

# Q&A with the Experts: How Public Sector Organizations Are Supporting DEI&B Initiatives

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Studies show that workplaces where employees feel a sense of belonging and more connected have a decidedly positive impact on both the citizen and employee experiences. After all, happy and engaged employees deliver excellent service — resulting in happy and engaged citizens. **Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEI&B)** can add value to an organization, strengthen its culture, and boost employee engagement and pride.

The following excerpts are highlights from a UKG Industry Insights session that featured a panel of industry experts (below) discussing the importance of implementing DEI&B initiatives in the public sector and beyond.



## Knickeita Bullock, Principal Public Sector Consultant, UKG

Knickeita is a human capital and workforce management consultant with more than 20 years of public sector consulting experience. She's a trusted partner, strategic advisor, and thought leader who engages technology in a data-driven solutions process.



## Marcia Conner

*Executive Director,  
National Forum for Black  
Public Administrators  
(NFBPA)*

With more than 20 years of public sector administrative experience, Marcia Conner has served as a city manager, town manager, and budget director for various entities throughout the U.S. She also serves as the director of MLC Consulting and provides one-on-one consulting for governmental and nonprofit agencies.



## Dr. Wazir Ishmael

*City Manager,  
City of Hollywood, FL*

Dr. Ishmael has more than 30 years of experience as a city administrator, planner, and international business executive with the City of Miramar; City of Hollywood; Clark County, Washington; Broward County Planning Council; Wigan Council, Lancashire, UK; CTG-Power Systems International; and PlanLogical Corporation.



## Dayana Vice

*Strategic Advisor for  
Citywide HR Planning &  
Innovation, City of Seattle*

Dayana (Dayo) Vice is strategic director of a citywide initiative to end racism and to encourage folks to truly be employers of choice and to embody equity and drive inclusion at the City of Seattle. She is also a gifted actress who uses her theatrical experience to lean into making change and be an institutional disruptor.

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Dayo, tell us about the work you're doing with the City of Seattle around DEI&B. Who's your audience?



Something we've uncovered with our race and social justice initiative is that everybody learns about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at a different pace based on their personal experience in life. However, whatever skin you're looking through the world at is going to fundamentally change what you need to learn.

We have something called a racial equity caucus structure, which are caucuses of people who get together by choice and who get to self-identify which caucus they join. I am a white caucus facilitator, so folks who identify as white, who want to learn more about racial equity, come to my caucus. We have conversations much like this one, discussing where we're at on our racial equity journey and the benefit of doing it. This allows us to learn through our individualized kind of experience without harming other people.



Can you elaborate on this approach and how it's been working for the city?



It's gotten to the point now where I'm part of conversations where a trusted friend of mine who is Black will come to me and say, "A white woman I know you're coaching said XY&Z, and this is the impact it had on various people. Can you please talk to this person and help them understand why that was harmful?"

And the amount of healing that this gives all sides is incredible. It's transformative. And we want to transform people. We don't want to just throw information at them and hope that they take it in. However, we know the demographics of our various cities and we know that predominantly supervisors are white, at least in Seattle. So when you have people geared toward teaching white people how to be less harmful in those positions of power, you see actual transformation.

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– Dayana Vice, City of Seattle

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Dr. Ishmael, what is the City of Hollywood doing around DEI&B? I know that you are leaders. In fact, last year the city elected its first person of color to the City of Hollywood Commission, right?



It's actually the first time in Hollywood's history, which is interesting given the fact that we have a significant African American population down here to see that happening.

What we've been doing in terms of this whole issue of bias and diversity and inclusivity is not just to have programs, because we have those as well, but to actually employ DEI&B as part of our hiring practices and as part of our pay programs. It's not enough to talk about it, because we do all those things. We have the mandatory trainings and the reportings and the recognitions. We have Muslim Heritage month, Jewish Heritage Month, Asia Heritage month — we don't leave people out. In fact, there's something called a Municipal Equity Scorecard, and when I got to the city back in 2014, we were scoring around 40%. Last year, we scored a perfect 100%. So we make sure we go after LGBTQ proficiency, workspace bias, and all of those associated issues.



Can you tell us more about the Municipal Equity Scorecard and how you're using technology to ensure you are eliminating biases?



