

CAREER BUSINESS EDUCATION LIFESTYLE

# DIVERSITY

COMM

OCTOBER 2024

MAGAZINE

## HOT JOBS

YOU CAN'T MISS!

## TOP

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

## NEW CHANGES IN SUPPLIER DIVERSITY

## NMSDC DEFINING NEW NORMS

# MAGIC JOHNSON

A LEGEND ON & OFF THE COURT





U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection

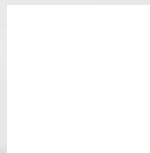
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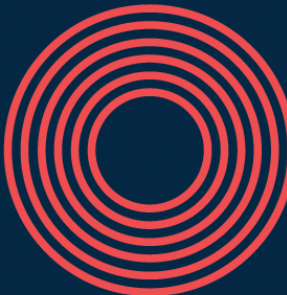
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# We are inclusive.

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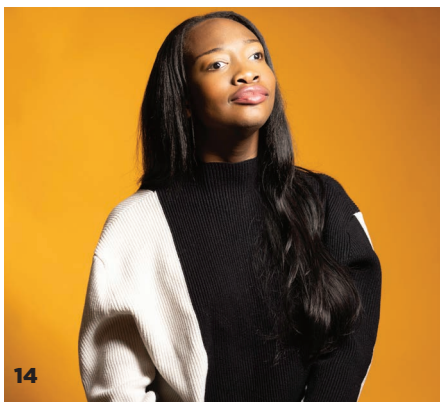
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# Like Magic, Go Out & Show ‘Em

This October, we celebrate our Diverseability community, National Disability Employment Awareness Month and all of the incredibly important contributions that people with disabilities make in our world.

Gracing this month’s cover is beloved NBA great Magic Johnson. While he’s best known for his legendary moves on the basketball court, it’s perhaps a lesser-known fact that the business mogul and urban community advocate has had dyslexia his entire life. But in true Magic fashion, it never stood in his way. “The looks, the stares, the giggles,” said Johnson, recalling his school days. “I wanted to show that I could do better and also that I could read.” Flip to page 50 to learn more about Johnson’s journey to greatness.

There’s something for everyone in this issue: If you’re a recruiter looking to fill that key role, Jeff Haden’s article, “To Hire the Perfect Job Candidate, Organizational Psychologist Adam Grant Says These Two Words Matter Most,” on page 16 is a must-read. Fresh out of college? “10 Essential Tips for New College Graduates Starting Their Careers,” on page 34, will help you start your job search off right. And if you’re a business owner, learn more about “How Best to Get Your Small Business Insured” on page 42.

Take a cue from Magic’s playbook, and don’t let any hurdle or obstacle get in your way—go out and show ‘em that you can do anything!



*Kat Castagnoli*

Kat Castagnoli,  
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**November 2024 Focus**  
**What’s Trending in the Native Origins Community**



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# HOT JOBS

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## Employment Opportunities



## Supplier Diversity Opportunities





# TOP INCLUSIVE COMPANIES IN INSURANCE

Most people have an insurance policy of some kind, from life and health to home and auto. But just like any other business, simply having a diverse clientele isn't enough when it comes to creating an inclusive workforce. To provide for the insurance needs of diverse populations, insurance companies need to prioritize inclusive practices both internally and externally to ensure business success. The following companies are lauded not just for creating a more inclusive culture for their customers, but for their employees as well.

### How they're enforcing inclusive practices:

- Implement some of the top diverse retention and recruitment practices
- Host ERGs or similar affinity groups
- Participate in supplier diversity partnerships
- Engage with diverse organizations or community events that support diversity and inclusion
- Have received multiple awards for exceptional inclusion practices



# Empowering Disabled Leaders: Driving Innovation & Inclusivity

By Delaney Norvor

“I have a disabled boss” is one of the rarest statements you will hear at a working professional make. Disabled bosses are indeed uncommon. According to the National Organization on Disability, just 9.2% of professionals with a disability (PwD) received a promotion in 2023. While the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that more than 22% of employed Americans working today have one or more disabilities, just 4.2% self-identify as disabled when asked by their companies for fear it will harm how they are perceived and treated in the workplace and impede their ability to advance their careers. This is a valid concern, as disabled professionals qualified to work are twice as likely to be unemployed or underemployed compared to able-bodied workers.

As a disabled boss who happens to be Black and female, I’m working to change all that. Selectively mute due to mild dystonia, a muscle disorder that affects the way I talk, I rely on text-to-speech technology to communicate, leading some to call me the Stephen Hawking of tech.

After graduating from business school, I joined an edtech company where I was hired as a product manager. My career began two years later when I secured my first leadership role at a startup, where I was promoted from Senior Product Manager to Head of Product. In less than two months, I supervised a team of 30 people.

Now 28, I am currently the Director of Product Management for the National Apartment Association (NAA) in Arlington, Virginia, leading a team of seven and product lines worth \$30 million, including our most popular product, Click and Lease, used by the majority of rental housing owners and managers nationwide.

That’s not to say I haven’t experienced my share of workplace discrimination. Despite impressive

“For me, success is not just about breaking personal barriers; it’s about breaking systemic ones. Inclusivity in the workplace is not just a moral imperative but a business one.”

practical experience in the tech sector—including launching three of my own dot.com startups at 25—I interviewed with more than 40 companies before securing my first full-time position.

For me, success is not just about breaking personal barriers; it’s about breaking systemic ones. Inclusivity in the workplace is not just a moral imperative but a business one. Diverse teams bring diverse perspectives, which drive innovation, creativity and better decision-making, which yields higher revenues. Disabled professionals bring unique insights and problem-solving skills, which are often overlooked.

## The Benefits of Having a Disabled Boss

Having a disabled leader can bring unique advantages to a team and organization. Here are a few ways my team benefits from my leadership:

- Enhanced empathy and understanding:** My disability has fostered a heightened sense of empathy and understanding within my team. For example, the team was overwhelmed and lacked structure before my arrival. I approached this situation with empathy, giving them

the opportunity to express their concerns. This not only won them over but also demonstrated that my disability was not a barrier to effective leadership. By addressing their concerns and implementing necessary changes, I showed that I was more than qualified to lead. This approach helped create a supportive and cohesive work environment, where my team is now attuned to each other’s needs and challenges.

- Innovative problem-solving:** Navigating a world that isn’t always accessible has honed my ability to think outside the



COURTESY OF TINA KROHN

box. This mindset permeates my team, encouraging them to approach problems from new angles and devise creative solutions. For example, when our meetings were becoming chaotic and unproductive, we introduced a structured approach where we set up an agenda. We use a timer to share updates. It transformed our meetings as they now run smoothly and ensure we cover all important topics efficiently.

- **Improved communication skills:** Since I rely on a text-to-speech app to communicate, my team has become more adept at clear and concise communication. This has improved our overall efficiency and reduced any misunderstandings.
- **Resilience and perseverance:** Witnessing my journey and the obstacles I've overcome empowers my team to tackle their own challenges with resilience and perseverance. They see firsthand that setbacks are opportunities for growth, not barriers to success.
- **Inclusive mindset:** My leadership has instilled an inclusive mindset within my team. They actively seek ways to make our processes and products more accessible to a wider audience, broadening our market reach and enhancing our brand reputation.

Under my leadership, we have achieved significant business goals and objectives, such as implementing product management best practices that were not in place before, optimizing agile workflows and maximizing productivity. I also enrolled my team in skill development workshops to enhance their agility skills. By restructuring my team to include three managers and four specialists with roles tailored to meet our business excellence needs, we have streamlined operations and boosted efficiency. This strategic realignment has led to the production of higher-quality work and faster shipping of features, significantly improving our time-to-market. In just seven months, we have grown and hired two new team members.

Recently, my team received public recognition during an all-staff meeting for their exceptional hard work and dedication to my vision and plans for business growth.

Our increased visibility within the industry has not only enhanced our brand reputation but is also attracting more revenue-generating projects. For instance, we are now in a position to secure several high-profile projects based on the changes I have implemented within my team and organization.

### The Road Ahead

At the same time, because so many PwDs fail to self-report that they are disabled, it perpetuates the belief among C-suite executives that few or no PwDs work at their organizations. This misconception leads to the assumption that talent development opportunities or leadership training programs for disabled workers are unnecessary, even if such opportunities are made available to other traditionally marginalized employees.

Disabled leaders foster a culture of empathy, resilience and adaptability, strengthening team dynamics and overall performance. Together, we can build a future where disabled individuals are not just participants in the workforce, but leaders who drive innovation and success. While we have made significant strides, there is still much work to be done. Disabled professionals deserve equal opportunities to succeed and lead in the corporate world. By challenging the status quo and advocating for inclusive practices, we can create workplaces where "I have a disabled boss" is no longer a rare statement, but a common one.



*Delaney Norvor is a trailblazing disabled corporate executive and the Director of Product Management at the National Apartment Association, advocating for inclusivity and empowering disabled professionals in the workforce.*



# 2024 TOP DIVERSE CITIES

	Albuquerque, NM
	Atlanta, GA
	Austin, TX
	Baltimore, MD
	Boston, MA
	Chicago, IL
	Houston, TX
	Las Vegas, NV
	Los Angeles, CA
	New York, NY
	Sacramento, CA
	San Francisco, CA
	Seattle, WA
	Tallahassee, FL

# To Hire the Perfect Job Candidate, Organizational Psychologist Adam Grant Says These Two Words Matter Most

By Jeff Haden

A friend wrote a job posting for a sales support specialist and asked me for feedback. One thing stood out right away, and not in a good way: “Successful candidate must have at least five years of direct sales support experience.”

Granted, that’s not unusual. Most job postings include some form of experience qualification. That’s even true for entry-level jobs; in this study of over 95,000 entry-level job listings, 61% required three or more years’ experience.

And it’s also understandable. Experience implies some degree of skill and knowledge, which should mean less training and more rapid up-to-speed time. Greater familiarity with the work involved also should mean it’s less likely the new employee will bail after a few months.



more churches tend to have more criminals, not because churches *cause* criminal behavior but

trained to perform tasks that, to some degree, they already know how to do. Experience doesn’t even help with *that*.

The study’s findings line up with a Leadership IQ study that shows almost 90% of new hires who fail in their first 18 months fail because of problems with motivation, willingness to be coached, temperament or emotional intelligence. A lack of technical skills—which experience should theoretically help indicate—was almost never the problem.

Clearly experience doesn’t predict future performance. Nor, oddly enough, does past performance. As Grant recently said:

“The most valuable indicator of future potential is not past performance. It’s **recent progress**. The people who exceed expectations tomorrow are the ones who improved the most yesterday. Getting better shows the drive and dexterity to learn.”

Growth is an accomplishment in itself.

Looking for a great sales support specialist? What matters is what they have accomplished, especially recently. Helping salespeople boost

sales. Creating more efficient and effective CRM tools. Fielding—and landing—smaller, in-house sales opportunities.

Not someone with a certain degree of experience. Someone who shows they recently have, or clearly have the potential to, deliver what you need. In short, doers of things that need to get done.

That’s obviously even more true if yours is an entry-level opening. Describe the attributes of a great candidate, not the skills. Attitude. Enthusiasm. Work ethic. Interpersonal skills. Experience is interesting, but largely irrelevant.

What someone has recently done, and therefore is most likely to be able to do, matters most. What you can teach someone with the right attitude, aptitude and willingness to learn matters.

Because the past doesn’t predict the future.

Unless, as Grant says, it’s the *recent* past.

*Jeff Haden is a keynote speaker, ghostwriter, LinkedIn Top Voice, contributing editor to Inc., and the author of The Motivation Myth: How High Achievers Really Set Themselves Up to Win.*

**What someone has recently done, and therefore is most likely to be able to do, matters most.**

But experience isn’t a proxy for skill. Or attitude. Or work ethic. Or teamwork. Or accomplishment.

Or—and this is what you care about most—future performance. As Adam Grant writes in *Hidden Potential*, “Past experience rarely predicts future performance. What matters is past performance, and current motivation and ability.”

Science agrees: a meta-analysis of 81 studies published in *Personnel Psychology* shows almost no correlation between experience and job performance—or turnover.

Keep in mind the difference between correlation and causation. Correlation is the degree that as one variable changes in value, another variable tends to change in a specific direction. Taller people tend to weigh more. Towns with

because towns with more churches tend to have larger populations, hence a greater number of criminals. A correlation coefficient of 1.0 is a perfectly positive relationship; one thing goes up, so does the other. A 0.8 is fairly strong, a 0.6 is moderately positive and a Blutarsky-like 0.0 indicates no relationship at all between two variables.

So how does experience correlate to job performance and turnover?

- Job performance: 0.06 correlation
- Training performance: 0.11 correlation
- Turnover: zero correlation

Yep. In effect, basically no correlation, oddly enough even with “training performance,” the degree to which people can effectively be





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# National Disability Employment Awareness Month 2024: Access and Good Jobs for All

October marks the start of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), a time that raises awareness on disability employment. People with disabilities have always had a harder time obtaining work, mostly due to preconceived notions of their capabilities and unconscious bias.

