

CAREER BUSINESS EDUCATION LIFESTYLE

# DIVERSITY<sup>COMM</sup>

FEBRUARY 2024

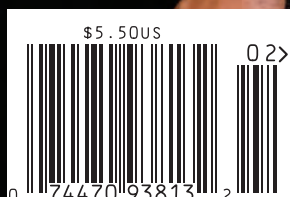
MAGAZINE

Leveling  
the Field  
for Black  
Businesses

Make-or-Break  
Lessons for  
Entrepreneurs

TOP  
BLACK  
EMPLOYERS  
& HBCUs

THE ONE & ONLY  
**TYLER PERRY**





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**Willie**

VP, Head of Talent Development  
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We invite you to explore career opportunities at Danaher by visiting our careers site [jobs.danaher.com](https://jobs.danaher.com) and joining our [talent community](#).





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# Mondelēz International

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Mondelēz International, Inc. empowers people to snack right in over 150 countries around the world. With 2022 net revenues of approximately \$31 billion, MDLZ is leading the future of snacking with iconic global and local brands such as Oreo, Chips Ahoy!, Ritz, LU, Clif Bar and Tate's Bake Shop biscuits and baked snacks, as well as Cadbury Dairy Milk, Milka and Toblerone chocolate.

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We believe our multifaceted approach has initiated a path to improve the root conditions necessary to create great workplaces for all in our organization and the community at large.





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March 2024 FOCUS

What's Trending in Women Communities



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**DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS**

**PROJECT MANAGER BUSINESS**

**DEVELOPMENT**

Tonya Kinsey

**PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION**

Jenine Peregrin

[jperegrin@diversitycomm.net](mailto:jperegrin@diversitycomm.net)

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# A Portrait of Perseverance

As we celebrate Black History Month and all that's new and notable in our Black Communities, who better to feature on our cover this month than the one and only Tyler Perry?

This acting, directing, producing and screenwriting phenom didn't become a Black storytelling movie mogul overnight. He endured his share of hardship, struggles and failures, but the one thing he never did? Give up.

In referencing his very first play, "I Know I've Been Changed," he said, "I was in the 200-seat theater, and I thought 1,200 people would show up, and only 30 showed up," Perry recalled. "I lost everything, but I kept going." It's a good thing he did because today, Perry is considered one of the world's best-known entertainers and only the second African American to own his very own movie studio. Read more about how Perry is continuing to tell Black stories on page 76.

As you navigate the path of your career, connections can help you keep moving forward, which is why "Tips to Expand Your Professional Network" is a must-read on page 56. If you're looking for a fresh start this new year, it's always good to get a refresher on "Preparing for Your Job Interview" (page 54). Finally, if you're a business owner or entrepreneur looking for inspiration, we've got it right here: "I'm a Black Woman, Mother of Four and a Millionaire—Here's My #1 Piece of Advice" on page 68 is a great read with some sound advice for us all.

We here at *DiversityComm Magazine* hope you make 2024 your best year ever! In the words of Perry – "The key to life when it gets tough is to keep moving. Just keep moving."



*Kat Castagnoli*  
Kat Castagnoli,

Senior Managing Editor

*DiversityComm Magazine*



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**OF THE | 2024**  
**BEST**

**A**t DiversityComm, Inc., we believe that diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are the foundations of success for any business or organization. Tracking the trends, staying aware of forward-thinking DEI policies and being listed on the top lists of diversity and equity leaders is what it's going to take for businesses, institutions and nonprofits to continue growing and performing. According to one study from Ethisphere, ethical companies outperform their competition by 7.1%. Though another study from i-Sight found that those on key DEI lists and rankings made more than double the profits of comparable companies. Our Best of the Best list seeks to recognize the organizations that have gone above and beyond to create more inclusive, equitable workplaces

where diverse talent can be recruited, developed and retained. We recognize them for their commitment to uplifting values and fostering a great workplace culture. In the words of Mona Lisa Faris, our founder and publisher, "Diversity is your superpower," she said "Embrace it. When you embrace and understand the value of diversity, you have the capability to maximize your creativity, problem-solving skills and inclusivity, which ultimately leads to increasing profitability. It allows you to compete on a whole other level businesswise, both internally and in reputation." For more information, please visit [diversitycomm.net/methodology](https://diversitycomm.net/methodology).

To receive a survey invite for the next evaluation, please contact [surveys@diversitycomm.net](mailto:surveys@diversitycomm.net).



# 2024 TOP BLACK EMPLOYERS

Abbott Laboratories	Consolidated Edison Company
AbbVie	DaVita
Adient	Delta Air Lines, Inc.
ADP	DISH Network, LLC
Aflac	Diversity & Inclusion, City of Tallahassee
Air Products & Chemicals	Dow Inc.
ALDI	DTE Energy Co.
Alight Solutions	Duke Energy Corporation
Allstate Insurance Company	Ecolab Inc.
Ally Financial	Eli Lilly and Company
Ameren Corporation	Entergy Corporation
American Express	Exelon Corporation
American Family Insurance	F.N.B. Corporation
Aramark	Fannie Mae
AT&T Inc.	FedEx Corp.
Bank of America	First Horizon Corporation
Baylor Scott & White Health	FOX Corporation
Best Buy Co., Inc.	General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)
Capital One	General Mills, Inc.
CarMax	General Motors
Centene Corporation	Global Atlantic Financial Group
Cigna	Hilton
CMS ENERGY	Humana
Colgate-Palmolive Company	IBM
Comcast	Johnson & Johnson



# 2024 TOP BLACK EMPLOYERS

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# **SUPPLIER DIVERSITY** program

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As a company that makes it a priority to attract the best possible workforce through inclusive hiring practices, Hilton firmly believes that an ongoing commitment to diversity results in numerous benefits. HSM takes a similar approach in seeking out partnerships with diverse vendors. We understand that everyone wins when procurement providers develop multiple channels for the sourcing of goods and services, promote healthy competition among vendors and advance innovation within products, services and solutions. That's why Hilton and HSM are continually striving to create a workforce and a supplier network that reflect the diversity of communities where we live, work and travel.

To learn more about our industry leading Supplier Diversity Program, visit [mysupplymanagement.com](https://mysupplymanagement.com).



# Gabby Settles

*Senior Category Manager,  
Property Operations*



## **A Conversation with HSM's Senior Category Manager, Property Operations**

With more than 17 years' experience procuring services and supplies to support hospitality, retail, warehouse and data center building operations, Gabby Settles recognizes the value of partnering with diverse businesses and creating opportunities for underrepresented communities. By working with a wide range of suppliers from different backgrounds and cultures, Gabby and her team are connecting HSM's global customer base with fresh perspectives, innovative products and new ideas, while also supporting local economies and promoting diversity across the world's supply chains.

### **How is the Property Operations team contributing to supplier diversity at HSM?**

We contribute to supplier diversity by actively seeking out and qualifying certified diverse suppliers to include in our sourcing events, special projects and spend goals. We work closely with existing suppliers to ensure they meet Hilton's high standards for quality and reliability, and we engage these partners in the promotion of diversity and inclusion across their internal operations and value chain. We also participate in networking events to connect with new diverse suppliers seeking growth opportunities.

### **What advice would you give to Black suppliers who want to partner with Hilton?**

My advice for any diverse supplier looking to work with Hilton is to showcase what you and your company can uniquely bring to the table. Rather than highlighting those similarities you may share with a larger supplier, lean in to your key differentiators and spotlight the skills, passions, professional expertise and personal experiences that help you and your team stand out from the crowd! And, continue to network and foster relationships with both new and existing contacts. Remember that while one opportunity may not be the right fit for your business, the right opportunity could be just around the corner!

### **How is HSM's Supplier Diversity Program creating opportunities for Black owned businesses?**

HSM's overarching commitment to our suppliers is that we want to help them succeed – and for small, diverse and disadvantaged businesses, meeting these suppliers where they are is often integral to their success. That's why our Supplier Diversity Program is specifically structured to bolster the financial, educational, technological and social reach of these businesses, including those owned by women, minorities, veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ community, individuals with disabilities and other traditionally underrepresented groups. HSM has been working to build a more diverse and inclusive supply chain for over a decade, and we are continually seeking out new partnerships with Black owned businesses and actively engaging with enterprises that contribute to a more equitable future. Learn more about our mission by visiting the "Supplier Diversity" page at [mysupplymanagement.com](https://mysupplymanagement.com).



# Top Hospitality Companies Excelling in DEI

*DiversityComm Magazine's Best of the Best program will now include industry-specific top companies and employers who excel at moving the needle forward with their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The following industries will be featured throughout the year: hospitality, pharmaceutical, banking, insurance, health care, finance, travel and utilities, retail and telecom, manufacturing and tech.*

The hospitality industry is all about accommodating people, regardless of who they are, in places they may have never been to before. But to make a customer feel welcome, companies need to embrace diversity, equity and inclusion within their own organizations. This month, we are recognizing six companies within the hospitality industry that are going above and beyond in setting the standard for a DEI-friendly business model.



## ACCOR HOTELS

A hospitality chain headquartered in Maryland, Accor Hotels offers everything from economy-style accommodations to luxury living quarters for your temporary stays. Accor is also one of the best companies to work for if you're looking for a business that prioritizes DEI. Part of the IMPACT 10x10x10 initiative of the HeForShe solidarity campaign, Accor is especially dedicated to providing leadership opportunities for women employees across their companies. In 2022, 93% of front-line manager positions and 42% of all job positions at Accor were held by women. The company additionally prides itself on its diverse hiring initiatives, especially for those with disabilities, on an international level through proper training, providing accessible job applications, fostering an inclusive workplace culture and participating in organizations that advocate for disability-friendly hiring.

Sources: Accor, Vervoe



## AIRBNB

They may be one of the youngest companies on this list, but their attention to diversity and inclusion is as old as their presence in the hospitality industry. Airbnb is best known for their people-first attitude both for their customers and their employees. They have a firm “candidate-first” hiring policy that allows them to find the best talent and eliminates the chance of unconscious bias in the hiring process. As of summer 2023, 52% of the company’s new hires were women and 21% of new hires were from underrepresented backgrounds. Airbnb also prides itself on being a disability-friendly employer, having been recognized multiple times by the Disability Equality Index.

Sources: Airbnb, Breezy, Yahoo! Finance



JOHN MACDOUGALL/APP VIA GETTY IMAGES



CHOICE HOTELS

## CHOICE HOTELS

According to Comparably, a website where current and former employees can rank their workplace, Choice Hotels received the outstandingly high grade of a 4.6/5 on the culture scale, and higher rankings for their attention to DEI initiatives. Choice Hotels has a lengthy inclusion policy that reiterates their dedication to hiring and retaining diverse talent. Past and present employees that were surveyed have highly ranked their experiences with the company. Of the women surveyed, 70% stated that they were paid fairly; 93% reported a positive work environment and 53% would recommend the company to a friend. Diverse employees were surveyed in these same categories, ranking pay, environment and their likelihood of recommendation at 72%, 95% and 54%, respectively. The owners of branches such as EconoLodge, Comfort, Quality Inn and others, Choice Hotels is also a multiple award-winning company for being LGBTQ+ friendly by the Human Rights Campaign and for being diversity-focused by *Forbes*.

Sources: Choice Hotels, Comparably





HILTON

## HILTON

Hilton has been recognized by many lists and award programs for being a diversity-friendly employer. They not only practice hiring techniques that work to eliminate discriminatory hiring, using virtual interviewing processes for accessibility well before the pandemic, but go out of their way to make their recruitment processes inclusive. Along with a general commitment to recruiting and retaining diverse talent, Hilton holds partnerships with several nonprofit organizations to provide opportunities for HBCU graduates, transitioning veterans and refugees. About 72% of the entire workforce at Hilton identifies as being ethnically diverse, with many of these employees, especially women, being in leadership positions. Hilton also provides many DEI-focused resources for their employees, including employee resource groups (ERGs), a strong supplier diversity program, a board of directors where 50% of the members are women and tuition-free educational opportunities for their employees.

Sources: Hilton, Breezy

## HYATT

Hyatt is another hotel chain who is putting a tremendous amount of effort into being a top DEI-centered company. They practice equitable hiring and promoting, have ERGs within their company and even have their own Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council to ensure that those in leadership positions are being trained to lead inclusively. Outside of their own workplace, Hyatt is also ensuring that all future employees, regardless of background, have a fair shot of securing a job. Established in 2020, Hyatt created the Change Starts Here grant program that funds six community-based organizations specializing in providing career development, training and opportunities to under-represented groups. This program was also created as a promise to its customers to hire and work with companies and organizations that support diverse communities.

Sources: Hyatt, Breezy

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, XNATEDAWGX







## MARRIOTT

Last but certainly not least, Marriott is also putting their best foot forward when it comes to DEI. Marriott puts the highest standard on diverse hiring and an inclusive workforce, but what sets them apart the most is their overwhelming commitment to supplier diversity. Marriott works with some of the biggest diverse small business certifiers like NGLCC, NMSDC, WBENC and Disability:IN to form partnerships with small businesses that are minority-, woman-, LGBTQ+, veteran- and disability-owned. This not only shows their support for diversely-owned businesses, but directly supports the success of them. In the United States, Marriott has over 800 locations that are owned and operated by women and diverse minorities, and have established programs that will grow their diversity footprint on a global scale. The hotelier has established career-, educational- and community-centered programs that encourage the importance of DEI in the Americas, the Middle East and Africa, Asia, Europe and beyond.

Sources: Marriott, Vervoe



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# Celebrating Black Excellence

February marks Black History Month, where we celebrate the accomplishments, contributions and heritage of Black Americans. *DiversityComm Magazine* is taking a look over the last several months to highlight the many successes of individuals within the community. Here's what you might have missed:

## The Academy to Replace Hattie McDaniel's Long-Lost Oscar

In 1940, Hattie McDaniel became the first Black person to win an Oscar for her portrayal of Mammy in the renowned film, *Gone with the Wind*. Upon her passing in 1952, McDaniel left her Oscar to what is now Howard University's Chadwick A. Boseman College of the Fine Arts. The award mysteriously disappeared in the late 1960s and hasn't been seen since. Decades later, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will finally replace the award. "I am overjoyed that this Academy Award is returning to what is now the Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts at Howard University," Phylicia Rashad, Howard's fine arts dean, said. "This immense piece of history will be back in the College of Fine Arts for our students to draw inspiration from. Ms. Hattie is coming home!"

Sources: NBC News, Wikipedia



JOHN KISCH/GETTY IMAGES

## Magic Johnson Earns Billionaire Status

It's official. Magic Johnson is now a billionaire. Joining LeBron James, Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods, Johnson joins the "billionaire club," becoming the fourth athlete in history to reach the mark. Though he made about \$40 million while playing for the NBA, Johnson has always looked to business investing to grow his finances. *Forbes* estimates that Johnson holds a net worth of about \$1.2 billion, with most of that funding coming from his 60% investment in the life insurance company, EquiTrust. Other funds have come from Johnson's ongoing business decisions with major corporations like Starbucks to conduct business and open locations in predominately Black neighborhoods and communities.

Source: ESPN



ISAAC BREKEN/GETTY IMAGES FOR GLOBAL GAMING EXPO



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JUSTIN BERLIN/CAA PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Laila Edwards Becomes the First Black Player on Women's NHL National Team

Nineteen-year-old Laila Edwards made history this last year when she became the first Black player to join the women's national hockey team. She officially earned her title when she played in a seven-game tournament against Canada late last year and was the only player to make her debut on the 22-person team. Edwards currently attends and plays for the University of Wisconsin, where she was named fifth in scoring during her sophomore season with 18 points. She is also a 2023 NCAA Women's Frozen Four champion, an alternate captain for the silver medal winning U.S. team at the 2022 IIHF U18 Women's World Championship and was named to the Western Collegiate Hockey Association All Rookie team.

Source: NHL

## Missy Elliott is the First Woman Rapper Inducted into Hall of Fame

Missy Elliott was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame last year, officially becoming the first woman rapper to do so. Known for her legacy in hip-hop and rap, Elliott is changing the genre with hits like "Get Ur Freak On," "Work It" and "The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)." She was presented the honor by another icon in the industry, Queen Latifah, who spoke highly of her impact on hip-hop: "Trust me, nothing sounded the same after Missy Elliott came on the scene," Latifah stated according to *Entertainment Weekly*. "And that's because Missy has always been a futurist, someone who's always looking ahead." Elliott closed out her induction by performing several of her hit songs, which can be streamed now on Hulu and Disney+.

Source: Entertainment Weekly



CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR FYE





## Diversity, equity and inclusion is how we do business

At Liberty Mutual, we foster an atmosphere of respect, where our collective differences and similarities constantly inspire and empower us. As a global company that serves customers of different cultures and backgrounds, Liberty Mutual is committed to actively supporting and engaging an inclusive supply base.

Visit us at [lmi.co/supplierprofile](https://lmi.co/supplierprofile) and complete our Supplier Profile.



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## Women's Hall of Fame Welcomes Serena Williams & Ruby Bridges

In March, civil rights activist Ruby Bridges and tennis champion Serena Williams will be two of the women to be welcomed in the Women's Hall of Fame as part of the 2024 inductee class. In 1960, Bridges became one of the first Black children to attend a formerly segregated school. She became one of the many icons of the Civil Rights Movement, memorialized by Norman Rockwell, and went on to form the Ruby Bridges Foundation as an adult—an organization working to promote racial equity and inclusion. Recently retired, Williams' induction comes from her phenomenal tennis career. She is a 23-time Grand Slam tennis champion and is regarded as one of the greatest tennis players in history. Both women will be entering the hall for the change they have curated and what they have accomplished throughout their careers.

Sources: NBC News, Wikipedia



BRIDGES: BRYAN BEDDER/GETTY IMAGES FOR GLAMOUR; WILLIAMS: CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES



JOSEPH OKPAKO/WIREIMAGE

## A\$AP Rocky Becomes a Creative Director for PUMA

Sports company PUMA and music artist, creative and designer A\$AP Rocky have officially announced a long-term creative partnership. Rooted in the motorsport business, A\$AP Rocky will serve as the creative director for the category, with a focus on the intersection of the sport and streetwear. He will focus his energy and efforts on PUMA's new partnership with F1, developing bespoke capsules that will influence the brand's seasonal design directions moving forward. His line will mainly be released in 2024 and 2025, ranging from athletic wear to street clothes. "Working with brands as iconic as PUMA and as innovative as F1 has been truly inspiring," said A\$AP Rocky. "When the world sees what we're doing, I believe a shift will happen with how brands approach taking risks and working with diverse creatives."

Source: PUMA





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BRYAN BEDDER/GETTY IMAGES



## Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" Makes Country Music History

In 1988, Tracy Chapman released a self-titled album that included the song "Fast Car." Both the album and the song rose in popularity at the time, but its recent resurgence is making history in country music nearly 37 years later. In 2023, country singer Luke Combs covered Chapman's "Fast Car," introducing the popular hit to a new generation of listeners in the social media world. The song quickly gained popularity again and took over the country music charts to such an extent that it won Song of the Year and Single of the Year at the 2023 Country Music Awards. Chapman's win marks the first time that a Black woman has won a Song of the Year award in the CMA's 56-year history. Sources: The Mary Sue, Wikipedia

## Philadelphia Elects First Black Woman Mayor

Taking office this year, former Philadelphia City Council member Cherelle Parker was elected mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Though the city's Black population currently sits at about 40%, Parker is only the fourth Black person and the only woman to hold the position. She is also the city's 100th mayor. Parker won the election on a campaign championing public safety, sustainability and educational reforms. Growing up in Philadelphia herself, Parker said of her mayoral status on NBC: "I'm uniquely prepared to make the city the safest, cleanest, greenest big city in the nation with access to economic opportunity for all."

Sources: NBC News, Wikipedia



GILBERT CARRASQUILLO/GC IMAGES





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**Pictured:** RMA Administrator Marcia Bunker with faculty of the University of Arkansas

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## Working for the USDA Risk Management Agency

### Kameka Gray, Outreach Specialist

My interest in agriculture began during childhood as I spent every summer and Thanksgiving holiday at my grandparents post-slavery farm in the Red Clay Hill area of Winston County, Mississippi. The farm was very diversified in row crops - cotton, corn, vegetables, hay, and sorghum, and livestock production of swine, Guernsey dairy cattle, and poultry. Manual farm labor was provided by family members to chop, pick, and cultivate the crops.

