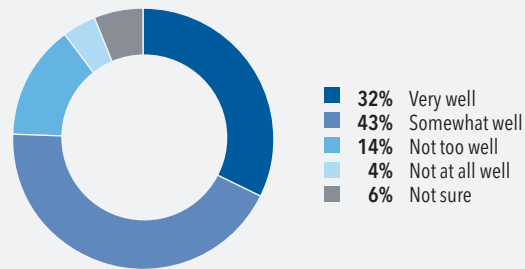
Figure 25 **How well does your workforce mirror the community it serves in terms of race/ethnicity?**

- **30%** Very well
- **32%** Somewhat well
- **24%** Not too well
- **9%** Not at all well
- **4%** Not sure
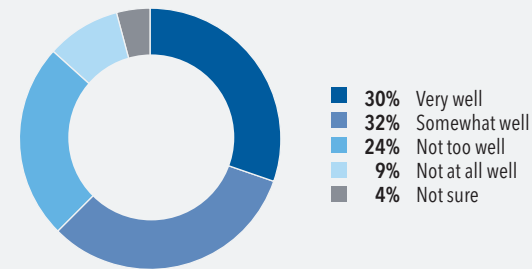
Looking ahead, respondents were also asked to project how they see the diversity of the community and the workforce evolving over the next ten years. In doing so, 68% predicted that the community would be much more or somewhat more diverse (Figure 26), while 71% predicted their workforce would be much more or somewhat more diverse (Figure 27). This may be an optimistic assessment of the success of their efforts at diversifying their workforce, but "somewhat more diverse" still leaves open the possibility that representation would lag behind the reflection of the community that is the subject of Figures 24 and 25.

Figure 26 **To what extent do you expect the broader community you serve will be more or less diverse in 10 years compared to how it looks now?**

- **17%** Much more diverse in 10 years
- **51%** Somewhat more diverse in 10 years
- **21%** No difference
- **4%** Somewhat less diverse in 10 years
- **2%** Much less diverse in 10 years
- **5%** Not sure
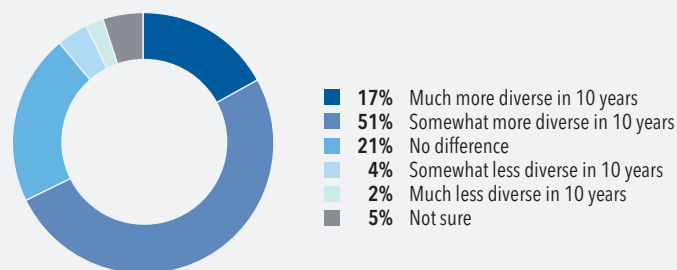
Figure 27 **To what extent do you expect your workforce will be more or less diverse in 10 years compared to how it looks now?**

- **14%** Much more diverse in 10 years
- **57%** Somewhat more diverse in 10 years
- **19%** No difference
- **1%** Somewhat less diverse in 10 years
- **2%** Much less diverse in 10 years
- **6%** Not sure
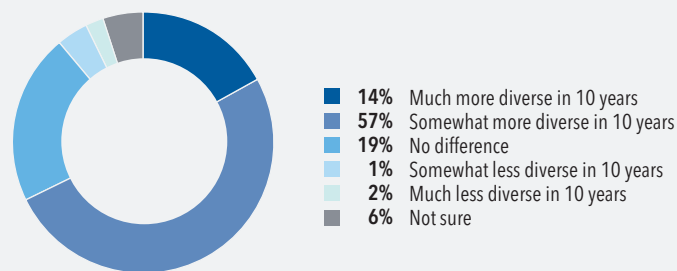
Detailed Comparisons

Segments currently seen as less diverse than the community at large include the urban workforce (55% view it as not too well or not at all well reflecting community racial/ethnic diversity), and the urban and K-12 workforce (with 24-25% perceiving a gender imbalance). While women are underrepresented in a range of public service professions, such as public safety and utilities, men are underrepresented among K-12 teachers and teachers assistants.[8]

Projecting ten years ahead, urban respondents were more likely to foresee both a more diverse community and a more diverse workforce.

Workforce Not Too Well/Not At All Well Reflecting the Community				
Race/ethnicity	Small town/rural	24%	Urban	55%
Gender	Small town (excl. rural)	11%	Urban	25%
	Local government	13%	K-12	24%
Much More/Somewhat More Diversity in 10 Years				
Broader community	Small town/rural	63%	Urban	80%
Workforce	Population <10k	62%	Population > 25k	87%
	Small town/rural	67%	Urban	81%

Note: Categories shown are those where the differences between the cohorts shown on a given line are most significant.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This survey research identifies workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion as a top or high priority for 56% of local government and K-12 respondents. In addition, 26% have formalized that approach through a related strategic plan and 42% have formal programs or policies to help achieve those goals.

The most significant barriers to implementing DEI programs include a lack of diverse candidates in the local labor market (87%); difficulty attracting or retaining diverse staff (85%); and factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing Great Resignation, and difficulty attracting and retaining employees generally (74%).