While 2023 saw the highest rate of disability employment in history—averaging at about 37%—there is still so much work to be done to further inclusion and independence opportunities

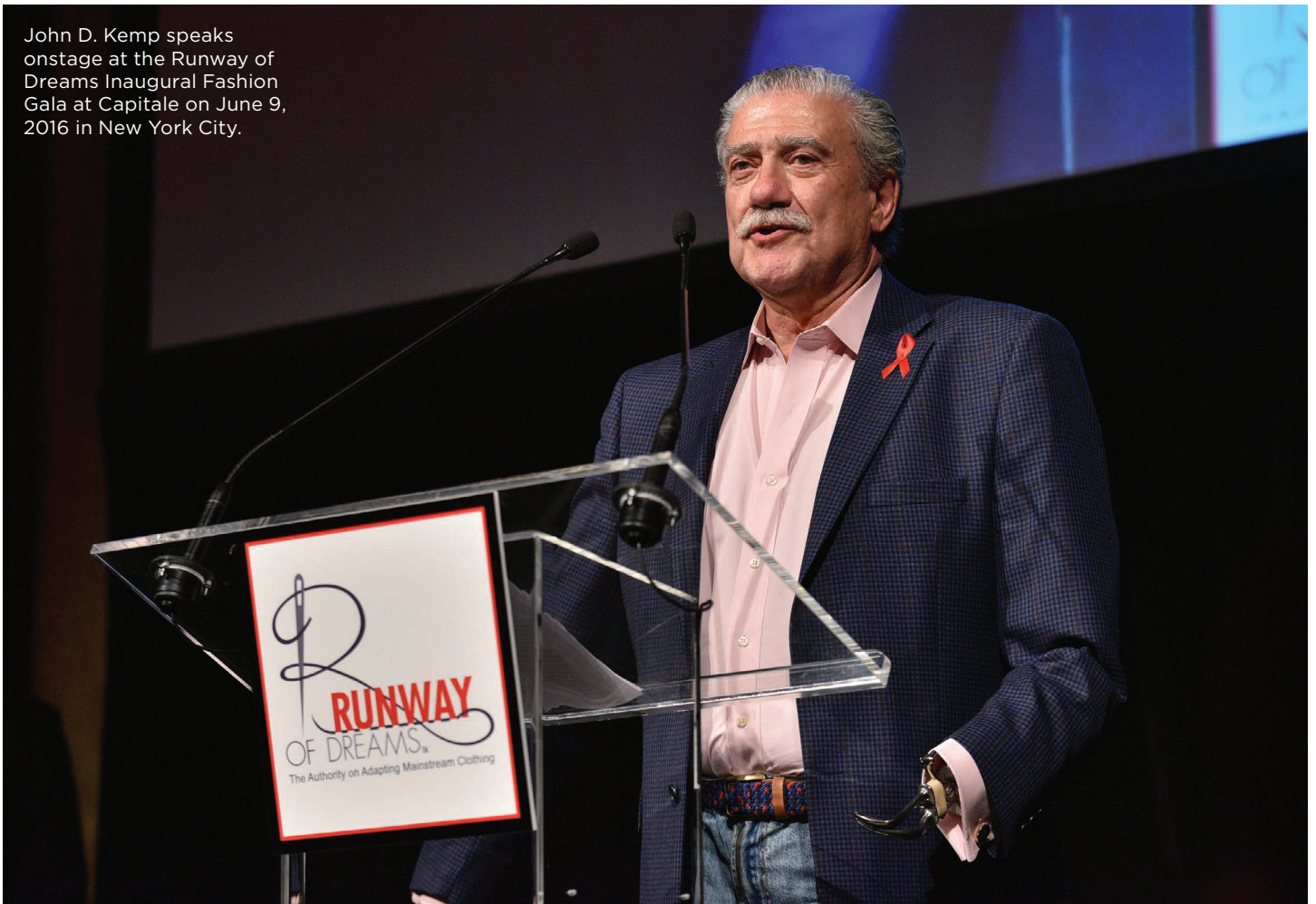
for the community. This year’s NDEAM theme, “Access and Good Jobs for All” will be focusing on this idea—promoting fair access to well-paying jobs for people with disabilities to further raise these employment numbers.

“Our theme in 2024, ‘Access to Good Jobs for All,’ speaks to our commitment to expand the number of employment opportunities for people with disabilities and the quality of those opportunities,” Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy Taryn M. Williams said in

a news release. “Good jobs change lives and all workers—including disabled people—deserve the opportunity to prepare for success in high-quality, good-paying jobs in workplaces free of discrimination.”

This month, we take a look at a few of the employees who not only illustrate this year’s theme but break the stereotypes surrounding the disability community in the workplace:

John D. Kemp speaks onstage at the Runway of Dreams Inaugural Fashion Gala at Capitale on June 9, 2016 in New York City.



## John D. Kemp

Born without arms or legs, John D. Kemp combined his passion for advocacy with his leadership knowledge and has served as a CEO and/or founder of numerous nonprofits and organizations for people with disabilities. He co-founded the American Association of the People with Disabilities organization, arguably the largest legal advocacy group for people with disabilities, and was the former CEO of the Viscardi Center and the Henry Viscardi School, which works to provide educational and employment opportunities to disabled people. Kemp is now the president and chief executive of the Lakeshore Foundation in Alabama, which focuses on providing sports and activities for the disability community.



JEROD HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES FOR MEDIA ACCESS AWARDS 2017

Haben Girma and 'Maxine' attend the Media Access Awards 2017 at The Four Seasons on Nov. 17, 2017 in Beverly Hills, California.

## Haben Girma

Haben Girma is a human rights lawyer and the first deafblind person to graduate from Harvard Law School. Since graduating in 2013, Girma has used her education to work on behalf of people with disabilities, representing them in cases where they have directly been affected by ADA violations. Alongside her work in the courtroom, Girma spends her time presenting TED Talks, authoring written works on disability issues and has even met with former President Obama to speak about accessible technology. At just 35 years old, Girma remains as one of the most influential and pivotal advocates for accessible technology today.

**“Good jobs change lives and all workers—including disabled people—deserve the opportunity to prepare for success in high-quality, good-paying jobs in workplaces free of discrimination.”**

- Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy  
Taryn M. Williams



BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Ed Roberts, a quadriplegic and director of the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, smiles from the iron lung in which he spent at least 12 hours a day.

## Ed Roberts

Ed Roberts was a wheelchair user who was paralyzed from the neck down. He was UC Berkeley's first wheelchair attendee and went on to become the director of the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, which had previously rejected hiring him due to his disability. During his time in this role, Roberts created what is still used as the standard model for Independent Living Centers in the United States and has improved California's policies on disability inclusion. Roberts was also the co-founder of the World Institute on Disability and the Physically Disabled Student's Program at UC Berkeley.

## Collette Divitto

Collette Divitto is a baker and the proprietor of Colletley's Cookies. Despite having her college degree and the work ethic to back her passions, Divitto was rejected from numerous possible jobs due to the interviewers' unconscious bias surrounding Down syndrome. She decided to take matters into her own hands and her business, Colletley's Cookies, became wildly popular both online and across retailers. It also became a central hub for disability employment advocacy. Along with employing several people with disabilities at her own company, Divitto created a nonprofit organization called Colletley's Leadership Program to provide pathways and trainings for other job seekers with disabilities.

Just like the contributions of these individuals, people with disabilities have proven time and time again that they can work in every capacity and industry. This National Disability Employment Awareness Month, it's important to remember that people with disabilities aren't just capable of work, but are critical to forming a more inclusive, accessible and educated society.



CRAIG F. WALKER/THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Collette Divitto stocks a shelf with Colletley's Cookies at the Golden Goose Market in Boston.



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# Chandra Vasser's Vision for DEI at Nissan Americas

Chandra Vasser holds the esteemed titles of vice president and chief diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) officer for Nissan Americas, as well as president of the Nissan Foundation.

Since her appointment to these roles in November 2021, Vasser has been instrumental in fostering a culture of productivity, respect and safety for all employees. Vasser drives Nissan's DEI strategies and develops partnerships that advance the company's commitment to diversity with employees, customers and the community.

Vasser also oversees Nissan's supplier diversity function and manages the company's corporate philanthropic efforts focused on

of purchasing, services and support and administration, which also encompassed supplier diversity.

Nissan's recognition as a Top Company for WBEs by *DiversityComm Magazine* is a testament to the automotive company's commitment to supplier diversity. Vasser expresses deep gratitude for this acknowledgment, attributing it to the collective effort of Nissan executives and the team that works to further DEI within the organization.

"This recognition highlights the unwavering dedication and hard work of everyone involved in advancing diversity within the company," Vasser says.

The transition of Nissan's supplier diversity department from

**"Nissan's integrated DEI strategy aligns with the company's overall corporate strategy and encompasses employees, customers, suppliers, dealers and community partners."**

education, humanitarian support and environmental initiatives. Under Vasser's leadership, the Nissan Foundation annually awards more than \$1 million in grants to nonprofits dedicated to breaking down societal barriers and building inclusive communities.

During her 20 years at Nissan, Vasser has held numerous leadership roles, most recently serving as director of finance. In this capacity, she oversaw activities in marketing and sales, aftersales, sales audit and cost of quality areas. Her extensive experience also includes leadership roles in finance for Nissan Motor Acceptance Company (NMAC), remarketing and purchasing. In addition, Vasser served as director

purchasing to DEI has broadened the scope of diversity efforts at Nissan. Vasser emphasizes that this move has elevated the visibility of supplier diversity within the organization, reflecting a stronger commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in procurement. Nissan's integrated DEI strategy aligns with the company's overall corporate strategy and encompasses employees, customers, suppliers, dealers and community partners. This alignment underscores Nissan's dedication to advancing DEI across all business aspects and maintaining a commitment to diversity and social responsibility in the communities where it operates.

Nissan's Supplier Diversity



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Development and Mentoring Program ensures supplier readiness for business with the company. The program offers a framework and tools for evaluating and improving the performance of disadvantaged businesses. Vasser highlights the importance of supporting suppliers with the necessary tools for success and acknowledges that a diversified supply chain contributes to strong and sustainable businesses. The program aims to build relationships and optimize collaborations between underutilized businesses and Nissan, serving as a catalyst for the development and growth of diverse suppliers in the supply chain.

As the automobile industry undergoes rapid transformation, many

women suppliers in the indirect soft commodities sector can benefit from strategic business alliances or joint ventures. Vasser advises women business owners to research automotive industry trends, identify solid partners and develop new skills and capabilities to prepare for these changes.

"The evolving business model for many original equipment manufacturers like Nissan will require suppliers to have vision, commitment and capability to compete in this new arena," Vasser says. "Manufacturing and advanced technology present attractive opportunities for entrepreneurs willing to adapt and thrive in this changing landscape."





## Fairness. Respect. Inclusion.

With multicultural roots, Nissan is committed to providing an inclusive space that encourages innovative ideas from our diverse workforce and supply base. We not only respect, but eagerly welcome, the varied perspectives of these talented men and women. Nissan believes our commitment to our core principles of diversity - fairness, respect and inclusion - is essential to creating quality and innovative products.



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**EMBRACING DIVERSITY**

# Fifth Third Bank's Commitment to Inclusion: A Conversation with Elizabeth Osborne & Mitch Morgan

In the rapidly evolving landscape of corporate America, Fifth Third Bank stands out for its longtime commitment to inclusion, especially for employees with disabilities. Supporting this charge are Elizabeth Osborne, executive vice president and chief audit executive, and Mitch Morgan, director of inclusion strategies.

In a recent interview, Osborne and Morgan shed light on the importance of inclusion and the impactful initiatives the bank has undertaken to foster a culture of belonging.

## Personal Commitment to Inclusion:

Osborne's dedication to inclusion is deeply personal. As the executive sponsor of Fifth Third's Individuals with Disabilities Business Resource Group (BRG), her advocacy is fueled by her experiences with her godson, who has autism. "I understand from a personal perspective how important it is to feel valued and to belong," she shared. This

personal connection has shaped her approach to leadership, making her a passionate advocate for creating inclusive environments.

## Overview of Business Resource Groups (BRGs):

Fifth Third Bank's BRGs play a pivotal role in fostering connectivity among employees. These groups allow workers to share their experiences and interests, thereby strengthening their bonds with colleagues. "From my perspective as a leader, that always strengthens our results: The stronger our community of employees is, the stronger the company is," Osborne noted.

The BRGs also provide leadership and development opportunities, enhance community engagement through volunteer activities and drive business innovation. With nine enterprise-level BRGs and 64 regional ones, Fifth Third ensures that all employees, regardless of their location, can participate. The BRGs



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cover a diverse range of communities, including African American, Asian & Pacific Islander, Individuals with Disabilities, LGBTQ+ and more. Participation is open to all employees, including allies who wish to learn and contribute to these communities.