Although born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, my family roots are in the state of Mississippi. After I obtained my Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Tennessee State University in Nashville, TN; I applied for USDA jobs in Mississippi. I was fortunate to be hired by the Jackson, MS Regional Office of RMA in May of 2018 as a Louisiana Risk Management Specialist. This role allowed me to give my children a peaceful upbringing, much like I experienced during my childhood visits to my grandparents farm. It also allowed me a chance to balance my career life with motherhood as I enjoy being a classroom, football, basketball and soccer mom. I am the proud mother of Alisha (23), Kenan (11) and Kole (9).

While in the Risk Management Specialist role, my passion increased to educate and help under-served producers sign up for USDA programs, this led to my current position as a Risk Management Education, Outreach Specialist. My current duties with the Risk Management Agency (RMA) include network building and strategic promotion of farm risk management tools. I work closely with risk management education partners who emphatically assist our traditionally under-served producers within the southeastern U.S.

RMA plays a vital role in farm communities. Our risk management tools serve as the nation's primary farm safety net. For some producers, crop insurance is the difference between staying in business or going out of business after a disaster takes place. We understand our obligation, and we are dedicated to improving our products, expanding participation, and ensuring producers needs are addressed. Producer education remains a priority at RMA, and it is fulfilling to be a part of a team advocating for equity and advancement.

Each year, we provide significant funding as an investment to provide risk management education and training programs that support farmers and ranchers, including under-served producers, smallscale farmers, organic operations, and climate-smart farm practices.

Being a woman of a color and working for RMA has allowed me to network and build relationships with stakeholders throughout diverse communities. Through in-person outreach, I've had the ability to build trust and increase education of RMA's products. Our agency has allowed me to collaborate effectively and deliver results. Here at RMA, you're always supported and encouraged to develop your career, as well as seek opportunities for growth.



Kameka Gray

A federal career offers outstanding benefits and a world of opportunities. Many career opportunities are available for growth or relocation. Great competitive pay, comprehensive benefits, and great work-life balance. Working at RMA has been the most rewarding out of my 15 years of federal service.

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# Adult Swim Introduces its First Spanish-Language Show

Even if you don't think you've watched an Adult Swim program, you most likely have. A channel specializing in comedy and animation content for a PG-13 to R rated audience, Adult Swim is home to some of the most popular shows to-date, including *Rick and Morty*, *Bob's Burgers* and *Futurama*. Now, the network is expanding its library and desire for inclusion with its first Spanish-language program.

At New York Comic Con in 2023, Adult Swim announced its newest project—a stop-motion series called *Women Wearing Shoulder Pads*.

**“While we’ve all seen a million stop-motion shows in Spanish featuring an all-female cast centered on the plight of guinea pigs, Gonzalo’s unique voice and the visually rich stop-motion from Cinema Fantasma meant that we couldn’t pass up on *Women Wearing Shoulder Pads*.”**

– teased Michael Ouweleen, president of Adult Swim

The series will follow a wealthy Spaniard living in Ecuador as she journeys through the complicated world of love, family, commercials and South American guinea pigs. The new series will mark Adult Swim’s first-ever Spanish-language series, along with its return to the stop-motion animation format. Each episode will be about 15 minutes long and feature an all-female cast.

Produced entirely in Spanish with English subtitles, the series comes from creator Gonzalo Cordova—who is best known for his work on the TV series *Tuca & Bertie* and *Adam Ruins Everything*—and in



Michael Ouweleen speaks onstage at An Animation Journey with Cartoon Network's Adult Swim panel during New York Comic Con 2022 on Oct. 9, 2022 in New York City.



# WOMEN WEARING SHOULDER PADS



partnership with the Mexico City-based studio, Cinema Fantasma.

“While we’ve all seen a million stop-motion shows in Spanish featuring an all-female cast centered on the plight of guinea pigs,” Michael Ouweleen, the president

of Adult Swim teased, “Gonzalo’s unique voice and the visually rich stop-motion from Cinema Fantasma meant that we couldn’t pass up on *Women Wearing Shoulder Pads*.”

Shows like *Women Wearing*

*Shoulder Pads* follow a trend of increasing Spanish language media in the United States over the past several years. In 2019, the U.S. Census found that nearly 68 million people in the United States spoke another language at

home that wasn’t English. Of this population, over 61% said that they spoke Spanish at home. With an increasing rate of Hispanic, Latinx and other Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, it would be no surprise if these rates have increased over the last five years.

During this time, several film and television networks, educational platforms and government agencies have released informative and entertainment mediums alike in both English and Spanish. Providing these resources and forms of entertainment is not only good for business—increasing viewership and consumption for networks—but makes media more inclusive and accessible to audiences.

At publication, information on casting, release dates and episode titles had not been released, but more news can be expected within this next year.

Sources: Adult Swim, Warner Brothers Discovery

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# Kevin Hart Aims to Level the Field for Hispanic- & Black-Owned Businesses

**B**lack, Hispanic and other minority business owners have been historically underfunded with less access to business resources. And while this still remains an issue, more celebrity-funded endeavors are stepping in to ease the burden.

For the second year in a row, actor and comedian Kevin Hart is using funds made through his small business to support diverse business owners. As part of his annual give-back program, the Coramino Fund, Hart and his business partner, Juan Domingo Beckmann, gifted numerous \$10,000 grants to Hispanic- and

**“The Coramino Fund is not just about grants—it’s about building a legacy of economic empowerment and generational success.”**

– Kevin Hart



GRAN CORAMINO

Black-owned businesses. The recipients were part of a large pool of applicants who applied to receive the funds. They are also eligible for job training and entrepreneurship learning opportunities provided by Hart’s team.

“The Coramino Fund is not just about grants—it’s about building a legacy of economic empowerment and generational success,” Hart stated in a press release. “The impact our first year of collaboration with LISC had on Black and Latinx small business owners was inspiring to see. With this new round of support,

we’re continuing to help break the barriers that have held talented entrepreneurs back from achieving their dreams.”

Gran Coramino was established in 2022 by Hart and Beckmann, who founded the tequila brand wanting to create a drink that blended Hart’s ideas and passions with Beckmann’s expertise for drink concocting. Wanting to do something even more for their community, the pair founded the Coramino Fund the same year and donates \$1 for every bottle sold to support Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs and their

small businesses across the United States and Mexico.

While the 2023 winners have not been chosen at the time of writing, 2022 set the tone for future funds, with \$10,000 grants to each of the 50 recipients chosen from an application pool of 20,000. The applications were chosen and distributed with the help of U.S. impact partner, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).

“The Coramino Fund is not merely a financial boost for small businesses; it’s a transformative force for aspiring entrepreneurs,”

said Michael T. Pugh, LISC CEO. “We’re eager to continue leveling the playing field for under-resourced Black and Latinx small business owners. Together with Gran Coramino tequila, we are supporting sustainable businesses, quality jobs and economic growth that will enrich lives and uplift communities across the nation.”

The company will hold another round of entrepreneurship programming in the early months of 2024 to fund businesses in Jalisco, Mexico and plans to hold its third year of grant giving at the end of this year.





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# The First Woman to Lead the U.S. Navy

With an impressive resume and a long-time commitment to the U.S. Navy, it's no wonder that Admiral Lisa Franchetti was nominated and assigned as the Chief of Naval Operations. In November, Franchetti was sworn in as the 33rd Chief of Naval Operations at a small ceremony in the Pentagon. She is the first woman to lead the U.S. Navy in its history. According to the BBC, this is also the first time that a woman was nominated to head a Pentagon military service branch. She was voted into the position on a 95-1 vote.

"I am honored to have been confirmed as the 33rd Chief of Naval Operations, and am proud to serve alongside the Sailors and civilians that make up our Navy team," Franchetti said. "I look forward to

continuing to lead the world's most powerful Navy."

Franchetti has served with the U.S. Navy in some capacity for nearly 40 years. A native of Rochester, New York, Franchetti received her commission in 1985 through the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps Program at Northwestern University. From there, Franchetti went on to serve on several operational tours, including as an auxiliaries officer and first division officer on USS Shenandoah; navigator and jumboization coordinator onboard USS Monongahela; operations officer on USS Moosbrugger; combat systems officer and chief staff officer for Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 2; executive officer of USS Stout and assistant surface operations officer on USS George Washington Strike



Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro swears in Adm. Lisa Franchetti as the 33rd Chief of Naval Operations in the Pentagon. Franchetti becomes the first woman service chief and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

CHIEF MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST AMANDA R. GRAY

Group. She also commanded several ships of her own, most notably serving as the commander of Pacific Partnership 2010, embarked on the USNS Mercy.

In her flag assignments, she served as a commander for U.S. Naval Forces Korea; commander,

Carrier Strike Group 9; commander, Carrier Strike Group 15; chief of staff, Strategy, Plans and Policy (J-5) Joint Staff; commander, U.S. 6th Fleet; commander, Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO; deputy commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and U.S. Naval Forces Africa; deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Warfighting Development, N7 and director for Strategy, Plans and Policy (J-5), Joint Staff. Most recently, Franchetti assumed the role of Vice Chief of Naval Operations which she held for a little over a year.

Her service has also earned Franchetti some of the highest military honors. These include the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with four gold award stars, the National Defense Service Medal and many others.

Upon swearing into her historic role, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro said of Franchetti:

"It was my honor today to swear in Adm. Lisa M. Franchetti as the 33rd Chief of Naval Operations.

I have the utmost confidence that [she] will faithfully fulfill the duties of this esteemed position. I look forward to working with her to lead our Force into the future as we continue to strengthen our maritime dominance, build a culture of warfighting excellence and enhance strategic partnerships."

Sources: U.S. Navy, BBC, Wikipedia



DOD PHOTO BY CHAD J. MCNEELEY

The new Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Lisa Franchetti delivers remarks after assuming the duties of CNO during the relinquishment of office ceremony for the 32nd Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Michael M. Gilday, at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland on Aug. 14, 2023.



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# Chinese Actor Tony Leung Makes History During the Venice Film Festival

By Natalie Rodgers

Celebrating its 80th year, the Venice Film Festival has been one of the first to showcase some of the greatest and most poignant films throughout history. As the oldest running film festival in the world, the annual event excels in honoring individuals in the film industry who have made a difference and excelled in their craft.

This last year, Hong Kong actor and singer Tony Leung Chiu-wai, best known as Tony Leung, won the festival's most coveted prize, the Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award. He is the first Chinese actor to be recognized with the honor.

Often referred to as one of Asia's most successful and internationally recognized actors, Leung has done more than make his mark in films all over the world. Starring and working with studios based in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Germany, France, the United States and throughout China, Leung made a name for himself mostly in romance and action genre films.

He is best known for starring in international collaborative films with director Wong Kar-wai, such as *In the Mood for Love* and *The Grandmaster*. Leung has also appeared in previous Venice Film Festival Golden Lion winners, including *Lust*, *Caution* and *A City of Sadness*.

In the United States, Leung is currently best known for portraying one of the leading roles, Xu Wenwu, in Marvel's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*. Leung's impact in the industry has additionally earned him several nominations and wins with organizations like the Hong Kong Film Awards, Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Bauhinia Awards.

"I used to suppress all the feelings inside," Leung stated upon his teary reception of the Golden Lion Award. "I didn't show all my feelings in front of others... [with acting] I found a way to express my-



Tony Leung speaks on stage during the Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award Ceremony at the 80th Venice International Film Festival on Sept. 2, 2023 in Venice, Italy.



self in front of other people without being shy."

Leung was presented with the honor by renowned director and col-

league Ang Lee, and used his speech to praise his home and birthplace, Hong Kong, for many of his most notable films.

"I am so grateful to have been raised in Hong Kong, as well as being nurtured later by the Hong Kong movie industry in general, where my acting career began," Leung said according to *TimeOut*. "I also want to share this honor and give thanks to all those wonderful people who I have worked with over the past 41 years, because this is a tribute to them as well—and of course, to Hong Kong cinema."

Leung's recognition also comes on the heels of his newest film debut, *The Goldfinger*, an action crime thriller in which he plays the villain. The European film came to theatres at the end of 2023 and has already received a positive reception from audiences.



## WHAT WE'RE READING:

The National Utilities Diversity Council is starting the year off with some books and reports by some of our favorite authors!

***Inclusive Leadership: Transforming Diverse Lives, Workplaces, and Societies***, edited by Bernardo Ferdman, Jeanine Prime, and Ronald E. Riggio

***Leading Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***, Rohini Anand

***Mentoring Diverse Leaders: Creating Change for People, Processes and Paradigms***, Audrey Murrell and Stacey Blake-Beard

***The Prepared Leader: Emerge from Any Crisis More Resilient Than Before***, Erika H. James and Lynn Perry Wooten

***Unmasking AI***, Joy Buolamwini

***US Latino Gross Domestic Product Report*** Dan Hamilton and Matthew Fineup, David Hayes-Bautista and Paul Hsu



## NUDC

### NUDC Mission

The National Utilities Diversity Council educates, develops best practices and guides efforts that will promote diversity in the utilities and communications industries in the areas of governance, employment, procurement, language access/customer service, and philanthropy.

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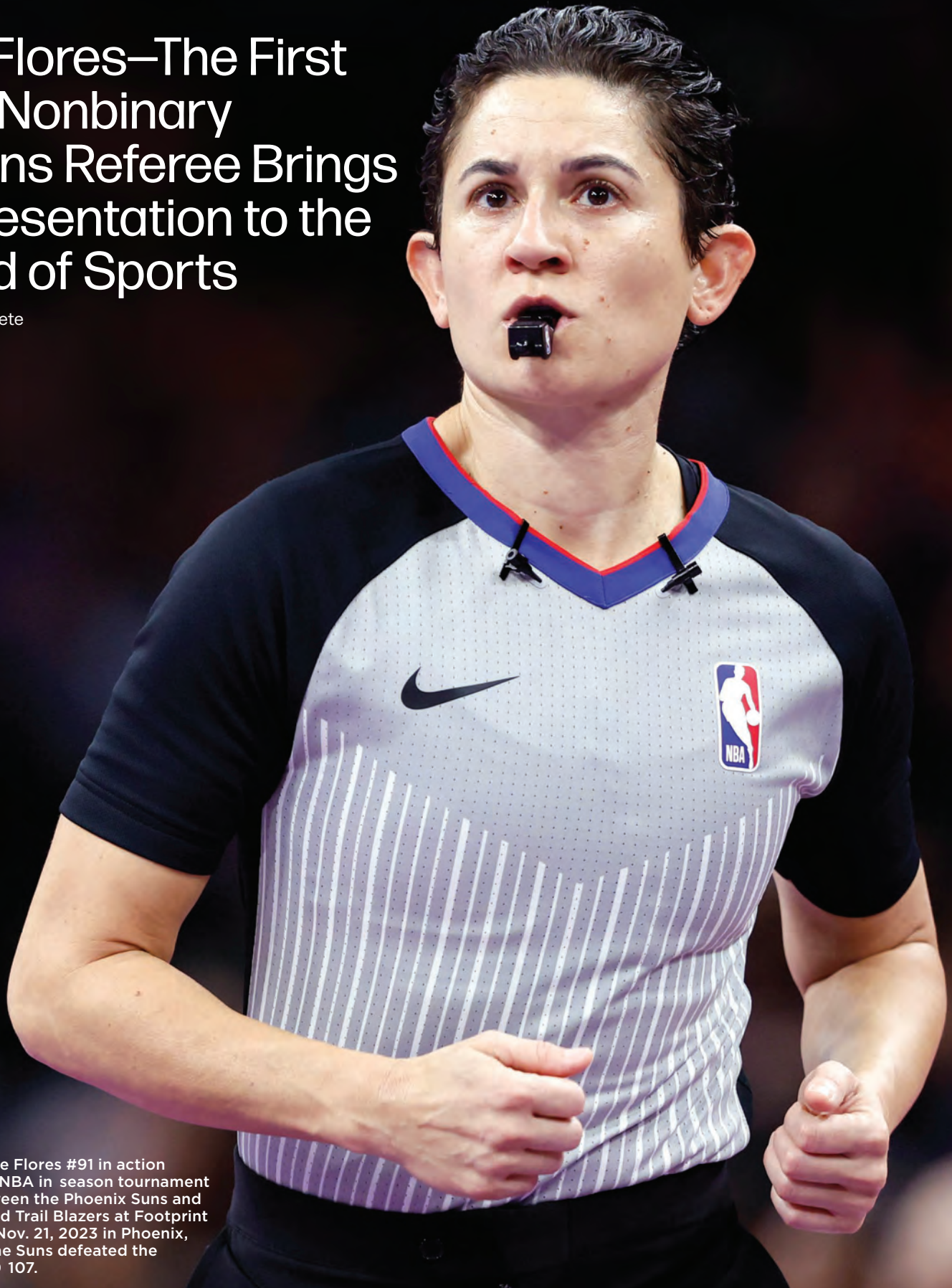
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# Che Flores—The First NBA Nonbinary & Trans Referee Brings Representation to the World of Sports

By Rosa Navarrete



CHRIS CUDUTO/GETTY IMAGES

Referee Che Flores #91 in action during the NBA in season tournament game between the Phoenix Suns and the Portland Trail Blazers at Footprint Center on Nov. 21, 2023 in Phoenix, Arizona. The Suns defeated the Blazers 120 107.



If you see it, you can be it. That is the empowering message behind Che Flores' public announcement of being the first nonbinary and trans referee for the NBA. Flores goes by the pronouns they/them. They are a Mexican-American and Costa Rican Southern California native with roots in Highland Park, and have become the first openly nonbinary and trans referee in the professional world of sports. Flores was recently interviewed by *GQ Magazine* and shared their journey in deciding to go public with their identity.

Flores refereed 12 regular-season games as a non-staff official during the 2021-2022 NBA season. They also officiated 10 seasons in the WNBA and nine seasons in the NBA G League, and worked the finals for both leagues in 2022 through the National Basketball Referees Association. Flores became an NBA official in 2022, which is

when the league announced that for the first time, two women would join the predominantly male-dominated referee roster.

In the interview with *GQ*, Flores expressed that the announcement felt alienating, as they had privately identified as nonbinary and trans for the past few years. "One piece I was missing for myself was that no one knew how I identified... Being misgendered as she/her always just felt like a little jab in the gut."

Last February, Flores began coming out to their supervisor and co-workers, explaining that they felt supported and encouraged by the reception of their workmates. In September, Flores announced their pronouns and identification to colleagues at the NBA Referees' annual pre-season meeting in Brooklyn, New York. Their announcement has since rippled into news cycles and Flores hopes that going public will serve the LGBTQIA+ community,

especially queer youth, who are one of the most vulnerable populations in our country today.

As Flores enters their second season as an NBA staff official, they want to use their platform to uplift queer youth. It was important to them that queer youth see themselves represented on a national stage.

Additionally, Flores expressed that the challenges for trans athletes is not lost to them. The *GQ* interview shares that, "globally, trans athletes have been banned from international competition in both track and field and swimming, while in the U.S., 23 states have passed laws restricting trans athletes from participating in school sports since 2020."

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) shares that, "2021 marked the worst year for anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in recent history," with the brunt of these policy changes

impacting queer and trans youth. "Playing sports comes with well-known academic, emotional, mental and social benefits. Transgender youth should not be shut off from these opportunities."

The Trevor Report conducted a survey in 2022 which stated that 60% of LGBTQ youth who wanted mental health care in the past year were not able to get it. And fewer than 1 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth found their home to be gender-affirming.

Flores says, "I just think of having younger queer kids look at somebody who's on a high-profile stage and not using it...and I'm not using the league to an advantage in any way. This is just to let young kids know that we can exist, we can be successful in all different ways. For me, that is most important—to just be a face that someday they can be like, 'oh, okay, that person exists.' I think I can do that."



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# A Look at Marvel's First Native American Lead

By Natalie Rodgers

In 2020, Disney+ released the *Hawkeye* series centered around the popular character from the Marvel Cinematic Universe movies. But with this series debut came the introduction of Maya Lopez, an antihero who is Native American, deaf and an amputee. She was played by Alaqua Cox, an actress who also identifies with all three of these characteristics. It was the first time that a Native American character was featured in such a prominent role for a Marvel Studios project.

But before Cox had wrapped filming for the *Hawkeye* series, she was told of an even bigger ground-breaking project for her character. The studios officially greenlit the *Echo* series, which

would completely center around Cox's character. The five-episode arc, which premiered in January of this year, is the first Marvel Studios project to star and tell the story of a Native American character.