We all know that technology is a really significant factor in attracting and maintaining quality talent. But what about the human factor? For example, someone might look at my name and think, "What the hell is 'Ishmael'? It sounds Arab or Muslim."

Look, we all come with certain ideas or we've been acculturated over a long period of time. And as much as we like to think that we are unbiased and that we don't bring baggage? We ALL bring baggage. So the interesting thing, and maybe just a little bit controversial, is we're seeing an increasing use of artificial intelligence. AI has been used to help companies find the right candidates, and research is showing that computers actually do a better job at screening candidates than humans.

Multiple studies have shown that candidates selected through these hiring AI algorithms outlast and outperform those selected by humans. Your greatest point of failure in terms of onboarding or bringing somebody on could be somebody who is actually responsible for checking off those people in your HR personnel department. And this technology takes that away.

**"AI has been used to help companies find the right candidates, and research is showing that computers actually do a better job at screening candidates than humans."**

*Dr. Wazir Ishmael, City of Hollywood*

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Now, as with any good system, whether it's AI or not, it's only as good as the data you put into it. But it's pretty much where Hollywood is right now in terms of incorporating technology to ensure that we really are taking care of these instances where particular individuals can screen people out.

And just the last thing in terms of the scorecard; it's based on a number of metrics. And you can skew them. I remember when my daughter was applying to law school and there were some law schools that just said, "Hey, apply. It's free." But we knew why they were doing it. They just wanted to say they got another minority applying. We don't want to be doing that. These types of data need to be parsed. You need to look down in a very granular way to see exactly what's taking place throughout your organization.



Marcia, can you talk to us about what the National Forum for Black Public Administrators is doing and how your organization is helping change the conversation?



NFBPA is in a very fortunate and positive position. As a part of just being a nonprofit, we also have an external arm of our organization called Institute for Excellence, and through that, we've been able to stand up a diversity, equity, and inclusion platform and program.

In deciding how to implement DE&I, they began to look for people who can implement DE&I programs within their organizations — key individuals who had experience and training and the opportunity to work with these jurisdictions. So we had a convening where we invited DE&I officers from different types of employers, whether they were private, public sector, or nonprofit.

And what we came out with was some of their concerns in terms of this DE&I movement and how you make it real. How do you get communities and cities and counties to value diversity? A lot of them are doing self-assessments and asking for individuals to come in and look at how they're approaching diversity, and this is something we're able to assist with.

Then you have to talk about how you institutionalize cultural knowledge and how you implement that as a part of hiring to make sure everyone's included in that. And then the real issue is, how do we have a conversation around understanding being different, where there is a BIPOC community, LGBTQ community, etc.? What are the things in terms of our personnel policies? So those are some of the ways we're helping communities and cities and counties began to peel back not just the DE&I concept, but also talk a little bit more about how organizations are institutionalizing this.

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Tell us more about how you're helping organizations adopt diversity policies.



We're finding that diversity, equity, and inclusion officers in certain jurisdictions can mean things that are totally different. Some of them are just focusing on contracting, some on the purchasing component, some of them are in employee relations. So I think the real issue is, how can we assist cities and communities and really look at their cultural competency from a DE&I perspective?

DE&I has become one of the top value pieces for many employees in determining whether a workplace is one they want to be a part of — and that starts with leadership. What does your organization look like? This becomes very important when you're trying to attract employees in terms of what they value now as being important. The old systems of measuring employee performance aren't how people are valuing how you move in an organization today. It's how you *treat* them. And I think that's one of the things we're finding as an association assisting a number of entities.

One of the things I also want to say is that it is very important not only for your leadership at the top, but the governing bodies to embrace DE&I as well. It can mean various things to many people, but we really just need to do it. Our elected officials, our appointed, and all our employees need to embrace it, and I think the more successful cities are those that take it from a cultural competency perspective and look across the organization in terms of how they define it.



Diversity equity, inclusion, and belonging are certainly the most important things when it comes to being an employer of choice. But we have to make sure that as we lean into it, we lean into actually *caring*. I want to thank my panel for joining me for this discussion. I'm excited to see where we're going to end up, and I look forward to seeing all of you as we progress on this path.

**Learn more about DEI&B at UKG: [ukg.com](https://www.ukg.com)**