## The Individuals with Disabilities BRG:

"Our Individuals with Disabilities BRG is a robust community of employees dedicated to fostering a culture of inclusion and belonging for people with disabilities," says Morgan.

This BRG was instrumental in developing Fifth Third's innovative ABLE Checking account product, designed to meet the unique financial needs of individuals with disabilities. The group's success lies in its ability to connect people with shared experiences, whether they are individuals with disabilities or

their supporters. "Connecting with the members in that way drives motivation to do more: You can sense the energy and pride in the work that's been done in the community and within our business," Osborne said.

## Impact on Employee Development & Networking:

Fifth Third's BRGs significantly contribute to employee development and networking. For instance, BRG leaders have opportunities to interact with senior leadership, such as attending the quarterly management committee meetings. This exposure allows them to share their ideas and learn from top leaders. "Providing them with access to leadership so that their ideas can be heard is important," Osborne says, highlighting the bank's commitment to nurturing future leaders.



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## Community Involvement & Business Innovation:

BRGs also play a crucial role in community involvement, according to Morgan. “[They] offer many networking events that support our strategic pillars,” he says. “While employee development is supported regionally and at the Enterprise level, the pillar of community involvement is also encouraged at the regional level.” He cited one example with members from the Individuals with Disabilities BRG in Northern Ohio, who volunteered at the Monroe County Intermediate School District Holiday Camp, supporting youth with disabilities. “Such initiatives not only benefit the community but also reinforce the bank’s commitment to inclusion,” Morgan says.

## Project SEARCH & Neurodiversity Apprenticeship:

Fifth Third’s Project SEARCH program exemplifies its dedication to supporting students with disabilities. This program provides high school students with disabilities with real-life work experience, helping them transition into future employment. Since its inception, Fifth Third has trained more than 400 individuals, with many continuing their careers at the bank.

Building on this success, the bank launched a neurodiversity apprenticeship program in 2023, according to Morgan. “Two neurodiverse apprentices were hired for a five-month experience in our Enterprise Data Office, where they supported various developmental assignments and had the opportunity to present their learnings to their teams at the conclusion of the experience,” he said. Morgan added that Fifth Third

plans to build on this pilot program in order to open new recruitment streams and provide even more employment opportunities for the neurodivergent community.

## The ABLE Checking Program:

The ABLE Checking program, another notable initiative, allows individuals with disabilities to save for their future without jeopardizing federal benefits. Developed in partnership with the National ABLE Alliance—a consortium dedicated to providing those living with disabilities and their families with low-cost investment products—this program offers features tailored to the needs of people with disabilities, such as a notched debit card for the visually impaired. “Fifth Third was the first bank to design a checking account for the ABLE program. From 2022 to 2023, we grew ABLE accounts by 20%,” Morgan said.

## Future of Inclusion at Fifth Third:

Looking ahead, both Osborne and Morgan envision continued growth in BRG membership and more opportunities for leadership development and business innovation. “Fifth Third’s commitment to inclusion is stronger than ever, and I expect that to continue over the next few years,” Osborne affirmed.

Through dedicated leadership and innovative programs, Fifth Third Bank is making significant strides in fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace, especially for individuals with disabilities. The efforts of Osborne, Morgan and the entire BRG community exemplify the bank’s commitment to ensuring that every employee feels valued and included. As they continue to build on these initiatives, Fifth Third is setting a standard for inclusivity in the corporate world.

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# Executive Spotlight on MassMutual's Kelly Piacenti

We recently caught up with Kelly Piacenti, head of SpecialCare at the financial services company MassMutual. She is a pioneer in her field, helping develop the practice of financial planning for the families of individuals with special needs. She is the former leader of the company's ADAPT business resource group, an affinity group for employees with disabilities and others impacted by disability. She recently received the United Cerebral Palsy 2024 Chair Award for her career-long dedication to improving the lives of others.

## A Mission to Protect the Financial Needs of Families

Piacenti started her career 33 years ago at MetLife, where she was instrumental in enhancing the company's special care planners group. Eight years ago, when MassMutual acquired MetLife's consumer-focused offerings, she joined the MassMutual team and took over the newly combined program. "MassMutual started offering planning services and financial advice for families of individuals with special

needs in 2004. The company realized then that these families faced tremendous challenges in terms of maintaining financial health while caring for their loved ones. Our mission as a mutual company is where that comes from: We protect the financial well-being for our policy holders and their families. My team helps create a holistic planning approach that goes beyond typical financial matters," she said.

## Creating the Industry Standard Certification

The company helps special needs families plan financially "primarily by educating our affiliated advisors. MassMutual worked closely with the American College of Financial Services to develop a three-course certification process for a designation, Chartered Special Needs Consultant (ChSNC), for financial advisors," Piacenti explained. The industry-wide designation indicates the person has mastered the specialized skills needed to help caregivers plan for the future of dependents with special needs. "MassMutual has nearly 400 advisors who have achieved this



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designation," she said. "The work they do is so important, helping families source and coordinate with a team of advisors and advocates." This includes qualified special needs attorneys, nonprofit disability organizations and service providers. The holistic approach takes into consideration how the social, medical and legal needs impact future life care plans. "We offer financial needs analysis and options that make the most sense based on a family's circumstances."

## Driven by Compassion

Piacenti explained that for approximately 85% of MassMutual's ChSNC-designated advisor affiliates, their motivation is personal. "These advisors are personally invested in our SpecialCare planner program—they either have a family member with special needs or have someone close to them that requires additional care." For Piacenti, the

experience of caring for a family member with special needs is deeply personal. "I have four kids. One of my children, Nicholas, suffocated at birth and passed away a few years ago at the age of 19. I know firsthand the challenges families face. It's incredibly stressful, and it creates a ripple effect through everything, touching all family members. Nick changed our entire world. His huge impact has reinforced my drive to help other parents plan for their child's well-being."

Piacenti is proud that MassMutual remains committed to providing special care planning for families. "We've provided 20 years of understanding. We've made the effort, and it's been worth it. We're the only company to have a dedicated special care area, and we continue to advise the industry on best practices and special care standards. For me, I'm 100% committed to this journey."



Company headquarters in Springfield, Massachusetts.

COURTESY OF MASSMUTUAL

# At MassMutual, Diversity Creates Opportunity



Laura Nietupski



Michael Morrissey



Miranda McCarthy

At MassMutual, diversity is driving success not just for the corporation but for individual associates as well. Through its business resource groups (BRGs), the company is creating organizational changes that positively impact its employees, partners and policyowners. The BRGs support initiatives that drive business results and increase employee awareness, respect and inclusion within the workplace.

For Miranda McCarthy, Laura Nietupski and Michael Morrissey, their involvement in the ADAPT BRG, which promotes disability inclusion, opens doors for themselves, their colleagues and communities.

McCarthy, a MassMutual diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) consultant, credits her involvement with the ADAPT BRG for helping her combine her passion for social impact with a corporate career. She initially had goals of working in Washington, D.C., creating public policy that impacted communities in need. A diagnosis of cyclical vomiting syndrome and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) sidetracked those plans. She shifted gears and wound up at MassMutual. Her involvement with ADAPT both as a caregiver and a person with disabilities empowered her to open new doors. “I merged these two worlds: having an MBA and working towards my financial planner certification, and my passion for diversity. The ability to bring my whole self to work came through BRGs.” Before being elevated to her present position, McCarthy served as chair of ADAPT. In her new role, she oversees all eight of the company’s BRGs. “I wasn’t afraid to open the DEI door. It’s been a dream come true to come to

work every day, knowing I’m doing exactly what I was meant to do.”

Nietupski’s involvement with ADAPT helps her gain invaluable perspective on segment marketing, where she is an insurance operations senior director. She recently stepped up her involvement and is the group’s new vice chair. “I’ve really honed in on the business value the BRGs can drive and how much impact we can have at MassMutual. Being in a pivotal role has really helped me pull all the dots together and see where we can take disability inclusion in the upcoming years.” Nietupski, who has general anxiety disorder, is passionate about the BRGs’ role in creating a culture of inclusion. “From hiring and what type of benefits we provide to how we support our employees while working – as well as being a safe place for caregivers – we want to be seen as a leader. We all have different perspectives and lived experiences; sharing those experiences can be so influential to those around us.” Nietupski is especially passionate about creating awareness of “non-apparent disabilities,” such as ADHD and anxiety disorders, and the ADAPT BRG gives her a platform from which to educate and inform.

Morrissey, digital experience lead at MassMutual, did not fully realize the impact that diverse experiences, perspectives and abilities could have on business outcomes until he began to lead a cross-company working group whose initial goal was to ensure that the company’s

website was fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). “Over the course of our conversations, we started to recognize that this effort was much more than one particular website. It’s like, ‘How do we make our entire digital ecosystem ADA compliant?’ We realized we needed to call our BRG friends because this effort was much larger than a compliance and tech conversation.” Morrissey’s immediately seen the benefit of diverse input. “This working group itself is bringing in people from all over the company, from different walks of life who have had different experiences, who can bring different perspectives to the team. It’s incredibly beneficial and is driving success for our customers, our employees and our financial professionals. For me, it’s been a great opportunity to learn and connect much more deeply with so many incredible people.”

Through its BRG programs, MassMutual has created a culture where diversity not only enables a vibrant, supportive workplace but is sought out as a way to create business solutions. The resource groups provide invaluable input in every facet of the business, from recruiting talent and customer accessibility to product development. As McCarthy, Nietupski and Morrissey’s stories illustrate, diversity and inclusion not only create opportunity for the company, but they accelerate the personal and professional growth of its associates.

# An Inside Look with the IRS' Cynthia "Cin-dee" D. Dunn



"Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) should be woven into the fabric of all agencies and organizations. It should not be an afterthought; it should be something that comes naturally in day-to-day operations."

Inclusion isn't just for small businesses or corporations. Sectors in the federal government, particularly the IRS, are also doing their part to create a welcoming environment for both their taxpayers and employees. In an exclusive interview, *DiversityComm Magazine* had the opportunity to speak with Cynthia "Cin-dee" D. Dunn, Director, IRS, TE/GE, Office of EDI to discuss the importance of inclusion on a federal level.

**Can you tell us about your career journey and how you became an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Director at the IRS?**

I've had quite a career journey, climbing the ladder of success within the federal government. My career journey includes time at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 1980-1983 and 1991-1998, Department of Defense (DoD), Department of the Army, 1984-1991, Export-Import Bank of the U.S., 1998-2000 and the Internal Revenue Service, 2000-present. I've always wanted a job where I can assist others. I was a military spouse, working at the Nuremberg Army Hospital in Nuremberg, West Germany. I applied and was selected for a position at the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) clinic. The EFMP is a mandatory enrollment program that works with other military and civilian agencies to provide comprehensive and coordinated community support, housing, educational, medical and personnel services to families with special needs. Active-duty Soldiers enroll their family member into the program when they have a physical, emotional, developmental or intellectual disorder requiring specialized services.

COURTESY OF CYNTHIA D. DUNN

### What are your primary roles and responsibilities as an EDI Director at the IRS?

I have many roles and responsibilities as the EDI Director for the IRS's Tax Exempt and Government Entities (TE/GE) Division. Some of the highlights of my responsibilities include:

- Leading the TE/GE Diversity and Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee.
- Compiling and developing TE/GE submissions for the mandatory EEO reports.
- Directing EDI efforts across TE/GE by providing a variety of services to TE/GE, including guidance, advice, counsel, training and assistance with any EDI-related matters.
- Conducting outreach activities that are required by MD-75. I conduct annual outreach activities for most national EEO organizations.
- Assist with the recruitment efforts to double TE/GE's workforce by soliciting for applicants during my presentations as well as meeting with deans at minority-serving institutions to talk about career opportunities as well as lead in virtual career fairs.
- Keep the TE/GE Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner aware of any important or emerging EEO issues.

### What does the IRS mission mean to you, and how do you align your work with this mission?

The IRS's mission is to provide America's taxpayers top-quality service by helping them understand and meet their tax responsibilities and enforce the law with integrity and fairness to all. In addition, IRS values are:

- Honesty and integrity
- Respect
- Continuous improvement
- Inclusion
- Openness to collaboration
- Personal accountability

When I developed the vision and mission statements for my EDI office in the Tax Exempt and Government Entities division, I wanted to make sure they were aligned with the overall IRS vision and mission statements. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is woven into the fabric of the IRS, it's not an afterthought, but something that comes naturally in day-to-day operations.

### You have received several prestigious awards, including "Woman of the Year" by National Image, Inc., the "Champion for Diversity" award from Federally Employed Women, the "Spirit" award from the Society of American Indian Government Employees and the "Invictus" award from the IRS Association for the Improvement of Minorities—which is the oldest employee organization within the IRS? How have these recognitions influenced your career?