"*Hawkeye* is my first experience of acting," Cox told *The Hollywood Reporter* upon *Echo*'s announcement. "Now I'm going to get my own show in the MCU? It's wild."

Cox was born and raised in the Menominee Indian reservation in Keshena, Wisconsin and is part of the Menominee and Mohican Nation. After graduating high school at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf, Cox worked at a nursing home and with delivery companies like Amazon and FedEx.

Unlike many other actors her age, Cox never had big dreams of being in front of the camera. In fact, she had only had one acting role ever—a background character in a high school play. Her whole perspective changed in 2019 and 2020 when her friends sent her a casting call for a deaf, Native American actor to play a superhero with Marvel Studios.

Before she knew it, Cox was sitting in a Zoom meeting with Marvel executives officially booking the role and Marvel Studios had cast exactly who they wanted: a talented actress who was authentic to the fictional character.

"Alaqua is one of a kind," Marvel's head of casting, Sarah



COREY NICKOLS/GETTY IMAGES FOR IMDB

Alaqua Cox poses at the IMDb Official Portrait Studio during D23 2022 at the Anaheim Convention Center on Sept. 10, 2022 in Anaheim, California.

**"I believe kids deserve to see inclusivity and accurate representation. It will make those with all types of cultures and disabilities feel like our dreams can break free from limitations."**

— Actress Alaqua Cox



JESSE GRANT/GETTY IMAGES FOR DISNEY

Vincent D'Onofrio, Graham Greene, Chaske Spencer, Cody Lightning, Devery Jacobs, Alaqua Cox and Kevin Feige, president and chief creative officer of Marvel Studios, speak onstage during D23 Expo 2022 at the Anaheim Convention Center in Anaheim, California on Sept. 10, 2022.



Finn, told *The Hollywood Reporter*. “She went through a large audition process. We were all rooting for her from the beginning.”

After the *Echo* announcement made headlines, Cox went to work in her first leading role, working alongside acting veterans like Vincent D’Onofrio and Charlie Cox. But besides Cox herself, the show’s cast and crew strived to make sure that the show was as authentic as possible and brought an even bigger level of representation to the Native American and deaf communities. The show cast other Indigenous and deaf actors to play Indigenous and deaf roles, had the crew take ASL classes, hired Navajo native Sydney Freeland as the director and met with the Choctaw Nation, where the fictional character hails from, to ensure they were correctly representing Lopez on screen.

Combining all of these elements with a priority for representation



Navajo filmmaker and *Echo* director, Sydney Freeland attends the *Echo* - Choctaw Powwow Special Screening Event on Nov. 3, 2023 in Durant, Oklahoma.

ultimately led to creating a story that was accurate from the dialogue and character development to the costumes, languages, interactions and all of the details in between.

Of curating accurate representation with the Choctaw Nation, Freeland said in *Variety*:

“Representation was extremely important to myself and to everyone

on the crew... Basically I said, ‘No, no, we’re not here to tell you what we’re going to do, we’re here to create a dialogue so that we can get your input and create a more authentic portrayal of the Choctaw people and culture.’”

While plans for a second season or other projects for Cox are yet to be announced, shows like *Echo* are hopeful to bring even further representation to Native American communities and people with disabilities in the future. And Cox is hoping to do exactly that with her position in one of the most popular movie franchises today.

“I believe kids deserve to see inclusivity and accurate representation,” Cox commented to *The Hollywood Reporter*. “It will make those with all types of cultures and disabilities feel like our dreams can break free from limitations.”

All episodes of *Echo* can now be streamed on Hulu and Disney+.

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# World War II Veterans Receive Free Health Care

In a new initiative launched by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), all World War II veterans are now eligible for health care, medical services and nursing home care free of charge when enrolled with VA health care. The VHA is not only one of the most popular resources used by military personnel and veterans, but the largest integrated health care system in the country, with 1,321 health care facilities including several medical centers and outpatient sites.

This expansion applies to all WWII veterans who served between December 7, 1941 and December 31, 1946, regardless of their length of service or financial status. These veterans will not have to pay copays, enrollment fees or monthly premiums.

“These members of the greatest generation answered the call to serve when our nation—and the world—needed them most. Now, it’s our job to serve them in every way that we can,” said Dr. Shereef Elnahal, VA under secretary for health. “We are proud to provide world-class, no-cost health care to these heroes at VA and we encourage all of them to enroll today.”

While these services will be provided free of charge, veterans must enroll into the program by email, phone or at their local VA office. Those who once didn’t qualify or weren’t approved for VA health care are encouraged to re-apply as income levels no longer apply due to this expansion. Veterans who enroll may also keep their private providers, Medicare and most other insurance to meet their health care needs.

This expansion is made possible through the Joseph Maxwell Cleland and Robert Joseph Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2022 (Cleland-Dole Act), signed in December 2022.

Facilities that WWII veterans



can gain access to at no cost also include the following:

## Common Medical Center Services

VHA Medical Centers provide a wide range of services including traditional hospital-based services such as surgery, critical care, mental health, orthopedics, pharmacy, radiology and physical therapy.

In addition, most of the medical centers offer additional medical and surgical specialty services including audiology and speech pathology, dermatology, dental, geriatrics, neurology, oncology, podiatry, prosthetics, urology and vision care. Some medical centers also offer advanced services such as organ transplants and plastic surgery.

## Community-Based Outpatient Clinic

To make access to health care easier, VHA utilizes Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) across the country. These clinics provide the most common outpatient services, including health and wellness visits, without the hassle of visiting a larger medical center. VHA continues to expand the network of CBOCs to include more rural locations, putting access to care closer to home.

## Community Living Centers

Community Living Centers (CLC) are skilled nursing facilities, often referred to as nursing homes. Veterans with chronic stable

conditions such as dementia, those requiring rehabilitation or those who need comfort and care at the end of life are served within one of our CLCs.

## Patient Advocates

Available at every medical center, Patient Advocates are highly trained professionals who can help resolve your concerns about any aspect of your health care experience, particularly those concerns that cannot be resolved at the point of care. Patient Advocates listen to any questions, problems or special needs you have and refer your concerns to the appropriate medical center staff for resolution.

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs



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# PBS's Newest Kids Show Centers on Characters with Autism

The studio behind hit children's television programs such as *Arthur* and *Wild Kratts* is introducing their newest show in fall of this year. PBS Kids has officially announced their newest show, *Carl the Collector*, an animated series for children ages 4-8 and its first show featuring a lead character on the autism spectrum. The new series was created by *New York Times* best-selling illustrator and author Zachariah O'Hora and is produced by Fuzzytown Productions and Spiffy Pictures.

Through its stories, the series celebrates the diverse ways kids think and express themselves, while helping them develop a strong sense of self and community.

"*Carl the Collector* values inclusion and empathy, while modeling relationship-building and social skill development, wrapped up in humor, heart and incredible visual design," said Sara DeWitt, senior vice president and general manager, PBS Kids. "We are excited for children to get to know Carl and his group of friends, who believe that the best experiences occur when we honor the things that make each of us unique."

*Carl the Collector* follows the everyday adventures of Carl, a warm-hearted autistic raccoon who loves collecting things. His talents—a laser-focus pursuit of his goals, attention to detail and a distinctive way of looking at and experiencing the world around him—have helped him amass a collection for just about every occasion (e.g., the perfect fake mustache or a soft plushie for a friend in need), and come in handy for solving problems around the neighborhood with his friends.

Carl has a lot of energy and is logical and precise, yet he often struggles with anxiety in new situations and has difficulty when things don't go according to plan. Like all of his friends, he is learning



COURTESY OF PBS

that there is no right or wrong way to be himself.

"My hope for Carl and his diverse group of Fuzzytown friends is that they will inspire neurodiverse and neurotypical kids alike to foster a world in which neurodiversity is not only recognized as a benefit to society, but is celebrated as exemplifying the full spectrum of what it means to be human," said creator and executive producer O'Hora.

Carl's friends include both neurotypical and neurodiverse characters, each with different traits, behaviors, learning preferences and challenges. In Fuzzytown, everyone is coming to understand something about themselves and each other. Carl's best friend, Sheldon, is a beaver who is a flexible thinker with a knack for connecting people and looking out for the underdog. Lotta, a quiet and self-assured fox, artist, and musician, is also autistic. She experiences hypersensitivity to loud sounds, powerful smells and certain food textures. Nico and Arugula are twin bunny sisters who, despite being identical in appearance, couldn't be more different in personality. And Forrest, a hyperactive and impulsive squirrel with a tree nut allergy, is

always up for an adventure—the more unexpected, the better.

"In today's world, inclusivity and representation in programming is more important than ever, especially for the youngest of viewers," said Caroline Bandolik, supervising producer and vice president of production for Spiffy Pictures. "We instantly fell in love with this beautiful Fuzzytown world Zachariah created, filled with engaging and relatable characters and funny, heartfelt stories."

The series additionally brings together a diverse production team of neurodiverse and neurotypical writers, advisors and voice talent. Advisors include Dr. Geraldine Oades-Sese, PhD, a licensed psychologist, children's book author and adjunct associate professor of pediatrics at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; Dr. Stephen Shore, professor at Adelphi University and adjunct professor at New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development; and Deborah Farmer Kris, MA, educator, author, parenting columnist and consultant for PBS Kids for Parents.

"As an autistic person, I continue

to be amazed at the level of detail and effort the team expends to assure that Carl and Lotta are authentic to the autistic experience," said Dr. Shore. "In addition to being an interesting series, *Carl the Collector* will become a great tool for both autistic and non-autistic people to gain insight on autism. Although designed for young kids, I plan on using relevant excerpts to supplement my university teaching and presentations around the world."

"It is about time for a children's show like *Carl the Collector*, which embraces the diversity of children's experiences and showcases an inclusive and relatable world," said Dr. Oades-Sese. "The show doesn't shy away from having its main characters experience common mental health challenges such as anxiety, fear, sadness, and the need for acceptance and belonging. Carl and his Fuzzytown friends take viewers on fun and humorous adventures that will help them understand and empathize with the characters, and ultimately, extend that understanding and compassion for others."

Source: PBS





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# Victor Glover Jr. Will Be the First Black Man to Travel to the Moon

NASA and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) have announced the four astronauts who will venture around the Moon on Artemis II, the first crewed mission on NASA's path to establishing a long-term presence on the Moon for science and exploration through Artemis. This will not only be the first crew to travel to the Moon in over 50 years, but will include the first Black man ever to make the journey: Victor Glover Jr.

If being an astronaut is the bar for success, Glover has gone above and beyond. Growing up in Pomona, California, Glover spent his college years splitting his time between



ROBERT MARKOWITZ - NASA/JSC

military service and academics—earning his Bachelor of Science degree from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, in 1999, the same year he was commissioned as an Ensign in the United States Navy. He earned his naval aviator wings a few short years later. Glover went on to serve with the Marine Fleet Replacement Squadron VMFAT-101 and the Blue Blasters of Strike Fighter Squadron VFA-34, where he completed the final deployment of the USS John F. Kennedy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Glover was then selected as the

United States Navy's exchange pilot to attend the Air Force Test Pilot School. During the one-year experimental test piloting course, he flew more than 30 aircraft in the U.S. and Italy and earned his Master of Science degree in flight test engineering. He immediately went to work as a test pilot, where he

simultaneously earned his Master of Science in systems engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School and a Master of Military Operational Art and Science from Air University.

Following graduation, Glover reported to the Dambusters of Strike Fighter Squadron VFA-195 in Atsugi, Japan, where he served as

a department head. With the Dambusters, he deployed three times to various locations in the Pacific Ocean. Three years later, Glover was selected for the Legislative Fellowship, where he reported to the Office of Legislative Affairs in Washington, D.C., and was assigned to the office of a U.S. Senator. Glover



This will not only be the first crew to travel to the Moon in over 50 years, but will include the first Black man ever to make the journey: Victor Glover Jr.



SpaceX Crew-1 pilot Victor Glover Jr. of NASA signs his name next to the mission insignia affixed to the vestibule between the Crew Dragon spacecraft and the Harmony module's forward international docking adapter.

NASA-JSC

er was a Legislative Fellow in the U.S. Senate when he was eventually selected as an astronaut candidate. Glover accumulated 3,000 flight hours in more than 40 aircraft, over 400 carrier-arrested landings and 24 combat missions.

Following his time with the Senate, Glover became one of the eight

individuals selected for NASA's 2013 graduating class, officially making him an astronaut. His first mission came in 2020 and continued into 2021 when he served as the pilot for NASA's SpaceX Crew-1, the first operational mission to the International Space Station in a commercially operated spacecraft. Glover



PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS JUSTIN SMELLEY

Lt. Cmdr. Victor Glover Jr., assigned to the Dambusters of Strike Fighter Squadron VFA-195, is greeted by his daughters at the Naval Air Facility Atsugi airfield during the first part of the squadron's homecoming celebration.

also served as Flight Engineer on the International Space Station for Expedition 64, contributing to many things aboard the station, including scientific investigations, technology demonstrations, growing crops and taking hundreds of pictures of Earth. He completed 168 days in orbit and participated in four spacewalks.

While the Artemis II journey won't be as long as his SpaceX mission, Artemis II could arguably be Glover's most important assignment as an astronaut. This mission will mark the newest generation of space exploration and the most inclusive one. Artemis II's four-person crew consists of the first Black man, the

first woman and the first Canadian to go to space, two of which were seen as rare possibilities during the last mission of this size over 50 years ago.

"And so, this mission also has the power to unify and bring our country together," Glover Jr. said of Artemis II to *LAist*, "But more important than that is also to heal and to acknowledge a little bit of our history and where we were and where we are now...I hope this crew can continue to serve as an inspiration for diversity and representation as we go on to explore for all."

Sources: NASA, *LAist*, Wikipedia



# Sati Smith, CEO of Diversified Members Credit Union

Diversified Members Credit Union (DMCU), formerly known as Detroit Municipal and Detroit Metropolitan Credit Union, opened its doors on Nov. 2, 1929, in the Lafayette Building in Detroit, Michigan. Only three days earlier, the nation experienced the Great Stock Market Crash of '29.

Today, 94 years later, the credit union is still making history. DMCU is pleased to announce that Sati Smith has been named the first African American woman CEO to lead the organization; she is one of the few Black women in the United States to hold that role.

"This a major accomplishment not only for me and my family, but for the entire community," Smith said. "It sends a strong message to women and other minorities that we can break glass ceilings. We can accomplish what we want to accomplish. My sincere hope is that this will inspire others."

DMCU serves nearly 30,000 members, has \$500 million in assets and employs nearly 100 team members at its three Detroit-area locations. The credit union offers a comprehensive range of financial products and services, and a robust



DIVERSIFIED MEMBERS CREDIT UNION

approach to financial services. She will provide oversight for DMCU's operations, making sure its services continue at the highest standard, and its member-supported policies

and the many wonderful people that we serve," Smith said. "We see our members as individuals with their own stories, struggles and triumphs. This approach has kept

Union in 1998 to a data processing clerk, IT manager, branch manager, operations manager and COO with DMCU. She openly shares her story of being a single mother on welfare who had not graduated from high school when she started her career.

While rising through the ranks and raising her daughter, Smith got a GED and put herself through college, earning a Bachelor of Social Work from Wayne State University and a Master of Arts from Ashland Theological Seminary. Her daughter, now 31, works at DMCU as a loan processor.

"Every one of our employees knows my story. That's what motivates me to coach and develop others and help them see their true potential," she says. "One of my goals is to give employees hope that they can advance, to develop them to achieve something greater. I love people. I love helping people—that's my passion."

Said DMCU chair David H. Brooks III, "Sati's promotion marks the beginning of reaching new goals and heights in her career and is also the start of a new chapter for DMCU. The board of directors is proud of Sati's accomplishments. We know she'll be an outstanding mentor and role model, and we look forward to her leadership and innovative initiatives to come."

Smith takes over the role of CEO from Kathie Trembath, her longtime mentor, who is retiring after 40+ years in the credit union industry and nearly two decades with DMCU. Trembath will stay on as a consultant for the next several months.

Source: Diversified Members Credit Union

**"Every one of our employees knows my story. That's what motivates me to coach and develop others and help them see their true potential."**

**— Sati Smith, CEO of DMCU**

financial coaching program to meet its members' varied needs.

As CEO, Smith will provide overall leadership and strategic vision for DMCU, working with the board of directors to ensure adherence to its community-based

and procedures are properly implemented. She will also play an integral role in developing future goals for DMCU that prioritize the continued support of its diverse membership.

"The foundation of DMCU is

DMCU going strong for nearly a century and will continue to set us apart in the increasingly competitive financial landscape."

Over the last 25 years, Smith has worked her way up from a teller with Kemba Financial Credit



# The Top Schools for HBCU-Bound Students

Over the last few years, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have received increased funding, resources and partnerships to create some of the best programs for students across the country. They are also known for their dedication to inclusion, superb campus life, scholarship opportunities and educational standards. If you're considering attending an HBCU this year, here are the top prospects that you should consider:



PARAS GRIFFIN/GETTY IMAGES

## Spelman College

Founded in 1881, Spelman College is a women's liberal arts school that not only ranks highly on "top HBCU" lists, but for liberal arts institutions and schools in general. Spelman is academically acclaimed—with many students pursuing psychology, biology and political science degrees—and has been highly ranked for its student life, safety, professors and diversity efforts.

- Location: Atlanta, GA
- Acceptance Rate: 28%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 67%
- Average Tuition: \$30,058



JONATHAN NEWTON / THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Howard University

One of the most well-known HBCUs, Howard University lives up to its reputation. Ranked as one of the top 100 best value schools in the country, Howard students are most likely to pursue degrees in communication, journalism, business or social sciences. Howard is known for its quality education, exceptional professors and overall campus life and aesthetic.

- Location: Washington, D.C.
- Acceptance Rate: 53%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 61%
- Average Tuition: \$33,344



ROBERTO SCHMIDT/AP VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Florida A&M University

Florida A&M University is an academically high-ranking university and the #1 rated school by students on Niche.com. Founded in 1997, the institution is a public university with popular degrees in health, business, law enforcement and psychology. Besides academics, students noted student life, athletics, food, professors and diversity as top attributes of the university.

- Location: Tallahassee, FL
- Acceptance Rate: 33%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 35%
- Average Tuition: \$5,785-\$17,725





## Tuskegee University

Tuskegee University is a private university and the perfect contender for students wanting to pursue studies in the STEM field. Many of Tuskegee's attendees come to the private school to study nursing, animal sciences, mechanical engineering or biology. In addition to its top HBCU status, Tuskegee University is in the top 25 for best value schools, according to U.S. News.

- Location: Tuskegee, AL
- Acceptance Rate: 30%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 37%
- Average Tuition: \$22,679

CAROL M. HIGHSMITH/BUYENARGE/GETTY IMAGES

## North Carolina A&T State University

Founded in 1891, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) State University is a public university and the educational hub to over 11,000 students. Most students attending this school are pursuing a degree in engineering, business, liberal arts, humanities or psychology. North Carolina A&T was also ranked highly in academics, campus life and athletics.

- Location: Greensboro, NC
- Acceptance Rate: 56%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 34%
- Average Tuition: \$6,733-\$20,243



SARA D. DAVIS/GETTY IMAGES





LANCE KING/GETTY IMAGES SUPERCHARGED BY KWANZA JONES

## Winston-Salem State University

Winston-Salem State University is a public institution known for its nursing, biology and health care majors. While the school is one of the top universities educationally, Winston-Salem is also known for its exceptional professors and student life. The school's higher acceptance rates and comparably cheaper tuition are also seen as favorable by prospective HBCU students.

- Location: Winston-Salem, NC
- Acceptance Rate: 81%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 28%
- Average Tuition: \$6,276-\$16,932



COLIN MYERS/CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY/HBCU VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Claflin University

A smaller private school currently hosting a little over 1,800 students in total, Claflin University is a top-ranked university by institutions and students alike. Many of the students attend Claflin to earn a degree in biological sciences, but there are also a sizeable amount of nursing, psychology, communication and business majors currently being pursued at the school.

- Location: Orangeburg, SC
- Acceptance Rate: 78%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 47%
- Average Tuition: \$17,046



MEGAN VARNER/GETTY IMAGES

## Morehouse College

Founded in 1867, Morehouse College is the only liberal arts school labeled as an HBCU for men.

The private institution is known for its enhanced medical program, but hosts a plethora of business, social science and bioscience majors.