The types of employers most likely to have adopted workforce DEI policies or to have systems in place to measure their results are K-12 employers and communities over 25,000 population.

This document follows a 2021 study entitled **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Public Service Workforce**, which reported on current and projected workforce data by gender, race, ethnicity, age, and other characteristics.

The survey conducted as the source of this report is also the starting point for a companion series of focus groups. Those group discussions are delving deeper into the challenges respondents have faced in implementing workforce DEI policies and the approaches that have been most successful. A report on the focus group results will be released in summer 2022.
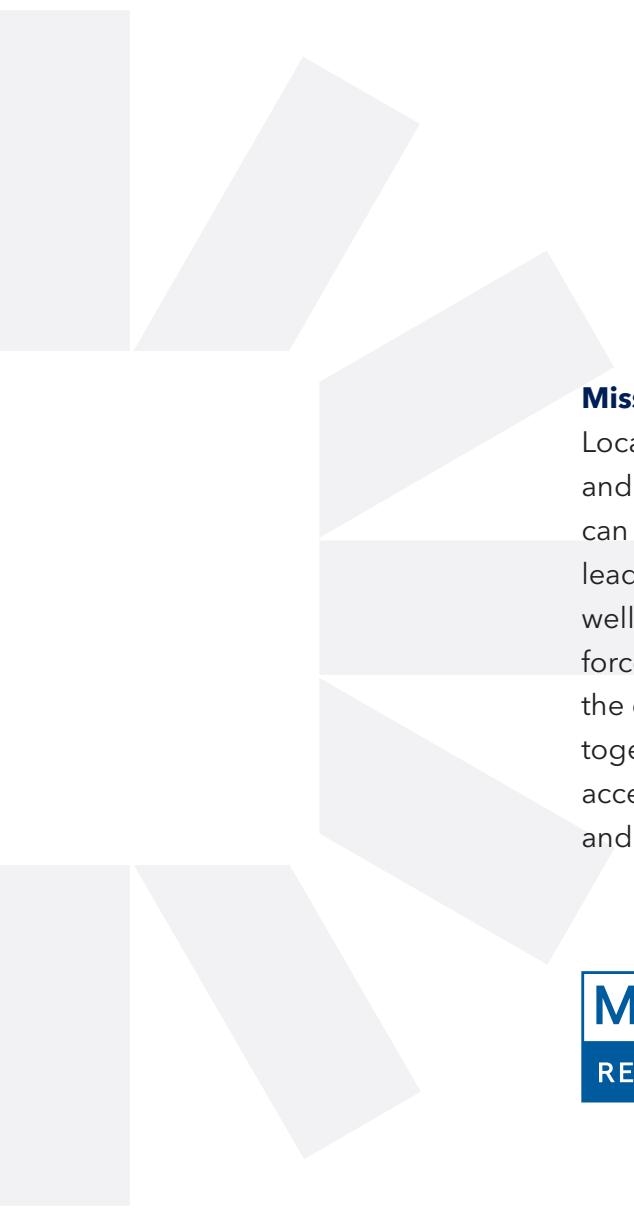
Resources

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Public Service Workforce, MissionSquare Research Institute, September 2021.

Survey Findings: State and Local Government Workforce 2021, MissionSquare Research Institute, IPMA-HR, and NASPE, May 2021.

Endnotes

1. The mean (average) age of respondents was 50.46.

2. S. Census Bureau, "**2020 Government Employment and Payroll Tables,**" 2020.

3. MissionSquare Research Institute analysis of IPUMS-CPS. See IPUMS-CPS, "Current Population Survey," at **https://cps.ipums.org/cps/sda.shtml**

4. U.S. Census Bureau, **Census of Governments**, 2017.

5. Per federal equal employment opportunity law, applicants, employees and former employees are protected from employment discrimination based on **race**, **color**, **religion**, **sex** (including **pregnancy**, **sexual orientation**, or **gender identity**), **national origin**, **age** (40 or older), **disability** and **genetic information** (including family medical history). See also: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity "**3. Who is protected from employment discrimination?**", accessed March 11, 2022

6. For employment trends in education by gender, see Figure 4 of **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Public Service Workforce**, MissionSquare Research Institute, September 2021.

7. May include targeting job fairs in certain locations with more diverse populations, such as urban areas; pairing with outside organizations such as colleges to attract diverse candidates; expanding advertising of job postings to more diverse outlets; or some combination of those or similar methods.

8. See Figures 2-8, **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Public Service Workforce**.

MissionSquare Research Institute (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence at ICMA-RC) promotes excellence in state and local government and other public service organizations so they can attract and retain talented employees. The organization identifies leading practices and conducts research on retirement plans, health and wellness benefits, workforce demographics and skill set needs, labor force development, and topics facing the not-for-profit industry and the education sector. MissionSquare Research Institute brings leaders together with respected researchers. For more information and to access research and publications, visit **mission-sq.org/researchinstitute** and follow on **Twitter** and **LinkedIn**.

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