I'm always humbled when I'm recognized like this. I don't do this work for the recognition; I do it because it's my passion. When my name is on anything, I make sure I've given my all. I was very excited when the Federally Employed Women (FEW) awarded me the first-of-its-kind "Champion for Diversity" award in 2018. I was the first recipient for this prestigious award. All of these accolades have definitely made me push harder and strive for more in my career because I know I've had an impact on and made a difference in others' lives.

### The IRS is being awarded Top Government Agency by DiversityComm Magazine. What does this recognition mean to you and the agency?

I am very excited about the IRS being awarded Top Government Agency by *DiversityComm Magazine*. My office and I have contributed a lot to earn this recognition.

### What are some of the key initiatives the IRS is currently undertaking to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility?

A key initiative currently in the IRS's EDI community to promote Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) is our year-long campaign titled, "Celebrating Our Uniqueness Together—Uniqueness = U in Action." The campaign is focusing on five areas: celebrate, educate, elevate, integrate and activate.

### What goals do you have for your EDI program at the IRS in the coming years?

I have several goals in mind: to continue with outreach activities, diversify recruitment strategies, promote the "Celebrating the Uniqueness" campaign and also focus more on employee engagement strategies.

### What do you find most rewarding about your job as EDI Director at the IRS?

What I find most rewarding is the ability to help others, to make sure that everyone is being treated with dignity and respect at all times and that everyone's voice is heard.

### What are your personal and professional goals for the future?

My personal and professional goals after retiring from the federal government is to continue to edu-

cate others through DEIA presentations, publish a book of poetry and remain connected to the DEIA community which I love.

### How do you envision the future of DEIA efforts within the IRS and the broader federal government?

I am proud to be an advocate for DEIA and also proud the IRS was recognized as one of the top in the Best of the Best federal agencies. I see the IRS continuing with DEIA awareness as well as the rest of the federal government.

### Many people have apprehensions about the IRS, but your presentations have a transformative impact on their perceptions. How do you achieve this positive shift?

I love it. I love when participants come up to me after presentations and tell me, "You gave me a totally different perspective about the IRS." One participant approached me after a training presentation and said, "I was offered a job at the IRS and I declined because of the negative things you hear about the IRS, [i.e., commercials, taxpayers complaining about having to pay taxes, etc.] but I wish I had met you prior to me declining the position because now I feel like I should have accepted the position." My follow-up to her was "It's not too late to join us!"

### Is there anything else you would like to add for our readers?

In closing, I want everyone to remember this... DEIA should be woven into the fabric of all agencies and organizations. It should not be an afterthought; it should be something that comes naturally in day-to-day operations.

## SYNTEREX

# Developing an AI tool to help get therapies to market faster

WITH SUPPORT FROM LISC AND ABBOTT

**G**ROWING UP, JEANETTE TOWLES SAW THE CHALLENGES her parents faced getting good, or even adequate, medical care. Her father, a service-disabled veteran, and her mother, disabled by a chronic health condition, struggled to access treatments that could improve their quality of life. From an early age, the Boston native knew her life's work would focus on assisting people in similar situations as her parents. Today, Towles fulfills this mission

through [Synterex](#), a clinical and regulatory consulting firm she founded to help biotech and other life science companies deliver important new therapies to patients in an expedited manner.

Towles' road to entrepreneurship, in fact, stems from her own disability, which threatened to displace her from the workforce. Prior to starting Synterex in 2016, Towles held consulting, medical writing, and clinical science positions with a range of companies. Then she was diagnosed with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), a disorder affecting blood flow that can cause lightheadedness, fainting and rapid heartbeat. When symptoms strike, Towles often needs to lie down for her circulation to adjust.

At the time of her diagnosis, Towles' employer consistently praised her as a strong technical and scientific contributor but could not give her the workplace accommodations she required. That's when the idea for Synterex was born.

"I spoke to some people I met in the industry, many of them strong woman leaders, who said they would be my first customers if I struck out on my own," said Towles, who launched Synterex when she was in her mid-thirties, the same age at which her mother left the workforce due to her disability.

[Disability:IN](#), a global organization that promotes disability inclusion and equality in business, recently named Synterex the Disability-Owned Business Enterprise of the Year. Towles calls the award "the coolest thing" she's ever received and is proud of the work community she's built, which includes others with disabilities.

Towles had always funded her business costs with proceeds from contracts with clients. She didn't need to seek capital until last year, when Synterex needed resources to develop a proprietary artificial intelligence (AI) tool, AgileWriter. The tool transforms regulatory and clinical documentation, dense and filled with technical and medical terminology, into plain language accessible to people without medical or technical backgrounds.

Towles hit roadblocks in her search for capital. She found interested investors, but none that would allow her to keep full ownership of the company. That all changed when she learned about the [Abbott-LISC Initiative to Support Diverse Businesses in Health](#), which provided a \$750,000 working capital loan and a \$250,000 growth capital investment to Synterex to develop AgileWriter. The capital is helping with ongoing product testing, building add-on features, and conducting routine maintenance.

"The prospect of giving up a large percentage of equity in a company that you fought so hard to start and grow is a hard pill to swallow," said Towles. "I'm grateful that companies like ours can go to programs like the Abbott-LISC initiative to get capital and still retain full ownership."

Towles expects AgileWriter to help Synterex expand relationships with existing clients and bring on new ones. She also believes the tool will help get therapies to market faster and at the same time nurture more diversity in clinical trials.

A case in point is the informed consent form, which breaks down the fundamental purpose of a clinical trial, its key elements, and what is expected of participants. "In doing research for AgileWriter, I was stunned to learn that only 29% of the U.S. population is actually considered scientifically literate to the point where if you put an informed consent for a clinical trial in front of them, they would actually understand everything that they're committing to," said Towles. "That number needs improvement, and we think that our tool is the way to get there." ■



JEANETTE TOWLES,  
CEO OF SYNTEREX



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Learn more at [lisc.org/abbott](https://lisc.org/abbott)

# 10 Essential Tips for New College Graduates Starting Their Careers

Graduating from college and entering the workforce is an exciting, yet often overwhelming, transition. As you take the first steps into your professional life, it's important to be equipped with the right strategies to set yourself up for success. If you're a recent graduate, here are 10 tips below to help you navigate the beginning of your career and make a positive impact:

## 1. Conduct Informational Meetings

Instead of jumping straight into job applications, take time to conduct informational meetings with professionals in your desired field. These casual conversations provide insights into different roles, company cultures and industry expectations, and they can expand your network significantly. By showing genuine interest and curiosity, you may also position yourself as a strong candidate for future openings.

## 2. Embrace Lifelong Learning

The learning doesn't stop after graduation. To remain competitive and advance in your field, continue to invest in your education. Attend workshops, take online courses, read industry-related books and stay updated on the latest trends. Building both technical skills and soft skills like communication and leadership will keep you adaptable and ready for new challenges.

## 3. Share Your Career Aspirations

Be proactive about sharing your career goals with your supervisors and peers. Clearly communicating what skills you want to develop and what roles interest you can help others support your growth. Managers are often willing to provide opportunities for professional development when they know what you're aiming for.



## 4. Cultivate a Professional Online Presence

In today's digital age, having a strong online presence is crucial. Build and maintain professional profiles on platforms like LinkedIn, and use them to showcase your work, connect with industry leaders and explore job opportunities. Regularly updating your profiles with achievements and industry insights can attract the attention of recruiters and hiring managers.

## 5. Become a Specialist in a Niche Task

Identify a specific task or responsibility within your team and master it. Whether it's a technical skill, a particular software or a unique process, becoming the go-to person for that task can enhance your value to the team. By taking ownership of even small but important tasks, you can quickly establish yourself as a reliable and indispensable team member.

## 6. Demonstrate Reliability Through Punctuality

Punctuality is a simple but powerful way to demonstrate professionalism. Make it a habit to arrive a few minutes early to

meetings and be prompt with your communications. This reliability shows respect for others' time and can positively influence how you're perceived by your colleagues and supervisors.

## 7. Take Initiative with Leadership Opportunities

Don't wait for leadership roles to be handed to you—seek them out. Volunteering to lead a project, committee or presentation is a great way to showcase your initiative and leadership potential. These experiences can help you develop skills in project management, delegation and public speaking, all of which are valuable as you progress in your career.

## 8. Be Transparent and Learn from Mistakes

Mistakes are inevitable, especially when you're new to the job. What matters most is how you handle them. Be honest about errors, take responsibility and seek advice on how to improve. This approach demonstrates maturity and a willingness to learn, which can build trust and respect with your supervisors and peers.

## 9. Find a Mentor

A mentor can be a guiding force in your career, offering advice, support and insight based on their own experiences. Look for a mentor within your workplace, industry groups or through networking. Define your goals for the mentorship clearly, so you and your mentor can build a mutually beneficial relationship.

## 10. Explore Your Interests and Stay Open-Minded

Your first job is a stepping stone and an opportunity to explore what truly excites you. Stay flexible and open to different roles, even if they don't align perfectly with your degree or initial career aspirations. Each experience can help you refine your goals and better understand your strengths and passions.

Starting your career journey is an exciting time, and with the right strategies, you can navigate this transition with confidence. Focus on building your skills, seeking out new experiences and staying true to your personal goals. Remember, your career is just one aspect of a fulfilling life, and it should align with your broader vision for the future.

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[careers.llnl.gov](https://careers.llnl.gov)



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# Resume Tips for Seasoned Workers



**R**eady to update your resume? For job seekers age 55+, find specific ideas to update your resume, bring it up-to-speed with current hiring practices and ensure it's an effective tool for promoting your strengths.

## Current hiring practices

When you send a resume in, an initial resume review is typically conducted by an applicant tracking system, or ATS, that machine-scans the resume for a match to the job posting. Most large companies use an ATS, while some—but far fewer—small and mid-sized businesses also use them.

Once a resume is in front of human eyes, hiring staff typically take just 6-7 seconds to scan it, looking for headings and keywords needed for the position. So, in either case,

it's important to follow the posting instructions to the letter, use relevant keywords and utilize a simple resume format to make a scannable, attractive resume to get through the first stage of evaluation.

## Common resume issues to watch for

Resume experts who provide critiques say that the resumes of older workers tend to share some consistent errors. See if you recognize any of these in your own resume:

1. With decades of experience, workers 55+ tend to write very long resumes.
2. The resume includes previous jobs that have no relation to the job they're applying for.
3. Resumes list skills and knowledge, volunteering and training that is out-of-date.
4. These resumes fail to mention technology skills.
5. They use full sentences, include too many words and use fussy punctuation that makes their resume difficult to read.
6. They use the same resume for every job posting.

## Tips for an excellent resume

How to tackle the task of writing an effective resume when you have decades of work experience that may or may not relate? The following tips will help guide you on what to include and what to leave off:

**Customize your resume to each job you apply for.** You don't have to revise your entire resume for every job, but it's important to match the top third of the resume to each job posting. That includes

editing your professional summary, skills summary and objective, if you use one. This is what employers scan first to determine if the applicant is a fit for their needs. Be sure to match your resume language to the job posting language wherever you can.

**Combination format.** Use a "combination" resume format that allows you to emphasize your skills and accomplishments and downplay the length of your career. This includes both a skills summary near the top and a work history that references job title, employer, start and end dates, along with accomplishments and responsibilities for each job.

**Make it clean and easy to read.** Use headings for resume



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section titles with simple, clean fonts such as Arial, Times New Roman or Calibri. For lists, use plain black dot bullets to separate items in a section. Avoid other types of bullets as well as the overuse of commas and tables, as they may not be readable by an ATS.

**Take a skills focus.** Create a key skills or professional skills section, and cluster your skills under three or four categories that are important to the open position. These may include leadership, teamwork, computer skills, communication skills, supervisory skills and so on. Make this substantial and personal, including the specific skills you offer, with a brief description. Avoid using generic skills like “good communication.” To get your resume past an ATS, it can help to express the same skill in two different ways. For example, list it in your key skills section, then mention it again in your work history.

**Include a technology skills list.** You may be extremely proficient on a variety of systems, but some employers may hold stereotypes about limited technology skills for workers 55+, so experts recommend including a tech skills list if you have at least 5-6 items to include. Keep to the “recent and relevant” rule and reflect only skills from the last 10 or so years. If this is a weak area, consider taking short classes to quickly upgrade your knowledge. Platforms such as LinkedIn, GCF.org and others offer free classes on basic technology skills and software such as Microsoft Office.

**Relevant work history.** Briefly list your jobs from the past 10-15 years; for each job, include several key tasks with a couple of major

accomplishments. Avoid listing unrelated experience or listing too much, since that may cause your resume to be discounted. Leave out irrelevant jobs you've held, especially from more than 15 years ago. Be sure to include your dates of employment, as most ATS systems reject resumes that do not include dates for work history. Aim to describe your responsibilities in one line per task, using a variety of action verbs. Include numbers, data, facts, people you served, documents you produced, money you earned or saved the company, budget size, etc. Match as closely as possible to the list of responsibilities noted in the job postings you apply to.