- Location: Atlanta, GA
- Acceptance Rate: 59%
- 4-Year Graduation Rate: 40%
- Average Tuition: \$14,734

Sources: U.S. News, Niche.com

# Preparing for Your Job Interview

Whether you're looking for your first job or making a career switch well into your working life, job interviews are crucial and inevitable. They are the best way to showcase your talents, abilities and work ethic to interested employers, but sometimes the nerves of such an important meeting can cause interviewees to forget their most important assets.

opportunities and how you can apply your skills to this work opportunity. Instilling confidence in yourself can also make you seem more friendly and approachable—traits many employers look for in their future employees.

## Be Prepared

As the old saying goes, practice makes perfect. Practice describing

## Be Knowledgeable

Yes, it's important to know how to answer interview questions and understand how your own skillset can benefit workplaces, but you'll also want to know the “red flags” for companies you don't want to work for. For example, it is illegal for an interviewer to ask for unnecessary personal details about your life such as your age, marital

- **Legal:** Our job requires employees to work weekends, would that be an option for you?

## Concerning Video Interviews

All of the above tips also apply to video interviews, but there are a few new factors you should be aware of when it comes to going into your virtual interview. This includes:

- **Testing equipment and space:**

Make sure you are using a charged, working device to perform your interview and that your interviewing space is free of distractions that could prevent you or your interviewer from having a successful meeting.

- **Don't let the screen fool you:**

Especially with pre-recorded videos, it's important to remember to treat virtual interviews the same way as you would a physical one. Show up to the meeting in business attire, speak with the same enthusiasm and confidence as you would in person and remember to make eye contact.

- **Don't be afraid of glitches:**

Sometimes technology fails, even if you prepare for every scenario. Experiencing troubleshooting issues doesn't mean your interview is ruined and can even show off your ability to stay calm under pressure. Once you and the interviewer connect, ask for their phone number so that you can continue the conversation if technical issues occur. If you remain connected and have an issue, ask for a moment to resolve the issue, mute your audio and video to address it, then resume the conversation with a brief apology and a positive attitude.

Interviews can be intimidating, but with the right amount of practice, confidence and preparation, you might surprise yourself with how successfully your interview can go.

Sources: CareerOneStop, Yale University



Before you go into your next interview, remind yourself of who you are, what you can bring and these tips for nailing your next job interview:

## Be Confident

It's important to remain professional and formal during an interview, but you also want to be confident in your abilities. You know what you have brought to other jobs, projects and volunteer op-

portunities from the previous several years clearly and without jargon. Prepare one or two stories about how you were able to master a new skill or task to solve an employer's problem. Interviewers prefer stories over a laundry list of facts.

If it helps, have a friend or family member perform a “mock” interview with you so you can get a feel for how the actual interview process may go.

status, if you have children, your prescribed medications and your disability status.

Some examples of inappropriate questions and their appropriate counterparts include:

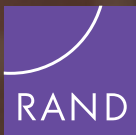
- **Illegal:** Do you have a disability?
- **Legal:** Do you have a condition that would prohibit you from doing this job?
- **Illegal:** What is your religion?





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# Tips to Expand Your Professional Network

**I**t's not just about what you know, but who you know. Even with the most advanced skills, you may need a connection in the industry to help you navigate your career path. One of the best things you can do, no matter what industry you want to get into, is to form your professional network. So, whether you're looking for a mentor, a job, a referral or just someone who understands your industry, here are some tips to help you form your network:

## Use Your Online Presence

Utilizing social media platforms, especially LinkedIn, is one of the best ways to make professional connections in today's day and age. The internet not only allows you to connect with professionals from around the world, but creates a platform that can ease the anxiety of the "first meeting." If you don't already, set up a LinkedIn account and then stay active on that platform. Send requests to people in your desired industry, stay relevant by posting articles concerning your career field and don't be afraid to use the chat feature to start a conversation.

## Attend Conferences, Fairs & Networking Events

While the internet is helpful in starting connections, having a face-to-face interaction is still one of the best ways to get professionals to remember you. Most people attend conferences, fairs and networking events to make connections with others. These are individuals who are seeking and offering expertise, removing the awkwardness in bringing up "work talk." Many of these events also have a digital platform with opportunities for connection to assist you in

networking outside of your area.

## Talk to Who You Know

Sometimes, some of your best connections are the ones you've already formed. Talk to friends, family members, professors, teachers, coaches and any other connections you already have about your career goals and aspirations. Even if these individuals work in a completely opposite field to where you work, they may still be able to give you a letter of recommendation, job searching tips or connect you with their own connections that have the information you're looking for.

## Once You Make Connections, Work to Keep Them

Once you establish a connection with someone, put in the work to keep them. Like any relationship, a connection can easily be lost if you don't act with intention. Chat online, send a follow up email or invite them out to coffee or lunch to continue your professional conversations. This will make a good impression and establish a stronger connection.

## Remember What You Have to Offer

Much like a friendship, having a professional connection requires both parties to put in the effort. Think of how you can offer your services to your connection. Maybe you excel in a sector of your job where your connection isn't as strong or know someone who can fulfill a need your professional connection needs. By ensuring you give as much as you get, your connection will strengthen and can provide even more opportunities in the future.





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# Outside the Cubicle: Hybrid & Work from Home Roles

Especially since the pandemic, many workplaces have embraced work-from-home and hybrid options. While many people have expressed the pros and cons of these kind of work environments, there's only one question you need to be asking yourself as you enter a job hunt: what workspace is right for me?

## What does working from home entail?

Working from home is exactly what it sounds like. It's a way for you to complete your workday without having to go to a set location. All of your work can be completed remotely from the comfort of your very own living room or home office. The perks of working from home especially favor those with disabilities, who cannot properly be accommodated to certain physical locations, but they are also great for expanding the horizons of job seekers—eliminating the need to move or live in a specific place to work for a certain company.

## Is working from home right for me?

Working from home looks different on a case-by-case basis. Before accepting a job offer to work from home, it's important to ask the right questions. How is your work day monitored? Is it even monitored? Will there ever be a point where you'll have to come into the office? What programs are utilized to keep up with employee connection and communication? All of these questions can have an effect on your experience with the work from home format.

If you're someone who can utilize a space in your home for work and stay on task without distractions or don't have access to the necessary transportation to travel to certain locations, working from home can be a great option. But if you need to keep your work life separate from your home life to fully commit to your work day, it might not be the



best option for you.

Your ability to accommodate to the following may also be helpful in determining if working from home is best for you:

- **Utilize a home office.** If you can, designate one room where you'll do your work. Try not to do anything else in that room. If you don't have the extra space, set up a desk or table that's dedicated to work.
- **Create a morning routine.** It may be tempting to sleep in and stay in your pajamas all day, but believe it or not, doing this gets old after a while. A morning routine will help you prepare for

work and set you on the path to a productive day.

- **Keep a schedule.** It's important to maintain boundaries between your work and home life. If you have a home office, shut that door at the end of the day. Close your computer and walk away. Decompressing after work can be difficult when you're at home, but setting a schedule helps you maintain that boundary so you can switch your attention from work to home.
- **Stay connected.** You may have to find unique ways to stay connected with your coworkers

without a common meeting place. Video conferencing, messaging platforms and email can be a great way to do this.

## But what exactly is a hybrid role?

A hybrid role is a mix of working at the actual location of your job and working remotely. It may consist of working from home a few days a week and going to the job site the other days. There are many schedules and situations possible with hybrid work, so it's important to understand the details. You'll need to decide if the job type is right for your lifestyle, ask the right questions





of a possible employer and look for hybrid positions in reputable places.

### Is hybrid right for you?

Working a few days from home each week can sound ideal. However, does this match with your home life? It's important to make sure you have a comfortable and quiet place to work from home, uninterrupted. Make sure you have an atmosphere where you can concentrate on your work and be productive.

Also, consider your own personality. Are you the type of person who needs a great deal of in-person interaction each day? If so, being at home, isolated from co-workers a

few days a week may have a negative effect on your mental health.

Think about the few days a week you will need to report to work. Are these days worrisome for you due to a long commute? Are you easily distracted working in a busy office setting? It's a good idea to think clearly about your own needs.

You may find you need a fully remote job and not a hybrid. You may even find you need to be on location each day to be the most productive. Whatever you decide, take time to think about your employment and personal needs.

Source: Ticket to Work



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# Remote & Hybrid Work—By the Numbers

The following statistics were gathered and/or reported by *Forbes*, Notta, Owl Labs, Global Workplace Analytics and Tracking Happiness.

## Current Numbers and Popularity

- According to *Forbes*, about 12.7% of full-time employees in the United States work from home while an additional 28.2% are employed in a hybrid model.
- 16% of companies in the United States operate fully remotely, not even having a physical office.
- 59% of employees expressed that they would choose an employer who offered remote work opportunities over one that did not.
- 54% of surveyed professionals stated that they would change jobs for one that offers more flexibility.
- 46% of women expressed preferring full-time remote work compared to 39% of men.
- Millennials reported feeling the happiest and most productive working from home, closely followed by their Gen Z counterparts.
- IT, management and consulting work are some of the most likely to adopt a remote working environment.

## The Pros of Remote Work

- According to Owl Lab's 2022 State of Remote Work Report, 62% of workers felt more productive when working remotely.
- 66% reported they would prefer to work remotely full-time over going to the office.
- Annually, remote work is estimated to reduce 54 million tons of carbon emissions that would otherwise go into the atmosphere.
- Remote workers saved an average of 72 minutes that would otherwise be used on commute time.
- Employees save between \$600-\$6,000 per year when working at home 50% of the time.

- Tracking Happiness reported that remote work increased happiness by 20%.

## The Cons of Remote Work

- 69% of remote employees reported burnout due to overtime and long hours.
- Co-working efforts are found to be harder in a remote setting, with only 22% finding remote collaboration to be more productive.
- 22% of remote workers feel isolated from others and are less likely to form relationships with co-workers.
- 40% of remote workers find it difficult to stop working after work hours.

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Founded in Philadelphia, PA in 1975, BDPA is the premier organization focused on nurturing and developing diverse working professionals and future IT leaders in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and all digital technology fields. For almost 50 years, BDPA has enabled the upward mobility of African-Americans and other minorities in the Information Technology (IT) and STEM fields.

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# Strategies in Hiring & Retaining Diverse Employees

By Dr. Fawzia Reza

In our globally connected world, developing inclusive practices allows us to work collaboratively and effectively with diverse stakeholders. Although many organizations understand the benefits of a diverse workforce, they often fall short in attracting and then retaining diverse employees. A checklist identifying the best inclusive practices for recruiting can be a valuable resource for organizations that want to hire and retain diversity within their organization.

As the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) manager at an asynchronous remote educational institution, I recently shared some steps below that might foster a sense of belonging and promote hiring retention of diverse employees:

## The Rooney Rule

This was initiated by the NFL's policy and is named after the former owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers, Dan Rooney. The hiring team is required to interview at least one minority candidate for senior level or coaching positions. Many organizations that follow this rule have extended it to all positions to include and promote gender and racial diversity. This simple step might resolve affinity biases and create opportunities for marginalized people to be accepted, welcomed and recruited.

## Inclusive Job Descriptions

Job descriptions should promote inclusive language to encourage applications from diverse candidates. For example, if an organization wants to hire a faculty member, then claiming that they are affiliated with a certain religion might discourage potential candidates who do not adhere to that faith from applying.

## Time Zones

It is always a good idea to make appropriate adjustments for remote team members. For example, be

cognizant of different time zones. Not everyone is available when the hiring team wants to meet. Sometimes candidates might be working different jobs and therefore might not be available at the time the hiring team has selected. This is especially true when hiring people for a remote position since the time

zone of the interviewers might be very different from the interviewee.

## Cultural Fit to Cultural Add

Organizations must move from considering whether a prospective employee is a cultural fit to determining if they might be a cultural

add. A successful organization might prefer to hire an individual who fits with the existing culture, but this approach may be too limiting and promotes a cookie-cutter approach which may hurt in the long run, especially as the world is becoming more globalized.





## Posting Job Vacancies on Different Recruiting Websites

While internal hiring is convenient, if an employee was asked to recommend someone, they might only select a friend or a relative. Therefore, whenever possible, it is best to place job opportunities on different recruiting websites. These include (but are not limited to) LinkedIn, Glassdoor, Craigslist and should also include sites that cater to special interest groups for people of certain cultures or interests. This

simple step will allow for a more diverse candidate pool.

## Offer Inclusive Perks

Some companies in the United States and the United Kingdom give a day off from work on their employee's birthdays. If their birthday falls on an official holiday (for example, 4th of July or Christmas), then they can take a day on another day. Many religious and cultural holidays are not based on the Gregorian calendar and can vary from year to year. Organizations that offer floating holidays allow their

employees to enjoy festivities with friends and families.

## Strong and Welcoming On-Boarding Process

Starting a new position can be intimidating. This can be even more difficult if the organization utilizes a one-size-fits-all on-boarding process. Each of us are different, with diverse talents and needs, and not recognizing individual strengths, perspectives and needs can make some new employees feel stressed and isolated. My younger daughter recently started a new job and in her welcome packet, she received a puzzle that was complete except for one loose piece, which could fit right into the puzzle. This simple gesture, indicating that the organization felt the new hire would immediately fit into the team, makes new employees feel welcomed and included.

## Promotions and Recognitions

Traditionally, white males have dominated C-suite positions. With the recent push towards promoting gender equality, a greater number of females are being promoted into senior executive roles. However, those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community continue to be underrepresented. If organizations want to retain a diverse workforce, there should be equal opportunities for growth and career advancement for everyone. For example, a 5-Minute Drill (Thomas & Khanji, 2004), wherein senior executives explain and defend their selection and promotion process and discuss why diverse individuals have not been appointed to leadership positions, might open up a dialogue to create greater opportunities for underrepresented minorities and allow the organization to demonstrate how they implement diversity and inclusion practices. Organizations must also recognize the accomplishments of their diverse employees. When employees are appreciated and recognized, they are more likely to remain on board and stay motivated.

## Listen and Act

If one dominant group makes all the important and strategic decisions

and are not transparent about their choices, this can create a toxic environment. While many organizations have hired a DEI director, manager or coordinator who develops workshops for employees, senior management are rarely expected to take this training or make efforts to address unconscious biases. As a result, they fail to understand the needs of their diverse employees, fostering a distrusting relationship with them.

## Move Beyond the Check Box

While the number of DEI positions has increased, these individuals often do not have any real power and are only hired to check the diversity box. A superficial approach is counterproductive, because diverse employees lose motivation and trust because they realize that there are no meaningful changes to address their concerns. This ultimately causes higher turnover rates—defeating the purpose of hiring and retaining diverse employees.



COURTESY OF DR. FANZIA REZA

*Dr. Reza serves as the DEI manager at American College of Education. She is an author, researcher, educator and a passionate advocate for social justice. She leverages her qualifications and expertise in DEI to create awareness of inclusive practices.*

# LISC Financing Helps Ohio Market Research Firm Address Obstacles to Growth

**F**OR TWO DECADES, Kristin Harper managed revenue, profit, and innovation for some of the world's most recognizable brands at companies such as Procter & Gamble, Hershey, and Cardinal Health. As she advanced in her corporate career, she realized that her skills in marketing and insight-driven innovation were not aligned to the needs of her employer at the time.

"I knew that I could use my gifts and experiences to make a bigger impact on businesses, brands and people," says Harper.

After her husband suggested she consider entrepreneurship,

Harper took the leap and launched her own business, [Driven to Succeed](#), to provide leadership development to people looking to advance in their careers. She wrote a book, [The Heart of a Leader](#), to share the "what" and "how" of successful business leadership.

"My original plan for Driven to Succeed was to do keynote speaking and training based on my book, but it was 2020 and God had other plans," she says, referring to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. "So, I went back to the drawing board and explored how to use my gifts to help businesses grow."

Harper expanded the services of Driven to Succeed beyond professional leadership development to include market research targeted toward Fortune 500 companies and leading brands. With two divisions, the services of Driven to Succeed include qualitative market research, quantitative research and analysis, brainstorming, innovation and professional development.

While Harper has built a successful business, the traditional structure of industry contracts has kept her from growing the enterprise the way she'd like. Driven to Succeed receives payment for 50% of a contract within 45–75 days of executing it, with the remaining balance paid 45–75 days after project completion. This means Harper has to front the money to pay project expenses, including payroll, limiting her ability to take on new contracts and grow her business.

In her book [The Heart of a Leader](#), Harper reflects on some key learnings from her career in marketing and brand management, which includes the need to control the "controllables." The structure of industry contracts is not among Harper's "controllables," but thanks to a \$100,000 loan and a \$46,000 growth capital investment through the [Abbott-LISC Initiative to Support Diverse Businesses in Health](#), the issue will no longer be an obstacle to growth.

The loan is helping Harper bridge that financing gap and hire a new director of business development so Driven to Succeed can execute and seek new contracts simultaneously, instead of waiting for payout. As for the growth capital investment, it is funding technology upgrades that will strengthen the enterprise's infrastructure as it grows.

"I'm so grateful for LISC and Abbott's belief in me and my business," Harper says. "This is only the beginning of an exciting new chapter for us."

With this new capital, more is within Harper's control, and she's using it to fuel growth. ■



KRISTIN HARPER  
FOUNDER AND CEO,  
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# I'm a Black Woman, Mother of Four and a Millionaire—Here's My #1 Piece of Advice

By Rachel Rodgers

*"What's my next move?"*

At the beginning of 2020, that's the question that kept me awake at night. As the pandemic began, everything felt shaky and precarious. Especially for business owners like me. During the first lockdown, dozens of clients emailed to say, "Rachel, I love working with you and your team, but..."

"I'm worried about the economy." "I have to trim my budget." "I need to cancel my services."

Overnight, my client roster dwindled as one person canceled, then another. Revenue took a nosedive. My stomach lurched every time a new message came into my inbox. Another cancellation. I have a team of employees who rely on me for their paychecks. People with kids, mortgages and student loans. I needed to find a way to salvage my company (which felt like a sinking ship) and continue paying my team. Not to mention, pay my own salary! With four kids of my own, I've got bills too.

I stood in my shower as hot steam surrounded me. I needed to be alone and hear myself think.

*"What's my next move?"*

The question kept echoing in my head. With the pandemic raging, my business model wasn't working anymore, but I wasn't sure what to do next. That's when I had a moment of clarity.

"We need to talk to our community, find out exactly what they want and give it to them. And we have to move fast."

My company, Hello Seven, provides business coaching. Want to start a six-figure side hustle? We'll show you how to do it. Ready

to expand your business and make your first million? We've got a path for you to follow. Tired of overworking and under-earning? We're here to guide you through your own personal Glow Up.

Our clients are women, BIPOC, LGBTQIA and folks from other historically excluded groups. Because when people like us have more money, that means progressive leaders get elected, new laws get passed, civil rights get protected, equity becomes a reality (not a trendy buzzword), senseless wars come to an end and the world becomes a vastly better place.

Back in 2020, as cancellations rolled in, I spoke to my sales team and asked, "What are people in our community saying? What do they need right now?" My lead salesperson told me the facts. She was blunt.

"Rachel, every week I talk to people who want to work with us...but can't afford our prices. They want a more affordable option."

"Okay," I replied. "Then we need to pivot. Let's deliver exactly what they're asking for."

My team and I acted swiftly. We did not dilly-dally for months. We made immediate moves. Within a matter of weeks, we rolled out a brand-new offer called We Should All Be Millionaires: The Club.

The Club includes education on how to build a successful business, coaching to reach your financial goals faster and a diverse community of people who look like you—all at a budget-friendly price.

We did a quiet launch and had 300 enrollments immediately. Soon after that, we had 2,000 members and a wait-list. We grew so quickly, we had to hire additional team

members just to keep up with the demand!

In spite of the pandemic, our revenue grew exponentially. Since then, we've become an eight-figure company and hit the *Inc.* 5000 List three years in a row.

Here's what I learned from this rollercoaster ride:

## ■ There is Always Another Move:

No matter what's happening—pandemic, tense political climate or anything else—you have options. You can make more money no matter what's happening in the economy. There is always a way.

## ■ Things Never "Settle Down":

We lie to ourselves and promise we'll go after our goals "when things settle down." When the pandemic is over. When the kids are older. When x, y, z is finished.

What I learned in 2020—and every year since then—is that things never settle down.

There's always something getting in your way. That's why you have to decide, "I'm taking action on my goals now, not later."