**Education & training section.** Include the highest level of education you have completed, noting your degree or training program. Only include high school diploma or equivalent if that is your highest level, but be sure to also include recent or current job training. If you've taken college courses but did not earn a degree, note it as “College coursework, XYZ University.” For the ATS to recognize it, write out the degree, such as associates of arts or bachelor of science. If your major isn't relevant, don't include it. Leave off the year you finished unless it's within the past five years.

**Always get a review.** Your resume should be free of errors; use simple, current language; be skills-focused and target the specific job opening you are applying for. Ask friends or family to check your resume for these points or contact your local American Job Center to ask for free, professional feedback.  
Source: CareerOneStop

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# A Closer Look at Insurance Industry Jobs

If you're looking for a career that's fast-paced, constantly evolving and offers some of the highest salaries around, then a job in insurance might be for you. But what kind of jobs can you get in the insurance industry? Here are a few possibilities to consider:

## Actuary

**Average Salary: \$120,000**

Actuaries are responsible for analyzing the cost of risks and uncertainty on behalf of businesses and individuals. They use mathematics, statistics and financial theory to assess the risk of potential events and help their clients to minimize the cost of that risk. Considered one of the most essential positions in the industry, actuaries often work

in teams for insurance agencies to help design policies and determine premiums that are profitable, but competitive with other insurance companies. Actuaries may work in various sectors, such as property and casualty, life, health, public sector, pension and retirement.

To become an actuary, you typically need a bachelor's degree



in mathematics, statistics, actuarial science or a related field.

Actuaries also need to obtain specific credentials depending on which insurance sector they want to work for.

## Claims Adjuster

**Average Salary:**

**\$75,020**

Claims adjusters are in charge of evaluating insurance claims and determining the amount to be paid if necessary. As part of their evaluation, adjusters may interview the claimant and witnesses, inspect the affected property, look at police reports, consult with experts and perform other forms of additional research. Adjusters strive to achieve fair rates for the insurance companies or individuals they are hired by and work closely with attorneys and law enforcement.

Some adjuster positions only require a high school diploma or GED, but a bachelor's degree in insurance-related studies is highly recommended before going into the field. Supervised training is often a necessity for the job as well.

## Insurance Broker

**Average Salary: \$80,000**

Insurance brokers are tasked with acting as an intermediary between insurance companies and their clients. Usually hired by companies or individuals, insurance brokers are responsible for having extensive, up-to-date knowledge on insurance policies to secure the best package for their clients. Brokers often need to stay informed on insurance trends, have fantastic communication skills, work closely with underwriters and are adept at advising their clients on policies

in simple terms. Companies prefer insurance brokers to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in an insurance-related field. Depending on their state, brokers will also need to obtain proper certification and training before they can be hired.

## Risk Manager

**Average Salary: \$113,735**

Risk managers work closely with an organization to minimize the chances of financial loss or uncertainty. They are responsible for maintaining records, staying up-to-date on currency changes, handling investment activities and ensuring that the current insurance policies in place are still in the best interest of their clients. Risk managers partake in extensive amounts of communication, from responding to customer inquiries and explaining coverages and policy changes to maintaining organized records.

Risk managers typically need a bachelor's degree and at least five years of experience in the insurance and/or financial sectors. Obtaining your certification as a financial manager is also recommended.

## Underwriter

**Average Salary: \$82,731**

Insurance underwriters are known as the "main link" between insurance companies and sales agents. Once an insurance application is submitted, underwriters carefully review and evaluate the application and decide on its approval status. If approved, underwriters determine the coverage amounts and premiums. Within the broad field of property and casualty, underwriters may specialize in business insurance or personal insurance policies, such as automobile and home.

Underwriters need to have the minimum of a high school diploma to be considered, but many also have their bachelor's degree. Insurance-related work experience and certification are also preferable to be hired.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor Statistics

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# How Best to Get Your Small Business Insured

Whether it be protection from natural disasters, accidents or complex lawsuits, business insurance can ensure that both your business and personal assets are protected. Depending on your state, needs and circumstances, you'll want to understand which type of insurance is best for your business. Consider the below:

## The Six Common Types of Insurance

The federal government already requires every business with any number of employees to have insurance in the form of workers compensation, unemployment and disability insurance. In addition to these, you'll want to think about what kind of incidents could damage your business. Is your business located in a commercial area that is at risk for seasonal or natural disasters? Are you working from home and could have a higher risk on your personal assets?

If you have any concerns about your business protections, you may want to consider purchasing one or more of these additional policies:

- **General Liability Insurance:** Coverage that protects against financial loss as a result of bodily injury, property damage, medical expenses, libel, slander, defending lawsuits and settlement bonds or judgments.
- **Product Liability Insurance:** Coverage against financial loss as a result of a defective product that causes injury or bodily harm.
- **Professional Liability Insurance:** Coverage against financial loss as a result of malpractice, errors or negligence.
- **Commercial Property Insurance:** Coverage against loss and damage to company property due to a wide variety of events. These may include fire, smoke, wind and hailstorms, civil disobedience and vandalism.



- **Home-Based Business Insurance:** Coverage that's added to homeowner's insurance as a rider can offer protection for a small amount of business equipment and liability coverage for third-party injuries.
- **Business Owner's Policy:** A business owner's policy is an insurance package that combines all of the typical coverage options into one bundle. It simplifies the insurance buying process and can save you money.

## Buying Your Business Insurance

Once you've decided on what

kind of protections you need, it may be wise to consult a commercial insurance agent to ensure you've decided on the best plan. Commercial insurance agents usually have a deeper understanding of the different policies and can help you find the ones that best match your business needs.

It's also important to shop around for your insurance policy with different providers. Much like you would with a home or car, you'll want to compare rates, terms and benefits from several different agents to find the policy that gives you the best coverage.

## Yearly Reassessment

As your business grows, so do your liabilities. Each year—and especially if you've purchased or replaced equipment or expanded operations—you'll want to contact your insurance agent to reassess your policy. You should discuss any changes in your business and how they might affect your current coverage. Expanding your insurance needs to fit your current business circumstances is necessary and shopping around for a better plan, if needed, is encouraged.

Source: Small Business Administration



# Supplier Diversity at State Farm<sup>®</sup>

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## **Questions?**

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at [supplierdiversity@statefarm.com](mailto:supplierdiversity@statefarm.com)



# The Future of Supplier Diversity: Adapting to Political and Legal Shifts

Supplier Diversity is evolving amid a changing political environment. In a landscape increasingly shaped by political and legal complexities, supplier diversity programs are undergoing significant transformations. With recent court rulings impacting affirmative action and growing political polarization, organizations must reassess their supplier diversity strategies to ensure compliance and effectiveness. This report draws from comprehensive surveys and interviews with senior corporate supplier diversity professionals, shedding light on the evolving dynamics and future directions of these critical programs.

## The Impact of Political and Legal Changes

The evolving legal landscape presents a complex challenge for supplier diversity initiatives. The Supreme Court's decision against Harvard University's affirmative action policies has sparked concerns about the potential rollback of supplier diversity programs designed to support minorities, including Black, Hispanic, Native American and Asian communities. A critical ruling in March 2024 by a federal judge in Texas declared that the Minority Business Development

Agency (MBDA) violated the Equal Protection Clause by presuming racial minorities are socially disadvantaged. Furthermore, attorneys general from 13 states have cautioned Fortune 100 CEOs about the "serious legal consequences" of race-based employment preferences and diversity policies, adding to the heightened scrutiny of supplier diversity programs.

Amid these challenges, supplier diversity professionals must navigate a complex legal environment to maintain the viability of their programs. "I commend and align with the white paper's insights, which are based on rigorous quantitative surveys and interviews with senior supplier diversity professionals," said Mona Lisa Faris, president and founder, DiversityComm Inc. "These findings underscore the transformative impact of diversity on competitiveness, creativity, decision-making, problem-solving, employee engagement and overall organizational success."

## Corporate Responses and Strategic Adjustments

While most survey respondents have not yet faced direct internal pressure to modify or eliminate their supplier diversity programs,

many are contemplating changes to ensure their initiatives remain legally sound. A notable trend is the shift from moral arguments to quantifying the tangible benefits of supplier diversity. Demonstrating how a diverse small business community contributes to economic growth and community well-being is becoming crucial in mitigating future pressures.

This approach aligns with the insights of Faris, who emphasized, "Moving forward, it is crucial to continue demonstrating the quantifiable benefits of diversity, ensuring our strategies evolve in sync with the dynamic landscape to foster innovation, profitability and enhanced corporate reputation."

## Proactive Approaches and Program Resets

To safeguard their programs, supplier diversity professionals are encouraged to adopt proactive strategies and consider resetting their initiatives. This involves balancing the demands of external and internal stakeholders who may oppose or support these programs. Such adjustments must address both reputational and programmatic risks, ensuring that changes do not undermine the effectiveness of supplier diversity efforts or damage

corporate reputation among minority communities.

"By demonstrating measurable outcomes and ensuring inclusive practices, we uphold the essence of diversity without prejudice, fostering a stronger, more resilient business ecosystem," noted Faris.

## Emerging Trends and Rebranding Efforts

In response to the evolving legal landscape, some companies are considering rebranding their supplier diversity programs. This may include renaming programs to eliminate terms like diversity, equity and minority, in favor of more neutral language such as economic inclusion or supplier relations. However, there is ongoing debate about whether such semantic changes will effectively shield programs from criticism. The perceptions of program beneficiaries may outweigh any rebranding efforts, making it essential to focus on the actual impact of these initiatives.

## A Historical Perspective and Future Directions

Corporate supplier diversity programs (CSDPs) have undergone significant evolution since their inception in the late 1960s. Initially driven by compliance and



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The **CHAMPIONS Initiative** offers a unique opportunity for diverse business owners to develop relationships with AmFam Group companies to focus on specific challenges and achieve defined goals. This initiative also supports the National Minority Supplier Development Council and its mission to advance economic equity and achieve \$1 trillion in annual MBE revenues.

For more information about The **CHAMPIONS Initiative**,  
please visit [AmFam.com/SupplierDiversity](https://AmFam.com/SupplierDiversity)

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federal mandates, these programs have transitioned through various phases—from being seen as a moral imperative to a business necessity. In the current era, marked by a renewed commitment in response to social unrest, there is a strong emphasis on aligning supplier diversity with broader environmental, social and governance (ESG) efforts.

“Studies like those conducted by The Conference Board are crucial for understanding the current landscape of supplier diversity and its implications,” Faris remarked. “The Conference Board has done an exceptional job in pinpointing critical issues, and I fully support their recommendations for navigating the future of supplier diversity programs.”

### Meeting the Challenges Ahead

Supplier diversity professionals must demonstrate that their programs are not racially biased

and are on firm legal footing. This involves aligning supplier diversity initiatives with other impact-focused efforts, balancing external and internal pressures, and ensuring that these programs remain effective and impactful.

### The Role of Advocacy Groups and Globalization

Advocacy groups such as the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) and the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) play a pivotal role in promoting corporate supplier diversity. However, they face challenges in staying relevant amid changing demographics and corporate priorities. Additionally, globalization presents both challenges and opportunities for supplier diversity, as highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the need for

more resilient and localized supply chains.

### Corporate Strategies for Future Success

To navigate the evolving landscape, corporations should:

1. Emphasize Localization: Tailor supplier diversity efforts to local needs, leveraging incentives for local diverse businesses in public contracting.
2. Educate and Engage Internally: Increase professional development and industry knowledge for supplier diversity teams and other internal stakeholders.
3. Align Business Objectives: Ensure supplier diversity strategies align with corporate business goals, emphasizing economic impact and business acumen.
4. Foster Innovation: Encourage ideation and innovation within the organization to highlight the transformative potential of supplier diversity.

### Conclusion


The evolving political and legal landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for supplier diversity programs. As corporations reassess their strategies, the continued relevance of these programs as pathways to economic opportunity and drivers of entrepreneurship remains clear. By adopting proactive measures and aligning supplier diversity with broader business objectives, companies can navigate these changes and continue to foster positive economic and social impacts.

*This report from The Conference Board presents key findings and insights based on data from quantitative surveys and interviews with senior supplier diversity professionals, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state and future direction of supplier diversity programs in the United States.*

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# A Conversation with Synterex's Jeanette Towles, President and DOBE of the Year



COURTESY OF JEANETTE TOWLES

**A**t this year's Disability:IN Inclusion Awards, Synterex was recognized as the 2024 Disability-Owned Small Business (DOBE) of the Year. Started by Jeanette Towles, Synterex is a clinical and regulatory consulting firm that provides solutions for medical communicators and clinical trials companies in a variety of therapeutic areas. We had the privilege of speaking with Towles as she shared her experiences as a DOBE owner and how being certified has helped her business thrive.

## Tell us why it was important for you to start a company like Synterex?

As the founder of a woman-owned, disability-owned business, I've worked hard from the very

beginning to foster a workplace environment where everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, feels valued and empowered to thrive. Growing up, my family faced significant challenges due to my mother's chronic health condition and my father's military service-related disability. Witnessing their struggles within the health care system left a profound impact on me. Not only did I find myself grappling with my own chronic health issues on a daily basis, but I also saw the struggles people with disabilities faced in the workplace and public sphere. I knew something needed to change. It was this personal journey that ignited a deep-seated passion within me to make a difference in the medical field and, thus, Synterex was born.

Our commitment to diversity and inclusion extends beyond our internal operations. We recognize that there is a lack of diversity in clinical trials and it is a critical issue that needs to be addressed, starting with the companies developing the medicines. At Synterex, we believe that the people creating the drugs should represent the diverse population who will be receiving them. To bridge this gap, we work diligently to provide patients from underrepresented backgrounds with health information in plain language, empowering them to make informed decisions about their medical journey. This is critical to our ethos and why it was so important to me to start this company in the first place: to promote diversity and inclusion in the industry and create a more equitable health care landscape.

## When did you first learn about the DOBE certification through Disability:IN and what enticed you about it?

I first learned about the DOBE certification through Disability:IN a few years ago when discussing business expansion opportunities with a colleague. Initially, I didn't think I qualified for the certification. However, upon closer examination

DOBE certification was the opportunity it presented to connect with forward-thinking business leaders who recognize the value of partnering with disabled-owned businesses. I saw it as a chance to align with companies that view working with DOBEs as a strategic advantage in meeting their business goals. This certification not only validated my status as a business owner with disabilities, but also opened doors to a network of like-minded professionals and potential clients who appreciate the unique perspectives and resilience that disabled entrepreneurs bring to the table.

## What benefits do you feel being DOBE certified has brought to your business?

Being DOBE certified has significantly benefited Synterex by increasing our visibility and credibility, in turn enhancing our reputation and setting us apart from competitors. The certification has opened doors to contracts, procurement opportunities and partnerships with various organizations. Additionally, we have gained access to a valuable network of other certified businesses, which fosters collaboration and relationship building.

Our DOBE certification appeals

**"This recognition not only highlights our commitment to excellence and innovation but also underscores the impact that disability-owned businesses can have within the broader business community. I am filled with pride and gratitude."**

Jeanette Towles, owner of Synterex

of the list of eligible diagnoses, I realized that I actually had several of the listed conditions.

What truly enticed me about the

to clients and industry partners who share our values of social responsibility, particularly diversity and inclusion (D&I). The certification



has given us access to resources, training and development programs that help us to continually improve our practices and expand our professional network. Moreover, the DOBE community provides opportunities for meaningful connections with like-minded individuals and organizations, which boosts our company morale.

Through our certification, we've been able to attend industry events and conferences, allowing us to forge new relationships and strengthen existing ones. These networking opportunities have led to knowledge sharing, potential collaborations and a broader understanding of industry trends and best practices.

Overall, DOBE certification has provided tangible business advantages, reinforced our commitment to D&I and served as validation that Synterex has stayed true to its

mission to create a more inclusive health care landscape. The relationships we've built through this certification have been invaluable in our growth and success.

**How did it feel to be named DOBE of the Year recently by Disability:IN?**

Being named DOBE of the Year by Disability:IN was an incredibly rewarding and validating experience. It stands as a testament to the hard work, dedication and resilience our team has demonstrated in the face of challenges and in pursuit of success over the years. This recognition not only highlights our commitment to excellence and innovation but also underscores the impact that disability-owned businesses can have within the broader business community. I am filled with pride and gratitude. Disability:IN's acknowledgment has inspired me and

everyone at Synterex to continue pushing boundaries, to advocate for greater equity and be an unwavering role model and support system for other disability-owned enterprises.

**What would you like to see Synterex accomplish in the future?**

The future is bright for Synterex. We will continue to grow as a leader in the life sciences, medical communications and operations space as well as drive innovation and excellence in all of our projects. With offices in the U.S. and Netherlands, we are working to continue our global expansion. We will also continue to grow and optimize AgileWriter, our proprietary software, to change the future of clinical documentation and better serve our clients. Most importantly, our sights are set on building a stronger foundation of inclusivity

by continuing to foster a workplace that champions DEI at every level. I envision Synterex playing a pivotal role in advancing health care solutions that improve patient outcomes and contribute to the betterment of global health. By expanding and establishing strategic partnerships, and continuously investing in our team's development, we will be at the forefront of scientific and technology advancements, setting new standards for quality and integrity in our industry.

**Anything else you would like to add or feel is important for us to know more about?**

As a mother and individual who knows what it's like to live with a disability, it is so important for me to leave a better world for future generations.

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# MAGIC JOHNSON

## A Legend On & Off the Court

By Brady Rhoades



**N**ame association: Magic Johnson. What comes to mind? Showman, the way he dazzled Lakers fans at the Fabulous Forum in the 1980s?

Champion? After all, he did win five NBA titles.

HIV?

Olympian? Who can forget his Olympic gold medal with the Dream Team?

Business mogul? He's worth \$1.2 billion, according to *Forbes*.

Whatever your answer, it's probably not disability or disorder, but it could be. He's dyslexic.

"Because of my dyslexia, I'm a visual person. I can see things that other people may not see, and that's been a big advantage in business."

People with dyslexia have difficulty reading because they don't process the sounds and sights of language in a typical way, according to The Yale Center For Dyslexia & Creativity. Dyslexia is the most common of all neuro-cognitive disorders, affecting about 20% of the population.

Those with dyslexia are often labeled as "slow," and that stigma can cause social and psychological trauma. But, dyslexia occurs at all levels of intelligence, according to The Yale Center, and dyslexic people are often fast and creative thinkers. With effort, they can become functional readers.

"The looks, the stares, the giggles," Johnson told the University of Michigan's Dyslexia Help program, recalling his school days. "I wanted to show that I could do better and also that I could read."

**Work Ethic**

The lessons his parents taught him about working hard proved a big help. Both worked two and sometimes three jobs.

“And so my father instilled that work ethic in me early on as a little boy,” Johnson said, as keynote speaker at the Evolve 2019 event. “I remember one day, you know, as a kid—it’s probably 10 below. A lot of snow in Lansing, Michigan. It’s cold out there, man. I did not want to be out there trying to get this trash out of this ice and put it on the truck, man. And so I did the job halfway. I jumped in that cabin in that truck, and I’m sitting here being warm, you know.

“By the time I got to feeling good about myself being warm, my father opened up that door, man, and he grabbed me. And man, you know how the fathers be strong. And he just took me through that; he’s dragging me through that snow. We got to the barrel. And he said, ‘Listen, son, if you do this job halfway, everything in life, you’re going to do halfway. You going to study halfway. You’re going to practice basketball halfway.’ He said, ‘I want you to go get that shovel. Break up that ice and get that trash out of that ice and put it on the truck like you’re supposed to do.’ That’s when my life changed. I became a perfectionist.”

Earvin Johnson, 65, husband to Cookie and father to three children, was born and raised in Lansing, Michigan. His father, Earvin Sr., and mother, Christine, were blue collar to the bone.

Johnson thrived at basketball from a young age and developed a singular focus: play (and star) in the NBA. He did not excel in academics because he struggled with reading. His social skills, however, were A+. So was his leadership, which served him and his classmates well when he was bussed to predominantly-white Everett High School as part of a national movement to integrate schools.

“The first week, there was fighting every day,” Johnson said at a business conference. “The fourth week, the principal got on the bus and said, ‘Earvin Johnson, come to my office.’ Our best white football player was in the office, too. The first thing he said was, ‘Earvin Johnson, you’re going to stop the Black kids from fighting.’ And then he turned to the other [kid] and said, ‘You’re going to stop all the white kids from fighting.’ And I said, ‘No, no, I just got here,’ and the principal said, ‘They’ll listen to you.’ The fighting stopped.”

The 6-foot-9 inch point guard was recruited by hundreds of universities offering scholarships and chose to attend Michigan State University where, as a sophomore, he made All-America and led the Spartans to a national title with a victory over the Larry Bird-led Indiana State Sycamores. Thirty-five million viewers watched Magic battle Bird in the most famous college basketball game ever.



MICHAEL KOVAC/GETTY IMAGES FOR TURNER SPORTS

1



BETMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

2

**The NBA**

The Los Angeles Lakers drafted Johnson as the No. 1 pick. He led the Lakers to an NBA championship in his rookie campaign, scoring 42 points in the clinching game against the Philadelphia 76ers.

He signed a \$25 million contract in 1981—

unheard of at the time—and captained the Lakers to five titles while earning three MVP awards and making 12 all-star games.

In 1991, he learned he was HIV positive, but he remained hopeful despite the fact that HIV/AIDS was the second leading cause of death to those ages 25-44, according to the Centers for



3

EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES



4

EMMA MCINTYRE/IREIMAGE



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VICTOR SPINELLI/IREIMAGE



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7

MONICA MORGAN/GETTY IMAGES

- 1. Larry Bird and Magic Johnson accept lifetime achievement awards onstage during the 2019 NBA Awards at Barker Hangar on June 24, 2019 in Santa Monica, California.
- 2. Michigan State University's star guard Earvin 'Magic' Johnson after a recent practice in MSU's Jenison Field House, March 1979.
- 3. Former Los Angeles Laker Magic Johnson waves to the fans prior to game three of the 2018 World Series between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Boston Red Sox at Dodger Stadium on Oct. 26, 2018 in Los Angeles.

- 4. Cookie and Magic Johnson attend the Elizabeth Taylor Ball to End AIDS at The Beverly Hills Hotel on Sept. 21, 2023 in Beverly Hills, California.
- 5. Mayor James K. Hahn and Magic Johnson, The City of Angels Corporate Award recipient.
- 6. Earvin 'Magic' Johnson, top pick in the NBA draft, gets a proud hug from his mother, Christine. The 6'8" guard from Michigan State University was selected by the Los Angeles Lakers.
- 7. Johnson with Harriet R. Michel, president, National Minority Supplier Development Council.

Disease Control.

At a Nov. 7, 1991 press conference at which reporters wept, he stated, “I’m going to go on, I’m going to beat it and I’m going to have fun.” He said he would become an AIDS activist, raising awareness and money and teaching children that “no sex is the safest sex.”

Leave it to Johnson, just days after learning he had HIV, to talk about fun. That’s the charismatic part of his personality. Another side—blue collar, grind away—could be seen in his day-to-day commitment to following doctors’ orders. He took his medications, exercised and made sure to get rest (not his strong suit).

About a year after the announcement about HIV, Johnson co-starred with Bird, Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley on the 1992 Dream Team, which won Olympics gold in Barcelona.

For millions, everything changed in 1995, when an anti-HIV antiretroviral drug was approved by the FDA. That led to combination treatments (a so-called “cocktail” of drugs) that greatly lengthened the lifespan of patients with HIV and AIDS. Treatment continued to improve.

Thirty-three years after announcing that he was carrying the virus, Johnson is healthy. He continues to approach every day like it’s a gift, though, having transitioned from a professional athlete to a business tycoon. He’s a co-owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Washington Commanders, among other investment ventures.

### Entrepreneur & Philanthropist

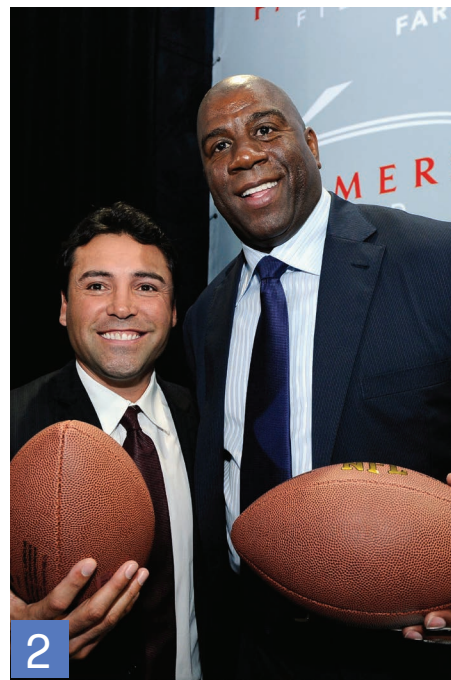
“While his investments in the sports space garner the most attention, Johnson has assembled a diversified portfolio through his investment company Magic Johnson Enterprises,” according to the business publication *Boardroom*. “That includes restaurant franchises and movie theaters. Johnson is also an avid real estate investor.”

Johnson formed the Magic Johnson Foundation in 1991 with the following mission: “The Magic Johnson Foundation develops programs and supports community-based organizations that address the educational, health and social needs of ethnically diverse, urban communities.” The foundation has raised millions for beneficiaries in Los Angeles and beyond.

It might be his most difference-making accomplishment, sparked by his connection to his humble roots and a lifetime habit of assisting others. Because he knows what it’s like to need a team.

Picture him in, say, 1967, confused and embarrassed when teachers asked him to read out loud. Too ashamed to ask for help in deciphering what it was that teachers were writing on blackboards. And without resources to tackle a problem that could have set him back his entire life.