There will be challenges now. There will be challenges later. You may as well act now, because:

## ■ The Sooner You Act, the Sooner You Win:

When coaching my clients, the main issue I see is delaying action. This is tragic because the sooner you act, the sooner you get results. Start a side hustle today and make an extra \$10,000 this month and every month thereafter. Or wait two years, start then and meanwhile that's \$240,000 you could have earned if you had just started sooner.

Here is my #1 piece of advice for anyone who wants to have more money:

## ■ Stop Waiting for Conditions to Be Perfect: Stop waiting to launch your side hustle. Stop

waiting until your website is "perfect" to start promoting and selling your work. Stop waiting for permission. Stop procrastinating. You can research, plot and plan all you want, but nothing changes until you make a move.

Whoever is reading these words, take action today. Before the stroke of midnight, hire that business coach, sign up for that financial literacy class, download an app to start investing. Even if it's only \$300 for now.

As we head into 2024, I hear the rumblings of change again. Our clients have different needs. They want less Zoom and more in-person experiences. My company is listening. We're ready to deliver. And, we're moving quickly.

You want to have a million in the bank—and all the freedom that comes with it? The best time to act was yesterday. The second-best time is today.

You want to have a million in the bank and all the freedom that comes with it? The best time to act was yesterday. The second-best time is today.



Rachel Rodgers is the CEO and founder of Hello Seven, a female-run company specializing in business, marketing, financial and legal training. She is an investor and eight-figure business owner, mother of four and the Wall Street Journal bestselling author of *We Should All Be Millionaires: A Woman's Guide to Earning More, Building Wealth, and Gaining Economic Power*.



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# Access Denied: Why Minority Entrepreneurs Struggle to Obtain Capital

By J. Byron Brazier

**B**lack business owners are community leaders, and the role they play in economic development can be transformational. Small businesses have generated most new jobs for a quarter-century. Yet Black businesses need more than supportive customers to thrive. They must have the financial backing that makes them full partners in neighborhood revitalization.

Access to capital is uniquely difficult for Black entrepreneurs. They start their businesses on a shoestring, with an average of \$35,000 of capital, while their white counterparts start with about \$107,000. Starting with less often leads to adding more debt—at least 30% of Black businesses spent more than half of their 2019 revenue paying off debt.

Black entrepreneurs receive less than 2% of all venture capital dollars each year. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted earnings for Black business owners. Yet even before the contagion, 58% of Black-owned businesses were at risk of financial distress, compared with about 27% of white-owned businesses.

## Crucial factors hindering access to capital.

When Black businesses suffer underinvestment, surrounding communities suffer, too. A Brookings study reported that Black, brown and Asian-owned businesses are more likely to make most of their transactions in their own neighborhood and Black-owned businesses are much more likely to hire Black workers.

As neighborhood main streets recover from the pandemic, shifting consumer habits and corporate expansion crowds out smaller players. In communities of color, especially those that are Black, chronic underinvestment is acute. Here are two key reasons why Black entrepreneurs struggle to attract investment and access financial resources:

## The number of financial institutions is shrinking, especially in Black communities.

Banks closed a record 2,927 more branches than they opened in 2021. Fewer banks mean fewer competitors, and this can lead to less credit granted and more stringent terms.

Bank branch closures hit Black communities hard. Since 2010, the branch footprint in majority-Black areas shrunk by almost 15%, compared to about 10% in all other communities, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence. This trend was evident across all wealthy and low-income Black communities. In fact, wealthy Black areas, with a median household income greater than \$100,000, lost more branches than low-income, non-majority Black areas.

Such closures can result in less access to capital in Black neighborhoods. The closure of bank branches and community lenders also damages banking relationships, severing ties between lenders and borrowers and hindering the development of new relationships. When lenders have existing relationships with borrowers, such as through

One study found that 73% of Black loan applicants were asked to provide financial statements for their businesses while applying for a loan, compared with 50% of white applicants with similar pro-

measure creditworthiness typically leaves Black borrowers at a disadvantage. Borrowers who own real estate or have a high net worth have an edge—they can borrow against their assets and thereby mitigate risks for lenders—but Black entrepreneurs have limited access to personal and family wealth and other assets.

Homeownership is a pathway for building wealth and increases loan approval odds, but Black households have the lowest homeownership rate in the country at 41.7%, 30 percentage points lower than white households, according to the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies.

## Increasing avenues for accessing funding.

As a developer of color on Chicago's South Side, I have a calling to support Black business owners and create jobs in my community. Yet at the same time, the dearth of local lending capacity makes it a challenge to assemble the bank loans, private capital and equity ownership necessary to create a retail environment in which Black entrepreneurs can thrive.

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files. What's more, 31% of Black applicants were asked to provide their personal W-2 forms; no white applicants in the study received this request.

Because of entrenched beliefs and implicit biases, financial institutions often see Black and other borrowers of color as higher risk, and the ways that banks typically

**Fortunately, funding challenges notwithstanding, Black entrepreneurship is on the rise.**

long-held checking or savings accounts, they are more likely to make exceptions to exacting underwriting criteria.

**Black borrowers face stringent requirements and have access to limited collateral.**





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At American Family Insurance our Supplier Diversity Manager Anisha Jackson was awarded the state of Wisconsin's 2023 Diverse Business Champion of the Year by the [Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation](#) which recognizes individuals who champion making an impact on diversity.

Anisha adds, "As we celebrate Black History Month, my primary focus is to drive the economic impact necessary to champion dreams and opportunities across all communities so that everyone can rise." To view our 2023 economic impact report please visit our website below.

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making access to capital equitable, but there have been some signs of progress. U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans to small businesses that are Black-owned have more than doubled since 2020. These loans are crucial layers of the capital stack for builders and busi-

ness owners alike. The SBA 7(a) loan program guarantees up to \$5 million for lenders that provide financing to small businesses, easing the way for lenders to grant financing to businesses that may not otherwise qualify. Community development financial institutions (CDFIs) are also pivotal in widening access to funding for Black and other entrepreneurs of color. CDFIs can be credit unions, banks, loan funds, microloan funds or venture capital providers. The U.S. Treasury Department's CDFI Fund helps

stimulate economic growth through programs that invest both federal and private sector dollars in these sources of community capital. In an attempt to address systemic barriers, some banks have made major financial commitments to CDFIs; during the pandemic, the Goldman Sachs Foundation pledged to invest \$25 million to support CDFIs and other mission-driven lenders. JPMorgan Chase said it would invest \$50 million in minority-owned banks and CDFIs and has since increased its financial commitment to racial equity efforts. Black entrepreneurs can likely tap into more capital by building business relationships with financial institutions that prioritize diversity and inclusion.

Fortunately, funding challenges notwithstanding, Black entrepreneurship is on the rise. Black owners make up 26% of all new micro-businesses, up from 15% before the pandemic, according to a Brookings report. Meanwhile, the National Bureau of Economic Research saw a spike in new businesses between 2019 and 2020 in moderate-income Black neighborhoods.

Despite unequal access to capital, Black entrepreneurs persist—and

find ways to prosper. As community funding dwindles, they will need equal access to capital before they can provide equal employment opportunities.



COURTESY OF J. BYRON BRAZIER

J. Byron Brazier is the lead developer of Woodlawn Central, a mixed-use community of residential, retail, hotel and office buildings on Chicago's South Side. Learn more about the Woodlawn Central community at [woodlawncentral.com](http://woodlawncentral.com).

**Access to capital is uniquely difficult for Black entrepreneurs. They start their businesses on a shoestring, with an average of \$35,000 of capital, while their white counterparts start with about \$107,000.**

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# Creating Spaces:

## A Conversation with Tifiany Walker of Walker Healthforce

By Tifiany Walker

As a woman in business, I have spent the majority of my career being the only one in the room who looked like me. Being a Black woman provides another category, where I was again in a very exclusive club. I have faced obstacles and setbacks throughout my journey. But ultimately, the adversity pushed me to find my unique voice and how to use it. I now count it a privilege to help others do the same.

My grandfather was an optometrist and my grandmother was a nurse, so health care is in my blood. I naturally assumed I would take the MCATs and go to medical school, but quickly realized that wasn't the path for me. I ended up getting two degrees that have absolutely nothing to do with each other—English and Chemistry. Meanwhile, I was developing a deep passion for business. And deep down, I always wanted to find a way to follow in my family's

footsteps in the medical field. I always tell people, "Nothing is ever wasted." That degree, that skill, that experience—it is all leading to the next thing. Needless to say, all of my interests, skillsets and desires converged into an idea that became Walker Healthforce.

Becoming an entrepreneur is no small task, especially for a young woman in a male dominated field. There are plenty of hurdles and systemic barriers in place that make

it a difficult path forward. In my experience, it's even more challenging when you're a services-based business. Banks typically prefer lending capital to asset-based businesses, so a staffing firm is not an easy sell. Thankfully, my father believed in me and was willing to give me a loan. He was so funny about it and did it all in a very official way, with a promissory note and everything. His one stipulation was for me to have a picture of him in my office—and



COURTESY OF TIFANY WALKER

**DiversityComm Magazine (DCM): As the CEO of Walker Healthforce, you are "revolutionizing health care through cutting-edge IT and clinical solutions." Please share with us some information about your company. What is unique about your approach in the industry?**

**Tifiany Walker (TW):** At Walker Healthforce, people matter. My belief has always been that unparalleled people deliver unparalleled results. We craft solutions with the highest caliber talent in travel nursing, allied health

and IT. We are experts in people and health care. We emphasize custom over commodity, and we've been exceeding expectations for more than 15 years.

One of the areas that sets us apart is our industry exclusive, 10-step "vetting-2-validation" process, which nets only the top 20% of the most hireable candidates. This ensures successful outcomes by always placing the right hire in the right position—the first time. This system has consistently landed us in the top 90th percentile in both vendor quality and client satisfaction.

**"If my own personal experience has taught me anything, it's that everyone offers a valuable perspective."**



I still do!

I've been so fortunate to have that kind of support from my family, but I realize that is not everyone's story. It's important that we are actively creating not only the spaces, but the pathways for people with less opportunity to occupy those spaces—not just in health care, but across the board.

The shortage of racial and gender diversity amongst business owners is not due to a lack of interest, but

a lack of access. What are ways we can mitigate the barriers from an educational standpoint? From a financial standpoint? From a mentorship standpoint?

One of the reasons I started my company was to create opportunities for young, diverse professionals to grow and thrive. As a certified women- and minority-owned company, we collectively believe in the power of inclusiveness, recognizing that diverse perspectives and experiences

enhance our capabilities and drive positive change. For that reason, diversity, equity and inclusion are ingrained in our identity and are fundamental to who we are at Walker Healthforce.

At Walker Healthforce, I am intentional about creating a workplace environment that values the voices and experiences of everyone in the room. If my own personal experience has taught me anything, it's that everyone offers a valuable perspec-

tive. Each individual brings a unique set of characteristics and qualities to the table—gender, race, religion and any other social identity factors. Equality is a moral and social imperative. But beyond that, we have seen firsthand how diversity strengthens our clients' competitiveness in diverse global and local markets. Tapping into the wisdom of someone with a different viewpoint or background has proven to be invaluable to our company's success.

**DCM: You were a collegiate basketball player, which requires intense focus, discipline and teamwork. How have your experiences as a collegiate athlete influenced your leadership style as a CEO?**

**TW:** Those experiences as a college athlete were formative for me, absolutely. Playing competitive basketball—or any sport for that matter—builds character and confidence. It also developed in me a tenacity and drive that has stayed with me and carried me through many difficult situations as an entrepreneur and CEO.

Perhaps the greatest lesson it taught me was the value of your whole team. In sports, you win or lose as a team. If a player is doing well, it helps the whole team. If a player is struggling, that affects the whole team, too. For that reason, I am very intentional at Walker Healthforce about

ensuring every voice is heard. The success of the company depends on everyone bringing their A-game. As CEO, that means fostering an environment that is conducive to learning, helping one another and being a place where it is safe to make mistakes.

**DCM: What advice would you give to women starting their careers?**

**TW:** To women just starting out, I would first say thank you—we need you. We need you in leadership, not just in health care and business but in whatever field you're pursuing. Your voice matters. My own experience has taught me that it can take some time to find your voice, but when you do, use it confidently. You may find yourself as the only woman in the room. Don't shrink back; be bold.

I would also tell women to lean on their village. You don't need

to do this alone. There are family members, friends, professors, neighbors and coworkers eager to support you and help you reach your goals. There was a time in my life when I had two very young children, a brand new business and I was also pursuing a degree. I heavily relied on my village to get through that hectic season. I couldn't have done it alone!

Finally, (and this goes along with the last point), I always tell young women to find a mentor. Find a woman with a similar career path as yours and ask her out to coffee. Learn from her successes and failures. The wisdom I've received from my mentors has been a game-changer for me and has shaped the way I operate my business.



# The One & Only— Tyler Perry

By Sarah Mosqueda

**A**s the creative force behind 24 films, more than 15 stage plays, nearly 20 television shows and two bestselling books, you'll be hard pressed to find someone who isn't familiar with the work of Tyler Perry.

However, the playwright-turned-producer, director, actor, screenwriter, author, songwriter and philanthropist didn't always have an easy time getting his projects green lit. His persistence has earned the praises of Beyoncé and the partnership of Oprah Winfrey. His storytelling has captured the hearts of many and his charity work has touched the lives of even more. Perry has built an empire while also creating a network that serves the community. Despite a rough childhood and early struggles, Perry pushed to have his work made and his story told.

## Pen to Paper

Perry was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1969 to carpenter Emmitt Perry Sr. and his wife, Willie Maxine Perry. One of four children, Perry has described his childhood as traumatic and changed his name from Emmitt to Tyler at 16 as a way of putting distance between himself and his abusive father. It wasn't until he was 41 that Perry learned Emmitt wasn't his biological father. He opened up about the abuse he suffered in a letter to fans on his website in 2009, saying, "I know that there are a lot of people out there with stories far worse than mine, but you, too, can make it."

While growing up, Perry found refuge through two activities; attending church each week with his mother and writing. He was inspired to put

pen to paper after a viewing an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on the therapeutic benefits of writing. He began writing letters to himself and worked to pursue a career in writing. The letters he wrote to himself in his early 20s as a way of coping became the basis of his first stage production, a musical titled "I Know I've Been Changed," a play performed in community theater in the early 1990s.

## The Birth of Madea

However, Perry's first play wasn't exactly a runaway success.

"I was in the 200-seat theater, and I thought 1,200 people would show up, and only 30 showed up," Perry recalled to NPR in 2021. "I lost everything, but I kept going."

After overcoming the obstacles in his childhood, the play wasn't his first lesson in persistence. Although the first production of "I Know I've Been Changed," was considered a financial failure, Perry continued to rewrite the play and perform over the next few years and in 1998, the show sold out a local run.

"You can get a thousand no's from people and only one yes from God. It doesn't matter if a million people tell you what you can't do or if 10 million tell you no. If you get one yes from God, that's all you need," he said.

Perry not only refused to give up on himself—he also resisted the notion that there wasn't room for Black storytelling on the stage. In 1999, on the Chicago stage, Perry introduced audiences to one of his most recognized and beloved characters, Mabel "Madea" Earlene Simmons.

Madea was first introduced in his play "I Can Do Bad All by Myself" and Perry said he was inspired to try his hand at a female character after



KAYLA OADAMS/WIREIMAGE





Tyler Perry attends the world premiere of Warner Bros.' *The Color Purple* at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures on Dec. 6, 2023 in Los Angeles.



seeing Eddie Murphy as *The Klumps*; though the essence of her personality is influenced by the strong women Perry observed growing up.

“Madea is a cross between my mother and my aunt,” Perry told NPR “I thought I’d imitate the funniest person that I know, and she is exactly the PG version of my mother and my aunt, and I loved having an opportunity to pay homage to them.”

In 2015, his original play, “Madea on the Run,” sold out at theaters and he eventually used the money from ticket sales to fund his first film.

## A Big Screen Powerhouse

Perry’s first film, *Diary of Mad Black Woman*, tackles issues from a female perspective—a common theme throughout Perry’s work. The 2005 American romantic comedy drama was taken from Perry’s play of the same name and was also the first installment of the Madea film franchise. The sequel, *Madea’s Family Reunion*, was released the following year, opened number one at the box office and went on to gross \$65 million.

The success of those early films gave him the freedom to reach even farther and in 2007, Perry wrote, directed, produced and starred in *Why Did I Get Married?*

“People see truth in my films,” he says. “That’s what they react to, and that’s what they relate to.”

Perry also found success with other film projects beyond his own. He starred in 2012’s *Alex Cross* and 2014’s hit *Gone Girl* and 2016’s *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows*. He also lent his voice to animated features like 2017’s *The Star* and *PAW Patrol: The Movie* in 2021.

Perry wasn’t just tackling the big screen either. In 2006, he produced the sitcom, *Tyler Perry’s House of Payne*, which centered around a household of three generations of an African American family. The show ran for eight seasons and was the highest-rated, first-run syndicated cable show of all time. In 2009, Perry wrote, directed and produced *Meet the Browns*, which ran on TBS until 2011. He also teamed up with Oprah Winfrey and Lee Daniels to produce the Academy Award-winning movie, *Precious*, based on the novel, *Push*, by Sapphire.

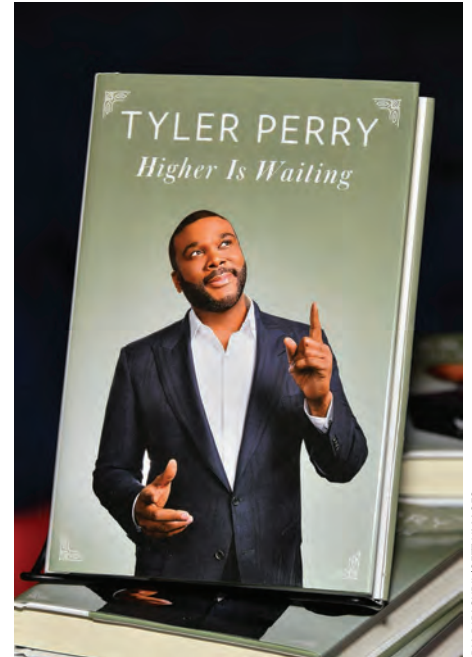
“I think [Perry] grew up being raised by strong, Black women,” Winfrey told *60 Minutes* correspondent Byron Pitts in 2009. “And so much of what he does is really in celebration of that.”

Working on *Precious* brought back painful memories of Perry’s own abuse, which led to his writing a letter to fans on his website. “It hit me so hard, I sat there in tears realizing that somehow, by the grace of God, I made it through. My tears were tears of joy, being



FRANZ HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES

Tyler Perry poses in the press room at the 2019 BET Awards on June 23, 2019 in Los Angeles.



DIA DIPASUPLI/GETTY IMAGES

Tyler Perry's book *Higher is Waiting* on display at the Gramercy Theatre on Nov. 14, 2017 in New York City.



MARCUS INGRAM/GETTY IMAGES FOR BET

(From left) Scott Mills, Jeanine Liburd, Kimberly Paige and Tyler Perry on stage during *The Oval* and *Sistas* screenings at Southern Exchange on Oct. 20, 2019 in Atlanta.





Actor and producer Tyler Perry attends the screening of *Boo! A Madea Halloween* at Regal Atlantic Station on Oct. 2, 2016 in Atlanta. (right, top) Tyler Perry and his mom, Maxine (right) and aunt, Mayola. (right, bottom) Actor Sidney Poitier and daughter Sydney Tamiia Poitier (L), Tyler Perry and Samuel L. Jackson (R) attend the Oscars at the Dolby Theatre on March 2, 2014 in Hollywood, California.



Writer/director Tyler Perry takes a selfie with fans before a special screening of *Nobody's Fool* at Regal Atlantic Station on Nov. 1, 2018 in Atlanta.



thankful that I made it.”

## Telling More Black Stories

After finding success on the stage and screens both big and small, Perry financed one of the largest independently-owned studios outside of Hollywood: Tyler Perry Studios. Built on a 330-acre former military base called Fort McPherson in Atlanta, the studio is one of the largest in the nation and made Perry the second African American to outright own a major film studio.

The grounds include 40 buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, 12 sound stages and 200 acres of greenspace and backlot. Perry has plans to open an entertainment complex next door that will feature restaurants and retail, as well as a museum and theater space. The studio, which provides jobs to the Atlanta community, is just one more example of how Perry is making it possible for more Black stories to be told.