This is a common story among dyslexic people. It helped when “dyslexia” was included in the 1980 DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual



of Mental Disorders). Now, there is awareness, and there are resources and treatments. There’s no magic to managing dyslexia, but there is persistence. For information and help regarding dyslexia, here are three, among many, websites: [childmind.org](http://childmind.org), [healthline.com](http://healthline.com) and [dyslexia.yale.edu](http://dyslexia.yale.edu).

For anyone who thinks the disorder is a failure sentence, consider that Tom Cruise is dyslexic. So is billionaire tycoon Richard Branson. Albert Einstein also struggled with a learning disorder.

“Words and language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to apply any role in my

mechanism of thought,” Einstein wrote in 1945.

On the court, Johnson was not a great shooter, so he worked on it, eventually improving while continuing to maximize his strengths. That MO proved valuable in the world of finance.

“Because of my dyslexia, I’m a visual person. I can see things that other people may not see, and that’s been a big advantage in business.”

And when those make-or-break moments in the game of life come along, he is prepared. He’s been the victor too many times to count, and do you know what he calls that?

“Winning time.”



- 1.** Magic Johnson, chairman and CEO of Magic Johnson Enterprises, and Mark Walter, founder and CEO of TWG Global and Guggenheim Partners, take questions from sportscaster Jim Gray (L) during a panel at the Milken Institute Global Conference in Beverly Hills, California on May 7, 2024. FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES
- 2.** Boxer Oscar De La Hoya and Magic Johnson hold footballs after an event announcing naming rights for the new football stadium, Farmers Field, at the Los Angeles Convention Center on Feb. 1, 2011 in Los Angeles. KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/GETTY IMAGES
- 3.** Johnson is seen outside Crypto.com Arena on March 16, 2024 in Los Angeles. ZZHOLLYWOOD TO YOU/STAR MAX/GC IMAGES
- 4.** LeBron James, #6 of the Los Angeles Lakers, celebrates with Magic Johnson after scoring to pass Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to become the NBA's all-time leading scorer—surpassing Abdul-Jabbar's career total of 38,387 points—at Crypto.com Arena on Feb. 7, 2023 in Los Angeles. RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES
- 5.** (L-R) James Worthy, Byron Scott, Jamaal Wilkes, Magic Johnson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Michael Cooper Jr., Kurt Rambis and A. C. Green attend a ceremony celebrating Michael Cooper's induction into the Basketball Hall of Fame during halftime of a game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Denver Nuggets at Crypto.com Arena on April 25, 2024 in Los Angeles. ALLEN BEREZOVSKY/GETTY IMAGES
- 6.** Radio Personality Sway and Johnson talk about National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on Feb. 7, 2014 in New York City. EARL GIBSON III/GETTY IMAGES
- 7.** Former NBA great Earvin 'Magic' Johnson attends a signing for his book, *When the Game Was Ours*, at Barnes & Noble at The Grove on Dec. 2, 2009 in Los Angeles. DAVID LIVINGSTON/GETTY IMAGES
- 8.** Earvin 'Magic' Johnson delivers the keynote address at the Global Gaming Expo on Oct. 5, 2017 in Las Vegas, Nevada. ISAAC BREKKEN/GETTY IMAGES FOR GLOBAL GAMING EXPO

# Whoopi Goldberg Partners with BLK Fam to Bring Inclusive Streaming Content to Families

**B**LK Fam is the first and only Black-owned, Black-focused family streaming platform. It entertains, educates and celebrates Black American family-friendly content, sharing authentic, inclusive stories incorporating original series, animation, syndicated shows, documentaries and more. The ad-supported, free streaming service, founded by digital media veteran Larry Adams, launched earlier this year in partnership with actress Whoopi Goldberg.

Recent Nielsen data reveals that despite being the demographic that consumes the most media and TV, Black audiences still feel misrepresented or underrepresented in mainstream media. The report shows that Black Americans are more likely than the general population to access three or more streaming services. Black audiences are underserved consumers despite over-indexing for using free streaming services compared to the total market. BLK Fam addresses this underserved market by bringing family-friendly, data-backed, unbiased content to streaming.

BLK Fam launches with an extensive content library, including over 20 syndicated series, 1,000+ hours of new animation titles, dozens of new animated characters of color and diverse gender experiences and hundreds of hours of original music-driven content. Ten new original live-action and animated series are in development to premier on the platform throughout the year. BLK Fam's content spans investigative journalism and news, fitness and wellness series, Black history, children's and adult animation, sitcoms and reality shows, and music programs—all through the lens of the Black experience.

"Black culture and content is so often stereotyped, siloed or written off—so I wanted to create a platform where my kids and I can



(L-R) Larry Adams, Whoopi Goldberg, Jimmy Jenkins, Tom Leonardis and Ian Wishingrad attend *Shorts: Animated Shorts Curated by Whoopi Goldberg* during the 2024 Tribeca Festival.

be entertained without having to face those same daily biases," says Adams, CEO of BLK Fam. "By curating authentic content, proven through data and AI, primarily from Black storytellers, we've built a service reflecting true inclusion... Where Black parents and children especially can feel holistically represented."

EGOT winner, business mogul and Black icon Goldberg has signed on as an equity partner alongside Tom Leonardis, president of Whoop, Inc., and will be steering the creative development of various programming exclusive to the plat-

form. Goldberg says, "I am honored to partner with BLK Fam to assist in the creative direction of curated diverse content—for Black culture to be brought to broader audiences."

BLK Fam has partnered with The Africa Channel to bring content amplifying stories from the global Black diaspora to the new platform. Additional content partners include PlayWatch Kids and ATTN:, who are developing educational, fun and empowering shows in animation and documentary styles that center on ethnically and culturally inclusive characters, including *Gabby Galactic*, *Marvelous Light*, *Black*

*History Beats*, *Kembe* and many more. "We are extremely excited to be partnering with BLK Fam—we feel this is a historic moment for families across the globe," said Jimmy Jenkins, owner at PlayWatch, Inc. "Ultimately, this platform will impact our children and our children's children."

BLK Fam is available on iOS, Android, Amazon Prime Video channels, Apple TV, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, YouTube TV, Samsung Smart TVs, Vizio and LG.

Source: BLK Fam





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# Historic Victory: Biniam Girmay Becomes First Black Cyclist to Win the Tour de France

By Fawzia Reza



Biniam Girmay of Eritrea and UCI WorldTeam Intermarché-Wanty celebrates at the finish line during the 111th Tour de France 2024.

TIM DE WAELE/GETTY IMAGES

The Tour de France is one of the most prestigious bicycle races, consisting of 21 stages that cover approximately 3,500 kilometers. The 2024 race, which marked the 111th edition, began on June 29th and ended on July 21st. The race featured 176 riders from 22 professional cycling teams, covering one stage per day. The course traversed varied terrains, including hills, flatlands and mountains.

This year's race began in Florence, Italy, and ended in Nice,

France, which is unusual since the race typically concludes in Paris. The ending venue was changed due to the 2024 Olympics.

Four jerseys are awarded to the best cyclists based on accumulated points and classification: yellow, green, white and polka dot. These jerseys are given to the leader at the end of each stage, and the recipient wears it during the next day's racing. The overall winner, who has the fastest overall time in all 21 stages, is awarded the yellow jersey.

The green jersey is awarded to the rider with the most points across the stages, the polka dot jersey is awarded to the cyclist with the most points in the mountain stages and the white jersey is awarded to the fastest cyclist under 25 years old.

## Biniam Girmay Hailu

Biniam Girmay Hailu (Biniam Girmay) born on April 2, 2000, in Asmara, Eritrea, is a successful Black African cyclist. The vibrant cycling culture in Asmara likely

sparked his interest in the sport, although he initially preferred football. Once introduced to cycling, he displayed significant talent and has made a name for himself in this sport. When he was 22, Girmay made history at the Giro d'Italia as the first Black African rider to win a Grand Tour stage. He was the first rider to be named African Cyclist of the Year multiple times.

Girmay currently rides for UCI WorldTeam Intermarché-Wanty. At the 2024 Tour de France, he won

the green jersey, holding the lead from stage 5 onwards and becoming the first Black African rider to win any jersey at the tour. He also made history by becoming the first Black African rider to win a Tour de France stage, winning stages 3, 8 and 12. He was also in contention to win stage 16, but unfortunately, an accident near the finish line prevented him from earning sprint points, and another rider, Jasper Philipsen, claimed victory.

Despite his successes, Girmay has faced significant challenges because he is from Africa. In an interview on “C’est mon tour,” he was asked about his childhood and financial issues, reflecting a mindset that overlooks his accomplishments and the respect he deserves (Road.cc, 2024).

In a recent interview with *Velo* (a bicycling magazine), he explained his journey. “It’s not easy for African riders to get onto the radar

of the bigger, Europe-based teams... it’s actually getting more difficult now.” Girmay explained that African riders currently have even fewer options to make it to Europe than he had in 2018.

**“If we want more Black riders, the European Continental teams need to start watching African cycling more. It’s all about being seen and getting a chance in Europe.”**

“There is so much passion in young riders from Eritrea, but if you want to become pro, you need to be lucky enough to be in the right place at the right moment.... (y)ou need to be seen. There are many local races and only a few big races like Rwanda and Gabon. That’s the moment to

show yourself to European teams.” He hopes the European clubs will pay more attention to African riders. “If we want more Black riders, the European Continental teams need to start watching African cycling more.

and enjoyment for everyone. His success has broken racial barriers and stereotypes in cycling, inspiring young African cyclists to compete and emulate his success. Girmay’s journey confirms that with hard work and dedication, success in any sport is attainable regardless of race or ethnicity, providing a platform for all to participate, enjoy and excel.

While Girmay has earned the respect of his fellow cyclists due to his dedication, determination and consistent hard work, his successes have also been celebrated with fervor in Africa. For example, many fans in his hometown in Asmara demonstrated joy in his Tour de France victories with parades and gatherings. His success was also televised on the local media, highlighting the national pride and inspiration he brought to the country of Eritrea and the young athletes within Africa.

It’s all about being seen and getting a chance in Europe.”

Girmay’s achievements have increased awareness and interest in his sport among Black Africans. He advocates for cycling to become a global sport (Fotheringham, 2024), ensuring equal participation

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# Nancy Maldonado Breaks Barriers as First Hispanic Federal Circuit Judge in U.S. History

The Senate has voted to confirm Judge Nancy Maldonado to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. She is the first Hispanic judge of any gender to serve on the Seventh Circuit and one of the few Latina judges ever appointed to a federal circuit court.

“We are pleased that the Senate has confirmed Judge Maldonado to serve as a United States circuit judge for the Seventh Circuit,” U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin stated of Maldonado’s confirmation. “She has the qualifications, integrity and judgment to serve with distinction and will continue to strengthen our federal bench.”

After graduating cum laude from Harvard University in 1997 and receiving her law degree from Columbia Law School in 2001, Maldonado served as a law clerk for Judge Rubén Castillo on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. She continued her work there until 2003, when she secured an associate position and later a partnership at Miner, Barnhill & Galland, P.C. During her extensive experience as an Illinois judge, Maldonado oversaw an array of cases but became best known for her expertise in labor and employment law and civil rights.

In December 2021, Maldonado’s experience landed her a recommendation on behalf of Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth to serve as a district judge for the state of Illinois. President Biden nominated Maldonado for the position in April 2022. After a lengthy nomination process, Maldonado was confirmed to the District Court for the Northern District of Illinois in a 53-41 vote. She spent the next two years as the first Latina to serve as a judge of that level in Illinois.

After being confirmed to the Seventh Circuit earlier this year, she again made history as the first Hispanic person to serve in her



Judge Nancy Maldonado, pictured with Judge Matthew Kennelly, after being sworn in as a judge of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

position. Maldonado is also the 21st lifetime confirmation of a Latina judge during Biden’s administration and the 10th confirmation of a Latina judge to a federal circuit court in our nation’s history.

“Judge Nancy Maldonado’s historic confirmation to the Seventh Circuit brings critically important civil rights experience to the appellate bench and long overdue

representation to this court,” Lena Zwarenstin, senior director of the fair courts program at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights said. “Her professional and lived experiences represent the kind of diversity that helps to build public trust in our courts, improves judicial decision-making and strengthens our democracy. We celebrate this significant moment for

our judiciary.”

“Judge Maldonado has already proven what an incredible judge she is, and Alliance for Justice was proud to support her confirmation,” Alliance for Justice’s Vice President of Strategy Keith Thirion further stated. “It is encouraging to see the Senate prioritizing judicial confirmations, particularly for outstanding nominees to our circuit courts.”

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# Rebeca Andrade, Brazil's Olympic Champion, Inspires Youth at Local Gym in Hometown

Anyone who loves the Olympics knows Rebeca Andrade, the Brazilian gymnast who has racked up countless gold, silver and bronze medals from her 2020 and 2024 Olympics performances. She became best known this year for her gold medal win in the women's floor final. But for the aspiring young gymnasts in Andrade's hometown, the gold medal winner is more than just a talented gymnast; she's an inspiration.