His legacy even inspired Tameka Cage Conley, an assistant professor of English and creative writing at Oxford College, Emory University, to teach an entire class on Perry titled, “In the Language of Folk and Kin: The Legacy of Folklore, the Griot and Community in the Artistic Praxis of Tyler Perry.” Currently, Perry is ranked third among the world’s highest-paid entertainers by *Forbes*.

## A Beacon to the Community

Perry has not only used his platform to bring Black stories to the forefront, but also to encourage others to overcome their own challenges. In 2006, Perry started The Perry Foundation, which is dedicated to “transform tragedy into triumph” for young individuals. In 2009, he donated \$1 million to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—the largest individual contribution ever made to the organization. He also purchased several NAACP-commissioned Jacob Lawrence lithographs. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Perry pledged \$1 million via his foundation to assist in rebuilding.

Aside from large donations to organizations and work through his foundation, Perry also finds ways to help individuals in need in his hometown of Atlanta. During the 2018 holiday season, he covered roughly \$434,000 worth of layaways for an estimated 1,500 people at two Walmart stores. During the pandemic, Perry covered groceries for elderly shoppers at 44 Kroger stores and 29 Winn Dixie stores. In 2020, he covered the funeral expenses for Rayshard Brooks, a man killed while in police custody, and pledged to cover the college education of Brooks’ children. Most recently, Perry donated \$2.75 million to older homeowners in Atlanta to provide assistance to those in danger of losing their home due to rising real estate taxes.



Rashad Bilal, Tyler Perry and Troy Millings onstage during 2022 InvestFest at Georgia World Congress Center on Aug. 7, 2022 in Atlanta.



Earvin “Magic” Johnson, wife Cookie and Tyler Perry at the Lionsgate’s premiere of *Why Did I Get Married?* held at the Invest Fest Cinerama Dome, Arclight Hollywood on Oct. 4, 2007 in Los Angeles.

## And the Films Keep Coming

A new documentary about Perry’s life, titled *Maxine’s Baby*, was released on Amazon Prime in late 2023 from his former longtime partner, Gelila Bekele. The model and filmmaker, who met Perry at a Prince concert back in 2007, shares her son, 9-year-old Aman, with him. She spoke of co-parenting with Perry in an interview with *TODAY.com*, saying although she and Perry have split, she’ll always see themselves as a family.

So, with all Perry has accomplished, what’s next? This year, fans can look forward to more

exciting projects, including a Netflix original film and a multi-picture deal with Amazon Prime to write, direct and produce four feature-length movies.

Perry is also set to write, produce and direct *Six Triple Eight*, a film on the true story of the predominately-Black, all-female World War II battalion with an all-star cast that includes Kerry Washington, Susan Sarandon and Oprah Winfrey.

“I’m looking forward to continue telling unique stories,” he said, “and bringing my next projects to the global audiences they reach.”





CAROL LEE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES FOR AMAZON STUDIOS

Kenny Burns, Tyler Perry, Armani Ortiz and Gelila Bekele speak onstage during the special screening of *Maxine's Baby: A Tyler Perry Story* presented by Amazon Studios at the Rialto Center for the Arts on Nov. 8, 2023 in Atlanta.



STEVEN SIMONE/FILMMAGIC

Tyler Perry and Oprah Winfrey attend the world premiere of Warner Bros.' *The Color Purple* at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures on Dec. 6, 2023 in Los Angeles.



DEREK WHITE/GETTY IMAGES FOR ABA

Former First Lady Michelle Obama and Tyler Perry speak onstage during the Michelle Obama: *The Light We Carry* Tour at The Fox Theatre on Dec. 2, 2022 in Atlanta.



MARK RALSTON/AP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Director/actor Tyler Perry poses in the press room during the 76th annual Golden Globe Awards on Jan. 6, 2019, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California.



JOHN SCUILLI/GETTY IMAGES FOR GRAYSCALE

(From left) KJ Smith, BJ Gray, Shalaya Shipman and Tyler Perry attend the GRAYSCALE "House of Gray" showroom opening on Aug. 26, 2023 in Los Angeles.

# Over \$40 Million to Be Invested in the Clean Energy Workforce

**T**he clean energy industry is in higher demand than ever, and with the help of over \$40 million in funding, the workforce is about to get stronger.

As part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced the selection of 17 new Industrial Assessment Centers (IAC) and the inaugural cohort of 10 Building Training and Assessment Centers (BTAC). Selectees are expected to receive a combined \$40.8 million, made possible by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, to expand training opportunities for in-demand, high-quality jobs while identifying opportunities for organizations to save energy, improve productivity and reduce waste.

**These new BTACs and IACs will play a crucial role in ensuring that all workers—and especially those facing barriers to employment—have the skills and opportunities to participate in the clean energy economy.**



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# BIG Fact Sheet

Blacks In Government (BIG) is a national, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to advocacy and career development training with members in all 50 states and abroad.



There's Strength in Numbers

**8000+** Members    **150+** Active Chapters

Our member volunteers are public servants delivering important services to the nation at the local, state, and federal government levels, including active duty service members.



## Our Mission

Since its creation in 1975, BIG has focused its efforts on creating a level playing field in government so that ALL government employees have an EQUAL opportunity to succeed and are equipped with the tools they need to soar.

## Our Impact

Over the years, BIG's advocacy has extended from Capitol Hill to the White House with testimonies before Congress and round table discussions with American presidents.

One of BIG's greatest accomplishments was its contributions to the passage of the NO FEAR Act.

## Our Strategy

The centerpiece of BIG's efforts is its annual National Training Institute (NTI) which is designed to provide four days of career development training, mentoring, and networking for employees at all stages of their career – from entry level to retirement.

Now in its 44th year, the NTI also consists of specialized components, including a youth leadership summit, an equal employment opportunity institute, and a military veterans educational clinic.

With the support of corporate donations, BIG is also growing future leaders as its advocacy efforts also extend to student youth programs, including our Future Leaders in America's Government (FLAG) program. FLAG is designed to mentor and train high school and college students as well as annual oratorical and STEM competitions."



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Selectees will also work with hundreds of industrial facilities and buildings across more than 25 states and territories, expanding the existing network to 54 IACs and 10 BTACs. Aligned with the Biden-Harris Administration's Justice40 commitment, over 75% of these awards will go to organizations that serve disadvantaged communities, help reduce energy burdens and increase access to high-quality, good-paying jobs for Americans facing barriers to employment.

"America's global leadership on advanced manufacturing and energy efficient buildings depends on our skilled, diverse workforce here at home," said U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer M. Granholm. "Thanks to President Biden's Investing in America agenda, DOE is doing even more to invest in workers and small businesses, helping us meet our clean energy goals while creating high-quality, good-paying jobs in communities across the country."

These new IACs and BTACs will deliver technical assistance and conduct assessments at small- and medium-sized manufacturer (SMMs) and commercial and institutional buildings. They will provide hands-on, engaging learning opportunities for students and union apprentices while identifying opportunities to reduce facility energy bills.

Programs will also offer training and upskilling opportunities for current manufacturing and building energy workers. Participants will exit these programs prepared for high-quality, in-demand roles as building energy managers, insulators and heating, air conditioning and refrigeration professionals, and as advanced manufacturing technicians for growing clean energy sectors like batteries and solar manufacturing.

These programs will broaden paths to clean energy careers that do not require a four-year degree. Seventeen of the 27 selected programs are based at community colleges, trade schools and labor unions, including several apprenticeship programs. Selected institutions will provide mentorship networks, scholarships, job placement assistance and other supports to serve diverse candidates, strengthen program

completion rates and place trainees into high-quality, good-paying green jobs.

In total, 13 of the 27 selectees are federally recognized as serving an especially high percentage of students from minority groups (also known as Minority-Serving Institutions, or MSIs). As the Investing in America agenda boosts domestic manufacturing, enhances building performance and reduces greenhouse gas emissions, these new BTACs and IACs will play a crucial role in ensuring that all workers—and especially those facing barriers to employment—have the skills and opportunities to participate in the clean energy economy.

### BTAC Selectees

The new BTACs will build upon the existing IACs' demonstrated successes in hands-on, real-world training. They will expand these benefits to commercial and institutional buildings across 26 states and territories to help them reduce energy bills and increase investment in environmental quality, employees and surrounding communities. Each BTAC will provide hands-on learning opportunities for students and in-depth assessments for building owners.

### IAC Selectees

For more than four decades, the IAC program has provided more than 20,000 assessments at SMMs, which comprise more than 90% of the nation's manufacturing entities. These new IACs will expand the IAC model to more SMMs in more states and communities across the country, while training 3,000+ students and incumbent manufacturing workers for quality careers that do not necessarily require a four-year college degree.

The new IACs at community colleges, trade schools and union training programs will expand pathways to green jobs for American workers. In the coming months, the IAC program will release additional opportunities to expand the network of IACs at community colleges, trade schools and union training programs; including combined labor-management training programs.

Source: Department of Energy

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# 4 “must ask” questions before starting an online MBA program

New online MBA programs are popping up seemingly every day, thanks to technological advancements and the unprecedented flexibility they offer—it was a trend undoubtedly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. But not all online programs are created equal.

So we asked Tawnya Means, Chief Learning Officer at the University of Illinois’ Gies College of Business, how you can discern which online program is right for you.

Gies’ online MBA program—the iMBA—was recently named the 2022 MBA Program of the Year by *Poets&Quants*. Priced just under \$24,000, the iMBA is designed and delivered by the top faculty and online learning experts at the University of Illinois, and it can be completed in 18-60 months. That’s a big reason why the iMBA has seen record demand and a 96% student satisfaction rate.

**Means gave us four questions you should be asking before you pick an online program.**

## 1. What am I going to do?

A program may have great faculty, high-quality videos, and a strong sequence of courses—but if you’re not engaged, then you’re going to have a solitary experience. At Gies, the online programs are career-curated; students take what they learn in highly interactive live sessions and apply it at their job the next day. In fact 95% of iMBA students apply what they learn in the program to their job.

“For learning to be transformative, it has to be experiential,” said Means, who joined Gies Business this fall after 20 years of furthering the teaching and learning goals of colleges and universities across the country. “I can provide you information, but if you don’t explore what that information means when applied in realistic and authentic situations, you haven’t really learned anything. As an example, being able to go into a simulation and apply what you’ve learned is key.”

## 2. What kind of meaningful interactions will I have with other people?

Engagement is key, and the best online programs offer opportunities to develop genuine connections with peers and faculty. At Gies, students participate in live class sessions with the College’s top faculty. Those sessions include breakout rooms and in-depth group work where learners can delve deeper into a topic with classmates from a variety of industries all around the world. Those personal connections are a big reason why the Gies iMBA has a 93% retention rate—a number almost unheard of among online programs.

“There’s a big difference between being asked to post a certain number of times on a forum versus making real connections with people,” Means said. “At Gies, we want students to feel part of an active community. Interacting with others is an extremely valuable piece of learning. We learn best when we have to explain an idea to someone else, when we defend an idea, or when we hear how others have applied an idea. Those elements are active in the best courses.”

## 3. Do I have options?

Many students care about the flexibility an online program can provide, and rightfully so, but often students think about that flexibility in terms of being able to view or attend a lecture whenever they want. The important question, according to Means, should go deeper than that.

“Online MBA programs, like the iMBA program here at Gies, appeal to working professionals because they offer unmatched flexibility, so you can integrate the program into your busy life,” said Means. “The best online programs, though, offer flexibility in the sequence of classes and elective tracks

“For learning to be transformative, it has to be experiential.”

TAWNIA MEANS, CHIEF LEARNING  
OFFICER GIES COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

or concentrations. They also offer flexibility and choice in small ways, such as how you complete your assignments. Does the instructor require you to conduct a SWOT analysis on a pre-selected fictitious firm, or are you allowed to run that same exercise on your current employer?”

## 4. Will my MBA still be relevant for my next job?

At Gies College of Business, 56% of iMBA graduates say they received a promotion, job offer, or accepted a new position during their time in the program. And, the average pay increase during the iMBA program is 23%. Not only do they realize an immediate ROI, but they’re also thinking ahead to their next position. That’s why Means emphasizes the importance of making sure your degree will fit your future needs.

“Some programs were put ‘in the can’ three years ago, and the content doesn’t stay fresh,” she said. “From a program perspective, it’s a lot of work to keep material fresh—but it’s critical. There should be core pieces that never change—concepts like time value of money; in contrast, FinTech is changing every week. Make sure the program you choose is adaptable. You should make sure you’re asking good questions about how frequently content is refreshed.”





“Gies gave me the opportunity to stand out from others. Gies also gave me the opportunity to connect with folks and be able to enhance and expand my experience in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility [being] in groups with folks from all over the world with different backgrounds.”

– Jackie Price Osafo, MBA '18

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# Finding Student Loan Forgiveness

It's not a mystery or a surprise: college is expensive. But even with the recent blockage of the one-time debt relief plan, there are still ways that you can get help in repaying your student loans, including full loan forgiveness, through certain federal loan programs.

Here are the top programs that you may be eligible for:

## Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) Forgiveness

One of the most popular repayment options, IDR plans take your income and family size into consideration and design a monthly payment plan according to your income and expenses. If you repay your loans under an IDR plan, any



remaining balance on your student loans will be forgiven after you make a certain number of payments over 20 or 25 years.

Your loan forgiveness timeline

and monthly payment amount depend on which IDR plan you're eligible to choose from.

Available IDR plans include:

- **The SAVE Plan:** Forgives

student loans after 20 years of qualifying repayment for an undergraduate degree or 25 years of qualifying repayment for a graduate degree.

- **PAYE:** Forgiveness for student loans after 20 years of qualifying repayment.

- **IBR:** Forgiveness for student loans after 20 years of qualifying repayments if you're a new borrower or before July 1, 2014 (and 25 years if you're not a new borrower).

- **ICR:** Forgiveness after 25 years of qualifying repayment.

With all four plans, any remaining loan balance is forgiven if your federal student loans aren't repaid by the end of your designated period. There is no limit on how

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much forgiveness you can receive as long as you meet the requirements. Applications and further details can be found on Student Aid's official website at [studentaid.gov](http://studentaid.gov).

## Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)

If you work full time for a government or nonprofit organization, you might qualify for forgiveness of the entire remaining balance of your direct loans after you've made 120 (10 years' worth) of qualifying payments. You can also be eligible for PSLF if you are repaying your student loans with one of the IDR plans.

## School-Related Discharge Options

Borrower defense to repayment is a legal ground for discharging federal direct loans. Borrowers apply for borrower defense if they believe their school misled or lied to them about a central aspect of their decision to enroll and take out loans. If

you think your situation qualifies for borrower defense, you can submit a borrower defense application on Student Aid's official website and see if you qualify for forgiveness.

You may also qualify for loan forgiveness under the "closed school discharge." If your school closes while you're enrolled or soon after you withdraw, you may be eligible for discharge of your federal student loan if you meet certain requirements.

## Teacher Loan Forgiveness (TLF)

Are you a full-time teacher? If so, you may qualify to free yourself from some of your student debt. If you teach full time for five complete and consecutive academic years in certain elementary or secondary schools or educational service agencies that serve low-income families, you may be eligible for up to \$17,500 in student loan forgiveness.

It's important to keep in mind that you may not receive a benefit

under both the TLF program and the PSLF program for the same period of teaching service.

## Total and Permanent Disability (TPD) Discharge

To get TPD discharge, you must have a current and ongoing physical or mental disability that limits your ability to work. If you get a TPD discharge, you don't have to repay any of your federal student loans. You will also be exempt from completing the TEACH Grant service obligation, if applicable.

In most cases, you'll have to provide specific kinds of proof of your disability. However, some people get an automatic discharge if they are identified as eligible by the Social Security Administration or Veterans Affairs.

## Military Service

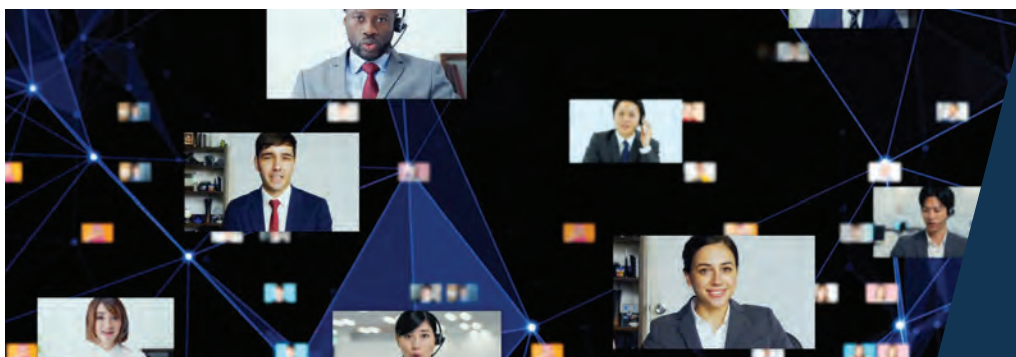
Another popular way to decrease or eliminate student debt is through military service. The U.S. Depart-

ment of Education and Department of Defense have special benefits for military service members with federal student loans. Benefits include interest rate caps under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act and Department of Defense student loan repayment programs. Your military service can also count toward PSLF.

## AmeriCorps

Through the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, you can receive a benefit that will help you to repay your student loans. You must serve in one of the approved AmeriCorps programs—AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps NCCC or AmeriCorps State and National. After you successfully complete your service, you are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which can be used to repay qualified student loans. AmeriCorps service can also count towards your PSLF.

Source: [studentaid.gov](http://studentaid.gov)



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**June 13<sup>th</sup> - Herndon, VA**

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# Can a Good Night's Sleep Help Your Heart?

**T**here's more to maintaining a healthy heart than just eating right and exercising regularly. While these practices play an important role in both cardiovascular and overall health and well-being, getting a good night's sleep is also key.

"Getting a good night's sleep every night is vital to cardiovascular health," said Donald M. Lloyd-Jones, MD, ScM, FAHA, immediate past president of the American Heart Association and one of the world's most highly regarded experts in cardiovascular disease prevention and epidemiology. "Adults should aim for an average of 7-9 hours, and babies and kids need more depending on their age."

However, more than 1 in 3 adults in the United States are not getting the recommended 7-9 hours of sleep per night, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In addition to increasing risk for cardiovascular conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, heart attack and stroke, lack of sleep may also put people at risk of depression, cognitive decline, diabetes and obesity.

While high blood pressure—a known risk factor of cardiovascular disease and the number one cause of death worldwide—can run in families, it is more common in Black adults (56%) than in white adults (48%), Asian adults (46%) or Hispanic adults (39%). Healthy

lifestyle behaviors, including sleep, can help prevent the condition.

"We know that people who get adequate sleep manage other health factors better as well, such as weight, blood sugar and blood pressure," Lloyd-Jones said. "The American Heart Association added sleep to the list of factors that support optimal cardiovascular health. We call these Life's Essential 8, and they include: eating a healthy diet, not smoking or vaping, being physically active and getting adequate sleep along with controlling your blood pressure and maintaining healthy levels of cholesterol and lipids, healthy blood sugar levels and a healthy weight."

Some other practices to improve sleep health that can impact heart health include:

## Take Note of Current Sleep Habits

Keeping a sleep diary to help track your sleep patterns and habits can make it easier to identify factors that may be helping—or hurting—your sleep quality. Monitor what time you go to bed, what time you wake up in the morning, how many times you woke up during the night, how you felt when you woke up and any variables, such as changes to your routine or sleeping arrangements. Having documentation over the course of several weeks can help you identify necessary changes.

## Avoid Food and Beverage Close to Bedtime

It can be more difficult to fall asleep if you're still digesting dinner. To help reduce sleep disruptions caused by food, avoid late dinners and minimize fatty and spicy foods. Similarly, keep an eye on caffeine intake and avoid it later in the day when it can be a barrier to falling asleep.

## Exercise Regularly

Physical activity during the day can have a noticeable impact on overall health and wellness but can also make it easier to sleep at night as it can initiate changes in energy use and body temperature. However, exercising too close to bedtime may hinder your body's ability to settle. Aim to have your workout complete at least four hours before you plan to head to bed.

## Establish a Bedtime Routine

Getting a good night's rest often requires getting into a routine. Start by setting an alarm to indicate it's time to start winding down. Rather than heading straight to bed, take time to create a to-do list for the following day and knock out a few small chores. Then consider implementing a calming activity like meditating, journaling or reading (not on a tablet or smartphone) before drifting off to sleep. Also, set

an alarm to wake each morning—even on weekends—and avoid hitting the snooze button to keep your biological rhythms synced.

## Create a Comfortable Sleep Space

The ideal space for sleeping is dark, quiet and a comfortable temperature, typically around 65 degrees depending on the individual. Use room-darkening curtains or a sleep mask to block light and ear plugs, a fan or a white noise machine to help drown out distracting noises. Remember, using your bed only for sleep and sex can help establish a strong mental association between your bed and sleep.

## Avoid Tech Before Bed

The bright light of televisions, computers and smartphones can mess with your Circadian rhythm and keep you alert when you should be winding down. Try logging off electronic devices at least one hour before bedtime and use the "do not disturb" function to avoid waking up to your phone throughout the night. Better yet, charge devices away from your bed or in another room entirely.

For more tips on heart health and taking control of your blood pressure, visit [heart.org](http://heart.org).

Source: Family Features Editorial Syndicate



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# Simone Biles: Defying Gravity, Redefining Greatness

By Jasmine Tiffany

In the world of gymnastics, where precision meets grace, Simone Biles has etched her name into the history books as the most decorated gymnast of all time. As the world prepares to celebrate Black History and Heritage Month, it's only fitting to shine a spotlight on this remarkable athlete whose journey has been nothing short of inspiring.

Biles, born on March 14, 1997 in Columbus, Ohio, catapulted onto the global gymnastics stage at the age of six, with a combination of power, poise and remarkable skill. Her journey to becoming the most decorated gymnast began long before the record books took notice.

Biles' gymnastics career started at a very young age, after being spotted by coach Aimee Boorman during a pre-school field trip to the gym where Boorman was coaching. It quickly became evident that she possessed a natural talent that set her apart. Her early years in the sport laid the foundation for what would become a series of groundbreaking achievements. Guided by determination and an unwavering work ethic, Biles rapidly ascended through the ranks of the gymnastics world.

The turning point in Biles' career came at the 2013 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships in Antwerp, Belgium, where she secured her first all-around title. This triumph marked the beginning of an era dominated by Biles, a gymnast who redefined what was considered possible in the sport.

Biles is not just a record-breaking gymnast but a beacon of honesty and resilience, speaking out about the importance of mental health. In a candid moment reflecting on the pressures of elite competition, Biles shared with *US Magazine*, "My mental health is more important than any medal. I know I made the right

decision for myself, and my well-being is more important than anything I could've ever imagined."

This sentiment echoes Biles' commitment to prioritizing mental health over external expectations, a stance that has reverberated across the sports world. As she gracefully defies gravity in her routines, Biles is also dismantling stigmas surrounding mental health, proving that strength extends beyond the physical realm.

Fast forward to the 2023 season, and Biles has officially shattered records by becoming the most decorated gymnast in history. Her journey to this pinnacle involved pushing the boundaries of gymnastics, both physically and creatively. Biles' routines are a testament to her innovation, featuring gravity-defying flips, twists and combinations that leave audiences and judges in awe.

Beyond the applause and medals, Biles has become a symbol of resilience and empowerment. Her advocacy for mental health and open discussions about the pressures faced by elite athletes have sparked important conversations within the sports community and beyond.

As we celebrate Black History and Heritage Month, Biles stands not only as a sports icon but also as a trailblazer who has broken barriers and inspired a generation of aspiring athletes. Her impact reaches far beyond the confines of the gymnastics arena, influencing the way we perceive dedication, passion and the pursuit of excellence.

In a sport where precision is everything, Biles has not only defied gravity but also elevated the possibilities for future generations. As we witness her historic achievements, let us take a moment to appreciate the magnitude of Biles' contribution to the world of gymnastics and the indelible mark she leaves on the broader landscape of sports history.



PIER MARCO TACCA/GETTY IMAGES

Simone Biles with her gold medal after her victory in the women's balance beam final at the Artistic Gymnastics World Championships-Antwerp 2023 at the Antwerp Sportpaleis on Oct. 8, 2023 in Antwerp, Belgium. Inset: Biles celebrates at the end of balance beam during the women's apparatus finals on day nine of the 2023 Artistic Gymnastics World Championships.





In a sport where  
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but also elevated  
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for future  
generations.

TIM CLAYTON/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



# A Setback for STEM Inclusion

## African American Women Advance in Degree Attainment but Retreat from the Workplace

By Eric Addison

A recent look at employment and degree attainment statistics for Black women in engineering and computer science in the U.S. yielded good news and an unpleasant surprise for researchers at the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE).

The good news is that Black women, although still a small percentage of the students in these fields, continued their recent incremental progress toward parity with the general population in attaining baccalaureates in engineering and in computer and information science: from 1.5% of those graduates in 2016–17 to 1.8% in 2020–21, the last year for which figures are available from the National Center for Education Statistics.

One could argue that raising the number of newly-minted Black female engineers and computer scientists from 2,788 six years ago to 4,142 four years later hardly signifies “game over” for NSBE’s mission “to increase the number of culturally responsible Black engineers.” But in the long-struggling community of diversity, equity and inclusion advocates in STEM, the trend line is indeed cause for celebration.

The same cannot be said, however, for the employment trend for those graduates. The National Survey of College Graduates, conducted biennially by the National Science Foundation’s National Center for Science and Education Statistics, counted 14,000 employed Black female engineering graduates and 47,000 Black women computer science or math graduates in 2017; 0.7% and 3.2% of the total for each category, respectively.

Two years later, those figures dropped to 12,000 engineers and 28,000 computer scientists/

mathematicians. In 2021, the engineering statistic remained at 12,000 while the computer science/math number declined further to 24,000. It’s important to note that the total employment of Black graduates in these fields actually *increased* slightly during the four-year period, but only because of gains in the number of Black *men* employed.

### Harsh Reality

What’s going on? Dunsin Fadojutimi, a 2022 electrical engineering graduate of Morgan State University and member of NSBE’s National Executive Board as the National Leadership Institute Chair, calls for a closer look and coordinated action to address the problem.

“It is exciting to have statistically significant progress in computer science and math from the African American population, yet it is important to address the glaring loss of ground by Black women in this field,” she says. “This disparity

“It is exciting to have statistically significant progress in computer science and math from the African American population, yet it is important to address the glaring loss of ground by Black women in this field.”

– Dunsin Fadojutimi,  
NSBE National Leadership  
Institute Chair



calls for a deep dive into the driving factors for this and underscores a compelling need for systemic changes and targeted initiatives to advance equal opportunity for the Black women demographic. We must unite in improved efforts to equitably empower Black women in STEM.”

Reflecting on the employment statistics, Fadojutimi recalls being dominated by men in school and on the job, and often being unable to find a community of women in her engineering discipline, which she says has negatively impacted her and the way she does her work.

NSBE CEO Janeen Uzzell, a mechanical engineering graduate of North Carolina A&T State University, has also lived that reality. Before taking her current post with NSBE, Uzzell was CEO for Wikimedia Foundation and before that, held numerous leadership positions during her 18-year career with GE.

“My very first job in engineering was on the manufacturing floor, which is very common for a mechanical engineer. But for everything that I learned about

mechanics and operations and actual machining, I didn’t know what it meant to be cat-called on the manufacturing floor or whistled at, having pranks played on me with things being put in my locker. But that’s what the manufacturing floor is like,” Uzzell says.

“Then I was the supervisor. So, now all of these people who are my parents’ age and are white men, they work for me. And they have no respect for me. They’re calling me ‘gal’ and ‘honey.’ And this is in a corporate environment! Every day I’m going home, and I’m wounded...so, yes, we’re leaving the field.”

Uzzell continues, “I think that what you see in terms of the rise of Black women studying engineering is because we’re brilliant and we take on tough things. We’re seeing the result of years of investment in the pipeline, not just within NSBE but within technology-based high schools, and all of the wonderful programs that are happening in STEM—all the way from the Girl Scouts to organizations like NSBE Jr. and Girls Who Code. All of these programs that are coming into place are teaching girls how to do really cool things in tech, and they’re making it fun.

“[Then] we get into the workplace, and the workplace to this day is still not ready for the humans that we’re raising—these women who can stand in their royalty, their awesomeness and solve these great problems. We put them in really traumatic situations,” Uzzell concludes.

### Creating Community

Like Fadojutimi, Uzzell is calling for swift, targeted action to ensure Black women not only graduate in increasing numbers from engineering and computer science



“I think our next job as DEI advocates is to get into the workplace and make a change. The Black STEM experience is uniquely, diametrically opposed to and different from what non-Black students and professionals experience.”

Janeen Uzzell, NSBE CEO

NSBE



Janeen Uzzell

programs, but also are allowed to succeed professionally.

“I think our next job as DEI advocates is to get into the workplace and make a change. The Black STEM experience is uniquely, diametrically opposed to and different from what non-Black students and

professionals experience,” Uzzell says.

The hiring of qualified Black female candidates should be tied to corporate leaders’ bonuses, she says. “But not only do we hire them, we have to put out a call to action to the companies that are

pulling back from their employee resource groups. It’s unacceptable. Creating a sense of community is one of the premier ways that any culture engages. You find your strength by convening in groups and people of likeness.

“I think we have to invest in a

few different places to achieve race and gender equity for Black women in STEM,” Uzzell says. “We’re already investing in the pipeline. Now let’s talk about the post-line.”

For more information about NSBE and its mission, visit [nsbe.org](http://nsbe.org).

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# NSBE: Celebrating 50 Years of Black Excellence in STEM!

Each year, the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) holds its annual convention where Black professionals in the STEM field can come together to access career advancement and networking opportunities, invigorating guest and celebrity speakers, talks with national and regional leaders and programs where they can showcase their expertise. This year, NSBE will be celebrating 50 years of promoting and encouraging Black excellence in the STEM fields.

Officially established in 1975, NSBE is one of the largest student-governed organizations in the United States. Since its conception, the organization has worked with aspiring and current students and professionals of color to provide the opportunities and resources that are often unavailable to them. With over 600 chapters and more than 24,000 active members around the world, NSBE uses its platform to ensure that the number of Black engineers continues to increase and that their impact is made known on a global scale.

The year's 50th conference will be centered around the theme "Engineering CommUNITY" and how innovation can be reimagined to be inclusive of personal, professional and campus communities. Within the conference, there will also be three sub-conferences taking place that each focus on a specific demographic.

These conferences include the Graduate School Conference for collegiate students, the Technical Professionals Conference for those already working in the industry and the Pre-Collegiate Initiative Conference for young people who are not yet enrolled in college and are looking to pursue a career in engineering.

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NSBE presented the following as the biggest highlights for each of these upcoming conferences:

### Graduate School Conference (GSC)

- GEM Grad Lab
- Grad Society
- Dissertation House
- Academic and Research Leadership Symposium

### Technical Professionals Conference (TPC)

- Technical Training and Certification Opportunities
- Special Interest Group (SIG) Business Meetings
- Inside the Executive Suite
- Career Engineering Networking Suites

### Pre-Collegiate Initiative Conference (PCI)

- Graduating High School Seniors Reception
- College Preparation Day
- Leadership Seminar
- The NSBE Jr. Explorer Technical Innovation Competition

The NSBE conference will also be hosting events that will be beneficial for all participants, including the career and college fairs, general sessions and the 27th Annual Golden Torch Awards, which will recognize some of

the greatest minds in the STEM community today.

NSBE's commitment to not only growing diversity in the STEM field but providing the opportunities and resources needed to succeed is unmatched. We congratulate them on 50 years of conferences that foster DEI and STEM to the highest degree and wish them many more years of changing the scientific community for the better.

For more information on NSBE's 50th Annual Convention or how to become a member, visit their official website at [nsbe.org](http://nsbe.org).



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# NSBE Scholars in the Making

In an effort towards fostering diversity in the world of STEM, NV5 Global, Inc., a leading provider of technology, conformity assessment and consulting solutions, has awarded scholarships to 10 deserving students through their joint educational project: the 2023 NV5 National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) scholarship program.

This initiative is part of NV5's overarching commitment of \$275,000 over five years to NSBE, aimed at promoting greater representation of underrepresented communities, especially in the world of engineering.

Founded in 1975, NSBE stands as one of the largest student-governed organizations in the United States, dedicated to championing the aspirations of collegiate and pre-collegiate students, as well as technical professionals in the fields of engineering and technology. Their nearly 50-year commitment to providing these kinds of opportunities only strengthens their dedication to continuing this mission.

The scholarship recipients are comprised of both undergraduate and graduate students from various parts of the country who are pursuing degrees in a diverse array of disciplines. Many of these students are studying civil, electrical and mechanical engineering, geomatics and computer science.

Dickerson Wright, PE, chairman, and CEO of NV5, expressed his satisfaction with the initiative, stating, "We are pleased to contribute to the development of talented engineers and technical professionals who will develop innovative and sustainable solutions to meet the nation's growing need for essential infrastructure improvements."

The 2023 scholarship recipients were selected based on a rigorous evaluation that assessed numerous personal essays, educational achievements, positive community contributions and professional recommendations. The chosen students not only showcase academic



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excellence but also embody NSBE's mission "to increase the number of culturally-responsible Black engineers who excel academically, succeed professionally and positively impact the community."

The deserving recipients of this year's NV5 NSBE scholarships are:

1. Oreoluwa Adediwura - Texas A&M University Kingsville
2. Kimberly Betty - Kettering University
3. Neville Chirima - Carnegie Mellon University
4. Desvaun Drummond - Howard University
5. Anwi Fomukong - University of New Mexico
6. Dauan Hendley Jr. - Michigan State University
7. Caleb Ogbeta - Oregon State University
8. Derek Price - Kennesaw State University
9. Jayda Ritchie - Georgia Institute of Technology
10. Brianna Wyer - University of Central Florida

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"We continue to be impressed with the quality of applicants that we receive for the annual NV5 National Society of Black Engineers scholarship program, and we look forward to our ongoing NSBE partnership."

Source: NV5 Global, Inc.

Carl Henderson, PhD, PE, GE, chief diversity officer for NV5, said,



# ENGINEERING COMMUNITY

MARCH  
20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>  
2024  
ATLANTA, GA



[CONVENTION.NSBE.ORG](https://convention.nsbe.org)

#NSBE50

## Join us at the National Society of Black Engineers' 50th Annual Convention: ENGINEERING COMMUNITY

NSBE 2025's Vision is a world in which engineering is a mainstream word in homes and communities of color and all Black students can envision themselves as engineers. This vision is vindicated by NSBE's goal of graduating 10,000 Black engineers a year by 2025. We are so excited to reunite as a family at NSBE's 50th Annual Convention—

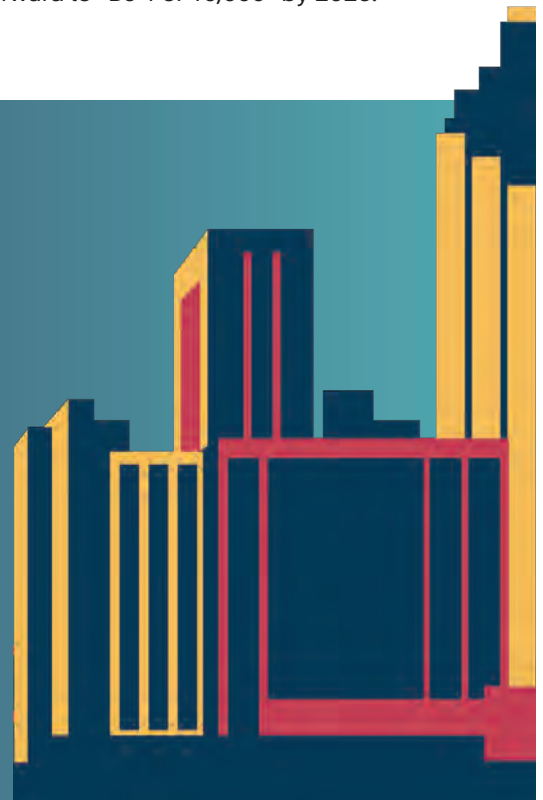
March 20th-24th 2024 in person at the Atlanta Convention Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

NSBE's 50th Annual Convention will inspire current and future engineers from around the country as we strive to move the needle forward to "Be 1 of 10,000" by 2025.

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- > **Motivating and informative** opening, general and closing sessions
- > **Participate in NSBE Business** (Regional and National Elections)
- > **Our flagship career fair** – one of the largest recruitment opportunities for inspiring and current black engineers, scientists and technologists
- > **Curated personal and professional development opportunities** catered to our membership tracks
- > **Showcase your genius** at our programs and competitions
- > **Networking opportunities** at our events, hospitality suites and receptions
- > Our signature event, **the Golden Torch Awards**, where we honor the best and brightest in STEM

Register at [convention.nsbe.org](https://convention.nsbe.org)



# CSAVR Conference: Celebrating the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), the membership organization of the 78 public vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs across the U.S., held its fall conference in October. The focus was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 included the first legislative focus on access and equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. Title V of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires access to programs and activities that are funded by federal agencies and access to federal employment. The conference included a focus on the strategic priorities for CSAVR, which include:

- Recruiting and retaining VR staff
- Redesigning and streamlining internal processes
- Increasing public awareness of VR services

VR leadership, staff and partners participated in several breakout sessions incorporating these priorities.

## VR Customers

Both individuals and business partners provided keynote sessions to share input, models and personal experiences. The CVS Health team received the NET (National Employment Team) Lifetime Achievement



Cindy Otis, former CIA intelligence analyst and author, joined the conference for a book signing.

Award. Duane Rohr, senior manager of workforce initiatives at CVS, shared his experiences and insight into working with VR agencies and training centers across the country. Lorenzo Brown, executive director of the IS-ABLE Center in Alabama,

shared his journey and experience with VR. Brown and Cindy Otis, former CIA intelligence analyst and author, joined the conference for a book signing. Otis has been a previous presenter who shared her journey as a person born with

a disability. Through the support of her family, community and VR in Utah, she gained a graduate-level education in international relations and navigated her career in the public and private sectors. Otis, who is currently working on her third book, is now a business owner, having opened her own bookstore called The Stacks (thestacksbookstore.com) in Savannah, Georgia.

In September, CSAVR also hosted the NET Summit 2023: The Future is Now. Over 200 NET points of contact and VR business relations consultants discussed strategies and initiatives working with national, state and local businesses. The first day included roundtable discussions and updates on the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), which is currently supporting over 38,000 candidates with disabilities (tapability.org). The second day of the NET Summit focused on business partnerships, trends and future career opportunities. Presenters represented 15 business partners in various industry sectors along with federal agencies. Awards were presented to recognize the partnership with CVS, GM and Hands On @Hyatt, and our legislative partners who have supported the VR agencies in their dual customer approach with individuals and businesses.

For CSVAR resources, including conference materials and information, visit [csavr.org/resources](https://csavr.org/resources).



NET Summit 2023 Awards.



Sodexo attendees at the NET Summit 2023.



# NACAC 2024 SPRING IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL COLLEGE FAIRS

## ATLANTA

*Georgia International Conv. Ctr.*  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
Sunday, January 21, 2024  
1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## GREATER COLUMBUS

*The Ohio Expo Ctr.*  
**Columbus, Ohio**  
Saturday, February 3, 2024  
1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## PITTSBURGH

*David L. Lawrence Conv. Ctr.*  
**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**  
Wednesday, February 7, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m. & 6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Thursday, February 8, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

## INLAND EMPIRE (CA)

*Ontario Conv. Ctr.*  
**Ontario, California**  
Wednesday, February 7, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m. & 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

## CLEVELAND

*Huntington Conv. Ctr.*  
*of Cleveland*  
**Cleveland, Ohio**  
Saturday, February 10, 2024  
1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## GREATER LOS ANGELES

*Pasadena Conv. Ctr.*  
**Pasadena, California**  
Tuesday, February 13, 2024  
9 a.m. - 1 p.m. & 6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.



## National College Fairs

## FEBRUARY VIRTUAL COLLEGE FAIR

Sunday, February 18, 2024  
1 p.m. - 6 p.m. ET

## MIAMI

*DoubleTree by Hilton*  
*Miami Airport Conv. Ctr.*  
**Miami, Florida**  
Sunday, March 3, 2024  
12 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## NEW JERSEY

*New Jersey Conv. and Expo Ctr.*  
**Edison, New Jersey**  
Wednesday, March 6, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m. &  
5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

## NEW YORK CITY

*Jacob K. Javits Conv. Ctr.*  
**New York, New York**  
Sunday, March 10, 2024  
12 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## ROCHESTER

*Rochester Riverside Conv. Ctr.*  
**Rochester, New York**  
Sunday, March 17, 2024  
1 p.m. - 3 p.m.  
Monday, March 18, 2024  
9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

## SYRACUSE

*J. Pirro Conv. Ctr.*  
**Syracuse, New York**  
Monday, March 18, 2024  
5 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.  
Tuesday March 19, 2024  
9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY (MD)

*Adventist HealthCare*  
*Fieldhouse*  
**Boys, Maryland**  
Tuesday, March 19, 2024  
9:45 a.m. - 1 p.m. &  
6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m.  
Wednesday, March 20  
9:45 a.m. - 1 p.m.

## HARTFORD

*Connecticut Conv. Ctr.*  
**Hartford, Connecticut**  
Wednesday, March 20, 2024  
9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. &  
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Thursday, March 21, 2024  
9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

## BUFFALO

*Buffalo Niagara Conv. Ctr.*  
**Buffalo, New York**  
Wednesday, March 20, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m. & 6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Thursday, March 21, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

## PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY (MD)

*Prince George's Sports*  
*& Learning Complex*  
**Landover, Maryland**  
Tuesday, April 9, 2024  
9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

## CHARLOTTE

*Charlotte Conv. Ctr.*  
**Charlotte, North Carolina**  
Saturday, March 23, 2024  
12 p.m. - 3 p.m.

## MARCH VIRTUAL COLLEGE FAIR

Sunday, March 24, 2024  
1 p.m. - 6 p.m. ET

## HOUSTON

*NRG Ctr.*  
**Houston, Texas**  
Thursday, April 11, 2024  
9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. &  
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

## APRIL VIRTUAL COLLEGE FAIR

Sunday, April 21, 2024  
1 p.m. - 6 p.m. ET

## WEST MICHIGAN

*DeVos Place Conv. Ctr.*  
**Grand Rapids, Michigan**  
Tuesday, April 23, 2024  
8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. &  
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

## METRO DETROIT

*Suburban Collection Showplace*  
**Novi, Michigan**  
Thursday, April 25, 2024  
8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. &  
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

## VANCOUVER

*Vancouver Conv. Centre*  
**Vancouver, BC**  
**Canada**  
Saturday, April 27, 2024  
1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## PROVIDENCE

*Rhode Island Conv. Ctr.*  
**Providence, Rhode Island**  
Tuesday, April 30, 2024  
5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

## BOSTON

*Boston Conv. and Exhibit Ctr.*  
**Boston, Massachusetts**  
Thursday, May 2, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m. & 6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Friday, May 3, 2024  
9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

*In addition to institutions promoting general programs of study, this fair will include designated exhibit space for STEM and Performing and Visual Arts programs.*

# BOOK YOUR BOOTH!

[nacacnet.org/exhibit](https://nacacnet.org/exhibit)

# HACU 37th Annual Conference Champions Hispanic Higher Education

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) held its 37th Annual Conference, Championing Hispanic Higher Education Success: Diversifying Our Workforce and Strengthening America, with over 2,500 attendees on Oct. 28-30, 2023. The conference took place in Chicago and included the ¡Adelante! Leadership Institute for students, an Exhibit Hall and pre- and post-conference events.

The Opening Plenary featured HACU president and CEO Antonio R. Flores, who delivered the State of HACU address. Two honorees were inducted into HACU's Hall of Champions: Devorah Lieberman, PhD, president emerita of the University of La Verne, and Norman I. Maldonado, MD, former president of the University of Puerto Rico System.

A total of 11 honorees were recognized for their contributions to improving opportunities for college students during the three-day conference event.

Other conference events included the Latino Higher Education



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Leadership Institute, PreK-12/Higher Education Collaboration Symposium, Deans' Forum, International Plenary, Town Hall,

California Hispanic-Serving Institution Summit and Illinois Higher Education Convening. HACU's 38th Annual Conference

will be held Nov. 1-3, 2024, at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center in Aurora, Colorado.



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# GLAAACC Celebrates Women in Technology

In celebration of Black women who have persevered and broke through the tech industry's glass ceiling, the Greater Los Angeles African American Chamber of Commerce (GLAAACC) hosted its 6th Annual Women in the C-Suite. Four women who beat the odds and operate successful businesses in the seemingly impenetrable technology industry "spilled the tea" and shared their tips and triumphs to a

capacity crowd at the London Hotel in Hollywood, California in early November.

GLAAACC Chairman Gene Hale welcomed the crowd and said that he and GLAAACC's Board of Directors created the Women in the C-Suite conference to recognize Black women whose contributions to the greater economy often go unacknowledged, as well as to provide a space for women to

uninhibitedly network, exchange information and share best practices.

"During the pandemic, 41% of all African American businesses across the country went out of business permanently. Seventy-five percent of those were women-owned businesses," Hale said. "There's work to be done and we're here to help."

Keynote speaker and GLAAACC's 2023 Women in the

C-Suite Trailblazer honoree, Sheila Marmon, is founder and CEO of Mirror Digital, Inc., an interactive media and advertising company focused on connecting brands to the growing U.S. multicultural market. Marmon's 15 years of experience in new business development, digital media development, strategy and planning has made her a leader in digital marketing.

In her keynote address, Marmon



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Women in the C-Suite moderator Celeste Alleyne (left) talks to technology leaders Nielle Cook, Jola Washington, Cassie Betts and Qiana Patterson.





From left: Angela Gibson-Shaw, Celeste Alleyne, Jola Washington, Crystal Hale, Gene Hale, Sheila Marmon, Lily Otieno, Cassie Betts, Qiana Paterson, Nielle Cook, Jessica Davis, Chanel Frampton and Naomi Scott.



stressed that in business and in life, pursuing your passion is more important than the passion itself.

“The common thread to success is launching your business and going for it,” Marmon said. “If you don’t go out in the world and try to make it happen, if you don’t shoot your shot, you can never win because you are not even in the game.”

Microsoft Director of Executive Engagement and External Talent, Celeste Alleyne, moderated Women in the C-Suite’s panel of four technology executives. Alleyne leads Microsoft’s internal “talent agency,” ensuring the company’s senior executives and external talent (celebrities, hosts, thought leaders) have a positive and successful event experience—both digitally and live.

Alleyne led the four panelists through a series of questions regarding overcoming challenges, how to select a sponsor, the tech economy, code-switching, brand building and the role of artificial intelligence. Each executive conveyed key lessons learned on their journey to the C-suite.

Panelist Cassie Betts shared her story of going from homeless at age 19 to becoming a leading advocate for women- and minority-owned businesses. Betts is a self-described serial entrepreneur and the founder

of Made in South LA, where she trains youth and young adults to become software engineers. She also hosts the KBLA 1580 AM radio talk show, “Talk Tech to Me.”

Betts said she has been aided in her career by women who saw her drive and championed her many ventures. “I feel like if you’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing and you keep moving it forward, they will come to you,” Betts said. “Success is not about the dollars in your account. It’s about completing the goal that you set for yourself.”

Nielle Cook founded Avercom Virtual Solutions, an information technology consulting and design company focused on digital conversion using customer data and social media monetization. Cook advocates for Black women to focus on their bottom line.

“I found that what was most helpful for us was revenue-focused everything. Revenue first for everything that we do,” Cook said. “A lot of the pathways that work for traditional businesses don’t exist for us. We have to throw that away and create our own playbook.”

Infotrack business consultant Jola Washington works with clients to help them focus on strengthening brand awareness and cultivating custom loyalty through digital marketing and branding.

Washington said expanding business is about finding your target market.

“Find those moments to insert yourself into what your tribe is doing,” Washington said. “You have the knowledge; share it and a lot of times that will end with getting a new client.”

Qiana Patterson, managing partner at Nayah, invests capital in early-stage companies and venture capital funds. Prior to her 20-year career in the tech industry, Patterson was a public school teacher. She said women have to claim their rightful share of the economy.

“Ninety-eight percent of every single dollar moving through our global economy is managed by white men. We have to collectively work together to move and push through that,” Patterson said. “My biggest lesson is: speak loudly. Speak the truth. State facts. And do not ask anyone for permission.”

GLAAACC’s 6th Annual Women in the C-Suite was made possible by Southern California Edison, SoCalGas, U.S. Black Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Small Business Administration, Verizon, Honda, AT&T, McDonald’s, Californians for Energy Independence, California Water Association and Valero. To see pictures of GLAAACC’s 2023 Women in the C-Suite, visit [glaaacc.org](http://glaaacc.org).

# AFWA Announces the 2023 Women Who Count Award Recipients

The Accounting and Financial Women's Alliance (AFWA) announced their Women Who Count Award recipients at their annual Signature Awards Event at the 2023 Women Who Count Conference in Reno, Nevada last October.

The Signature Event is a formal event that recognizes individual leaders and chapters within AFWA. A night celebrated with dinner, cocktails, entertainment and awards. The Women Who Count Awards, Chapter Achievement Awards and the President's Award were each recognized at the 2023 Signature Event.

The Women Who Count Award recipients are as follows:

- Emerging Leader: Kimberly Pace, from LBMC, PC – Chattanooga Chapter
  - Industry Professional: Olivia Brinker, Merrill Lynch, The Bohn, Brinker, Floberg, Gleason Group – Virtual Chapter
  - Public Practice: Kelly Salter, KPMG – D.C. Chapter
  - Small Business: Wendi Hall, DBHW Wealth Partners – Milwaukee Chapter
  - Academic Award: Liesel Mitchell, assistant professor at Illinois State University
  - AFWA Leadership Award: Christie Jordan, Chattanooga Chapter
  - Excellent Student: Natalie Starkey, Illinois State University
- The Chapter Achievement Awards were also announced for Membership, Communications, Programming, Scholarship and Public Services:
- Membership: Chicago Chapter
  - Communications: Chattanooga Chapter
  - Programming: Illinois State University Chapter
  - Scholarship: Denver Chapter
  - Public Service: Philadelphia Chapter.

The President's Award was awarded by past president, Wendi



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Christian to Grace Staten, Coastal Wealth.

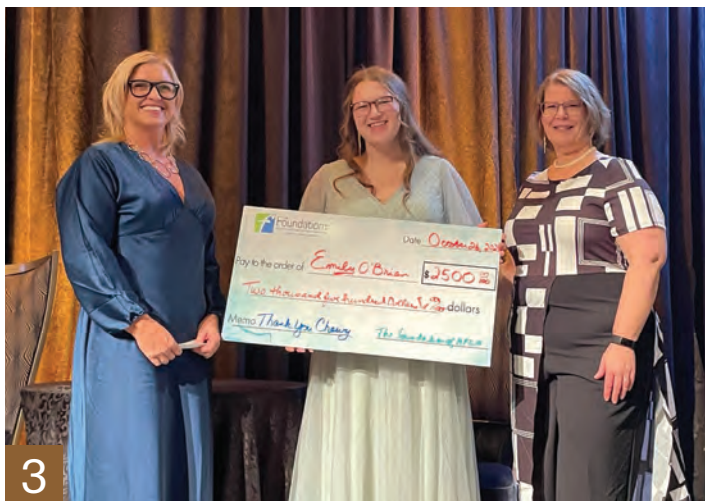
Executive Director Cindy Stanley stated, "We are so honored to recognize these outstanding Women and chapters of AFWA. It has been wonderful to see the growth of our

organization and the strides we are making. Each of these award recipients has made a difference and continues to demonstrate their leadership capabilities. Congratulations to all our award recipients. Their dedication to AFWA is important to

the success of the organization."

We are excited to be heading to the Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa, Oct. 23-26, 2024 for the next Women Who Count Conference! To register, visit [afwa.org](http://afwa.org).





**1:** (L-R) President Grace Staten, executive director Cindy Stanley and past president Wendi Christian.

**2:** (L-R) Brian Bohn, Cindy Stanley, Olivia Brinker and Grace Staten.

**3:** (L-R) Erin Chapman, Natalie Starkey and Wendi Hall.

**4:** (L-R) Cindy Stanley, Grace Staten and Wendi Christian.

**5:** (L-R) Cindy Stanley, Wendi Hall and Grace Staten.

**6:** (L-R) Christie Jordan, Cindy Stanley and Grace Staten.

**7:** (L-R) Cindy Stanley, Liesel Mitchell and Grace Staten.



# NMSDC & MBDA Conference Collaboration—Working to Create an Inclusive Economy

The NMSDC Annual Conference & Exchange and MBDA National Med Week, held last October in Baltimore, Maryland, witnessed the convergence of over 5,200 individuals representing minority business enterprises (MBEs), corporations and policymakers.

This marked the inaugural collaboration between the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) and the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), combining their premier MBE development events. Expectations were high, and the event in Charm City exceeded them.

The preconference activities on Sunday included crucial industry group meetings and the Opportunity Accelerator (OA23), a conference before the conference designed by MBEs for MBEs. OA23 featured notable speakers and opportunities tailored to provide NMSDC-certified MBEs with resources and connections to leverage their certification and foster business growth. The official programming commenced with the B'more Connect Welcome Reception at Power Plant Live!, offering ample opportunities for networking and mingling. Opening remarks from Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, MBDA Undersec-



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retary Donald R. Cravins Jr. and NMSDC President and CEO Ying McGuire set the tone for the event.

The second day began with insightful mainstage programming, featuring welcome remarks from MBDA and NMSDC leadership alongside perspectives from top corporate leaders on the future of MBE development and emerging industry trends. NMSDC's crowdsourced Impact Labs followed, addressing topics and training crucial for accelerating minority business development.

The afternoon continued with mainstage conversations, including remarks from Maryland Governor Wes Moore and Capitol Region Minority Supplier Development Council (CRMSDC) President Sharon Pinder. The Exchange, the premier networking event for MBEs and supplier diversity professionals, provided opportunities for connections and Power Talks, short sessions focusing on the latest trends and opportunities to close equity gaps.

NMSDC also provided a demo of its new certification database, offering live updates of MBE profiles.

The following day highlighted MBDA programming, featuring keynote speakers from the federal government, such as U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, sharing perspectives on how the government can assist in closing opportunity gaps for minority businesses. The Exchange also continued with additional networking and professional development activities. The day concluded with several evening receptions, including MBDA's 40 Years of National Med Week Celebration at the Baltimore World Trade Center.

The conference's final day featured mainstage sessions covering topics including increasing access to capital for MBEs and the impact of recent legal challenges to DEI programs. The Emerging Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) program held its annual pitch competition, awarding capital to the top three winners

to help expand their businesses. Impact Labs and NMSDC's annual members' meeting finished in the afternoon, leading to the grand finale—the annual awards ceremony and farewell reception, recognizing top companies, regional affiliates and individuals in supplier and business diversity. The ceremony showcased the power of collective efforts dedicated to creating lasting generational wealth for communities of color.

The conference concluded with a farewell reception celebrating 50 years of hip-hop with performances from DJ Kool and Kid 'n Play. This year's event demonstrated the full potential of the minority business community, illustrating how collaboration between the NMSDC network and MBDA can close the equity gap and create a more resilient, inclusive economy for the United States. The next conference is Oct. 20-23, 2024, in Atlanta.

For more information, visit [nmsdc-conference.org/2023](https://nmsdc-conference.org/2023).



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**February 2024**

**ASALH - Black History Month Virtual Event**  
February 1-29  
asalh.org

**CA Steam Symposium**  
February 9-10  
Long Beach, CA  
cdefoundation.org

**GEO Week Conference**  
February 11-13  
Denver, CO  
geo-week.com

**USPAACC Innovation Symposium**  
February 15-16  
Washington, D.C.  
uspaacc.com

**BEYA Stem**  
February 15-17  
Baltimore, MD  
intouch.ccmag.com

**NAAAS Virtual Event**  
February 15-17  
Austin, TX  
naaas.org

**VIVE Event**  
February 25-28  
Los Angeles, CA  
viveevent.com

**Value of a Veteran Conference**  
February 27-29  
San Diego, CA  
veteranrecruitingconference.com

**Ultimate Corporate Communications Conference CCOs Driving Results**  
February 29  
New York, NY  
conference-board.org

**City Career Fair Diversity Employment Day**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
citycareerfair.com

**From Day One Forum**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
fromdayone.com

**NCRF Black College Expo Virtual Event**  
Multiple Events

See Calendar  
thecollegeexpo.org

**Small Business Expo**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

**Hire GI**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
hiregi.com

**March 2024**  
**San Diego Festival of Science & Engineering**  
March 2  
San Diego, CA  
usasciencefestival.org

**UNIDOS Changemakers Summit**  
March 4-6  
Washington, D.C.  
unidosus.org

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Conference**  
March 5-6  
Atlanta, GA  
conference-board.org/conferences

**NAACP Image Awards**  
March 6  
Los Angeles, CA  
naacp.org

**NOBLE 2024 William R. Bracey Symposium**  
March 7-9  
Atlanta, GA  
noblenational.org

**SHPE - Regional Leadership Development Conferences**  
March 7-9  
Costa Mesa, CA & Indianapolis, IN  
shpe.org

**Prospanica Leadership Summit**  
March 7-9  
Dallas, TX  
prospanica.org

**Out Women in Business (ROMBA)**  
March 8  
Los Angeles, CA  
reachingoutmba.org

**HACR Latina Empow(h)er Summit**  
March 11-13  
Dallas, TX  
hacr.org

**SHPE - Regional Leadership Development Conferences**  
March 14-16  
San Antonio, TX  
shpe.org

**Abilities Expo**  
March 15-17  
Los Angeles, CA  
abilities.com

**CSUN Virtual Event**  
March 18-22  
Anaheim, CA  
csun.edu

**2024 Annual Employee Health Care Conference - San Diego**  
March 19-20  
San Diego, CA  
conference-board.org

**WBENC**  
March 19-22  
Denver, CO  
wbenc.org

**Veteran EDGE**  
March 20-22  
Addison, TX  
ivmf.syracuse.edu

**NSBE 50 Convention**  
March 20-24  
Atlanta, GA  
nsbe.org

**City Career Fair Diversity Employment Day**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
citycareerfair.com

**NCRF Black College Expo Virtual Event**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
thecollegeexpo.org

**Hire GI**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
hiregi.com

**From Day One Forum**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
fromdayone.co

**Small Business Expo**  
Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

**April 2024**

**NFBPA Convention**  
April 3-7  
Baltimore, MD  
nfbpa.org

**SHPE - Regional Leadership Development Conferences**  
April 4-6  
Miami, FL  
shpe.org

**CSAVR 2023 Spring Conference**  
April 6-10  
Bethesda, MD  
csavr.org

**The ARC Disability Policy Seminar**  
April 8-10  
Washington, D.C.  
thearc.org

**HACU Annual Capital Forum**  
April 9-10  
Washington, D.C.  
hacu.net

**Employing US Vets Conference**  
April 11  
New York, NY  
employingusvets.com

**WiCyS**  
April 11-13  
Nashville, TN  
wicys.org

**ASHHRA Conference**  
April 14-16  
Fort Worth, TX  
ashhra.org

**NAVUB Conference**  
April 15-19  
Reno, NV  
navub.org

**SHRM Talent Conference & Expo 2024**  
April 16-17  
Las Vegas, NV  
shrm.org

**2024 Annual Employee Health Care Conference - New York**  
April 16-17  
New York, NY  
conference-board.org

**MANRRS - 38th Annual Training Conference & Career Expo**

April 20-24

Chicago, IL

manrrs.org

**USHCC Legislative Summit**

April 22-24

Washington, D.C.

ushcclegislative.com

**Women In Tech Global Conference****Hybrid Event**

April 23-25

womentech.net

**NAWLEE 28th Annual Conference**

April 23-26

Las Vegas, NV

nawlee.org

**Express Connect (East Coast)**

April 25

Boston, MA

vibnetwork.org

**Women Veterans Engagement Conference**

Online &amp; In-Person

April 27

womenveteransengage.com

**Diversity Alliance for Science – East Coast Conference**

April 30 – May 2

Newark, NJ

diversityallianceforscience.com

**From Day One Forum****Virtual Event**

Multiple Events

See Calendar

fromdayone.co

**City Career Fair****Diversity Employment Day**

Multiple Events

See Calendar

citycareerfair.com

**Small Business Expo**

Multiple Events

See Calendar

thesmallbusinessexpo.com

**Hire GI**

Multiple Events

See Calendar

hiregi.com

**NCRF Black College Expo****Virtual Event**

Multiple Events

See Calendar

thecollegeexpo.org

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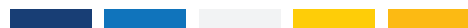


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