Growing up near San Paulo, Brazil, Andrade spent nearly every day at Bonifácio Cardoso gym, where she tirelessly worked on her craft before joining the Brazilian national team. She worked with the facility's coaches, helping craft her natural talents into a competitive skill set and building a repertoire that would help her win medals at some of the world's most prestigious international gymnastics competitions.

Crediting the gym for making her the athlete she is today, dozens of young girls have decided to follow in Andrade's footsteps and travel to Bonifácio Cardoso, utilizing the space and working with the coaches who shaped one of the most talented gymnasts in the world.



JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES

Gold medalist Rebeca Andrade of Team Brazil on the podium at the Artistic Gymnastics Women's Floor Exercise medal ceremony on day 10 of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games at Bercy Arena on Aug. 5, 2024.

"I saw a little girl with this biotype. Strong, explosive, just playing," Mônica dos Anjos, a gymnastics teacher who has known Andrade since she was five years old, remarked on the Olympian's

early days. "Many girls started coming in 2021 because of Rebeca. Now they know it is possible. Rebeca was here; she jumped the same vault [and] performed on the same floor. Not all will make it, but

just dreaming about it and trying hard will open many doors for them in the future."

One of the young gymnasts inspired by the Olympian's career is 14-year-old Manuela Kriegel, who almost gave up on gymnastics after becoming discouraged during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, after closely following Andrade's wins in the 2020 Olympic games, watching her receive the country's first Olympic medal for women's gymnastics and becoming Brazil's first Olympic champion in the sport, Kriegel was encouraged to continue in the sport she loved.

"It is what Rebeca says," Kriegel told the Associated Press about her gymnastics work ethic. "We have to trust the work we do here every day, get our training right and become confident in what we do when we are doing it. Before her, it wasn't possible. And now it is much beyond what we expected."

Along with her professional influence, Andrade encourages young and seasoned athletes to care for their craft and overall well-being. A vocal advocate for caring for your mental and physical health, Andrade is also helping to tear down the stigma around therapy, crediting it for her impressive performances.

"I talk a lot with my therapist, and I try to take care of my mind and my body to the best of my abilities to create the balance I need to perform very calmly, without pressure, without feeling an obligation to bring medals back home," Andrade said in an interview with Brazilian news outlet *Jornal Nacional*. "My job is just to compete, and I do it because I love it and because I want it. People tell me I look peaceful and serene [during competition]. That's because I'm there doing my job like every other human being has their job to do. We can only hope to do our share and work our hardest to try to achieve the results we want."



MIGUEL SCHINCARIOL/FPV VIA GETTY IMAGES

Young gymnasts pose at the Bonifácio Cardoso gym in Guarulhos, Sao Paulo, Brazil, on March 5, 2024.



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# Dr. Marcia Rieke of NASA Secures Top Position in Cosmology, Advancing Space Exploration

**D**r. Marcia Rieke, a scientist who worked on NASA's James Webb Space Telescope and Hubble Space Telescope, is this year's sole recipient of the Gruber Foundation's 2024 Cosmology Prize. Awarded since 2001, the Gruber Prize is considered one of the most prestigious awards in cosmology, the study of the origin and development of the universe. Dr. Rieke is the fourth woman to receive the distinction in the prize's history and the first woman to be recognized since 2017.

According to the Gruber Foundation's announcement, Dr. Rieke received the honor for:

"Her pioneering work on astronomical instrumentation to reveal the breadth and details of the infrared universe. Her contributions to flagship space missions have opened new avenues for understanding the history and mechanisms of star and galaxy formation. She enabled the development and delivery of premier instruments, providing ground-breaking sensitivity to near-infrared wavelengths for both the Webb and the Hubble telescopes. Through these substantive contributions, along with earlier work, Dr. Marcia



Dr. Marcia Rieke

GEORGE RIEKE/UAZ

Rieke has had a lasting impact on our understanding of the universe."

Dr. Rieke is a Regents' Professor of Astronomy at the University of Arizona, where she has worked since 1976. Since joining the staff, Dr. Rieke has made seminal contributions to infrared astronomy, from research and instrument development to working in outreach and international public policy. Among her most well-known accomplishments, Dr. Rieke was the principal

investigator for the Near-Infrared Camera (NIRCam) on the James Webb Space Telescope, considered the world's premier space science observatory.

Because the universe expands, light from the earliest galaxies has been stretched, or "redshifted," from visible light into infrared light. Humans can't see infrared light but can perceive it as heat. The NIRCam can visualize the infrared light, allowing scientists to study the early phases of star and galaxy formation.

As principal investigator for the NIRCam, Dr. Rieke is responsible for ensuring the instrument is built and delivered on time and on budget. She works with the engineers at Lockheed Martin who are building the NIRCam and helps them decipher the instruments' requirements, massaging its plans into shape.

Lee Feinberg, the Webb telescope's manager and optics lead at NASA's Goddard Space Flight

Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, said of Dr. Rieke's contributions:

"As principal investigator of the James Webb Space Telescope NIRCam instrument, Dr. Rieke's vision, dedication and leadership were inspirational to the entire team and a key contribution to the success of the Webb telescope."

In addition to her work with the NIRCam, Dr. Rieke's research interests include infrared observations of the center of the Milky Way and other galactic nuclei. She has served as the deputy principal investigator on the Near Infrared Camera and Multi-Object Spectrometer (NICMOS) for the Hubble Space Telescope and as the outreach coordinator for NASA's retired Spitzer Space Telescope.

"As a leading scientist on a premiere Hubble Space Telescope science camera, NICMOS,

Dr. Rieke's expertise enabled ground-breaking discoveries on everything from star formation to distant galaxies," said Dr. Jennifer Wiseman, Hubble Space Telescope senior project scientist at NASA

Goddard. "Subsequent cameras on Hubble and infrared space telescopes like Spitzer and Webb have built upon Dr. Rieke's pioneering work."

Dr. Rieke received the award in early August at the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union in Cape Town, South Africa. Her other accolades include her fellowship with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the 2014 Robert H. Goddard Award for Achievement in Science and the 2023 NASA Distinguished Public Service Medal.

Sources: NASA, James Webb Space Telescope

"Her [Dr. Rieke's] contributions to flagship space mission have opened up new avenues for understanding the history and mechanisms of star and galaxy formation."

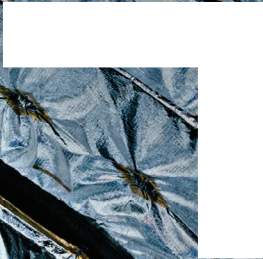
- Gruber Foundation



A rare view of the James Webb Space Telescope face-on from the NASA Goddard cleanroom observation window.

NASA GODDARD

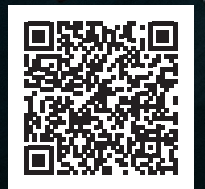




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# Jenn Tran Makes History as the First Asian *Bachelorette* and STEM Advocate

By Natalie Rodgers



DISNEY/RAMONA ROSALES

ABC's *The Bachelorette* star Jenn Tran.

**T**he *Bachelor/Bachelorette* franchise is one of the most popular reality programs in the nation, racking up millions of views every season. Throughout the show, audiences anticipate which of the numerous contestants will be the bachelor or bachelorette's final pick and which of the other contestants will have their own season.

After winning the hearts of audiences in season 28 of *The Bachelor*, starring Joey Graziadei, Jenn Tran was chosen to star in the latest season of *The Bachelorette*. Tran is the first Asian American woman

selected for the show's leading role.

"Growing up, I never really saw a lot of Asians in the media, and that really hindered me from believing that I could make something of myself and do some things," Tran said in an interview with *ABC News*. "So, for me to be here today and kind of be the role model that I've always wanted is honestly really surreal for me."

Captivating audiences with her outgoing personality and desire to help others—as she is currently studying to become a physician's assistant—Tran was tasked with



DISNEY/JOHN FLEENOR

Jenn Tran gives a rose to Dylan Buckor.

meeting and dating 25 men, hoping to find love. Contestants were eliminated each week depending on the impression they left on Tran, with audiences becoming more engaged as she narrowed her list of potential partners down to a handful of individuals. As the contestant list shortened, the final men were given a chance to go on more personal dates, including visiting the bachelorette's hometown of Miami, Florida and meeting her family—one of the most vital parts of representation, according to Tran.

"What really hit me was seeing my family on TV," Tran, who is Vietnamese, told *NBC News*. "My Vietnamese culture is present, and Vietnamese food is mentioned. And then my mom speaks Vietnamese... Things like that have always felt so close to me, but they've always only been in my home, so to have it on TV and normalized to have other people experience [it]—I'm so excited for that."

And according to the show's reviews, the bachelorette herself wasn't the only one excited to see AAPI representation in reality television. After the new season's first

episode aired, Tran's *Bachelorette* saw record-breaking viewership. The first episode became the fifth premiere episode in the show's history to gain new viewers since 2002, and the first one with a POC lead to gain new viewers in the franchise's history. It was also the most-watched premiere for the 18–49-year-old demographic on the night of its release. It beat out viewership for *Love Island*, another popular reality show that debuted its season premiere that night.

Along with normalizing AAPI representation in media, especially around her Vietnamese culture, Tran is also hoping to use her increasing platform to advocate against AAPI hate—something that has not been uncommon in past seasons.

"I do want to share that kind of stuff on social media because there are people who think racism doesn't exist anymore or don't really know the extent of it," Tran told *NBC News*. "To just completely ignore it and not talk about it would be a disservice [to] the cause that I want to do, which is to make change."

The latest season can be streamed in full on Hulu.

# Jaymes Black Takes Charge as CEO of The Trevor Project, Spearheading Change for LGBTQ+ Youth

The Trevor Project (Trevor), the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ+ young people, announced Jaymes Black as its new CEO. Black, an accomplished senior leader with over 20 years of experience managing high-performing teams at scale, has stepped in to lead the organization. Black will succeed Peggy Rajski, a founder and decades-long board member who stepped in as interim CEO in 2022.

Black's substantial expertise blends nonprofit and corporate competencies. It spans business and community leadership, LGBTQ+ advocacy and coalition building, fundraising strategy and innovation, large budget oversight and financial acumen, call center operations and user experience and more. In addition to their extensive professional qualifications, they identify as a Black nonbinary lesbian—bringing compelling lived experience that will help The Trevor Project work toward its mission to end suicide among LGBTQ+ young people.

"I am elated and deeply honored to step into the role of CEO at The Trevor Project for so many reasons—especially since this is an organization [that] I desperately needed myself as a queer young person growing up in South Texas," said Black. "Right now, far too many queer and transgender young people are struggling with thoughts of suicide and other mental health challenges—not because of who they are, but because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized by other people.

"I know what that feels like, first hand. I also know this is an enormously difficult moment for both Trevor and the young people we serve. Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the dangerous, demeaning rhetoric surrounding it has reached a record high in this country, and LGBTQ+ young people are constantly being



THE TREVOR PROJECT

Jaymes Black

exposed to messages that attempt to invalidate their very identities. As CEO, it is my job to reinforce that LGBTQ+ young people have so many more people who love and support them exactly as they are,

than those who wish them harm. This work won't be easy, but I am ready to roll my sleeves up to help create a world in which all LGBTQ+ young people feel safe, accepted and free to thrive as their

truest selves."

Prior to joining Trevor, Black served as president and CEO at Family Equality, the leading national organization for current and future LGBTQ+ families.

"I am ready to roll my sleeves up to help create a world in which all LGBTQ+ young people feel safe, accepted and free to thrive as their truest selves."

-Jaymes Black

Family Equality works to ensure everyone has the freedom to find, form and sustain their families by advancing LGBTQ+ equality through advocacy, support, storytelling and education.

"We are thrilled to welcome Jaymes as our new CEO at such a critical moment for The Trevor Project and for the LGBTQ+ young people we serve," said Julian Moore, chair of The Trevor Project's Board of Directors. "The search for Trevor's new leader was rigorous, and throughout the process, Jaymes established themselves as a sort of 'unicorn' candidate. Their history of successful leadership in finance, technology and business, combined with leading and growing an LGBTQ+ nonprofit during a historically challenging time for our community, makes Jaymes a uniquely remarkable fit. The role of CEO is a big job, and we are more than confident in Jaymes' ability to lead The Trevor Project forward."

Before leading Family Equality, Black had a seasoned career in the corporate sector, where they held various senior leadership roles, including at companies such as Charles Schwab, Sabre Corporation and Northrop Grumman. Black has an MS in management and was honored on the 2022 *Out Magazine's* Out100 list—a compilation of the year's most impactful and influential LGBTQ+ people.

Source: The Trevor Project

# Redefining Fashion: Indigenous Modeling Agency Leads Industry with Authentic Voices

For years, representation of Native Americans in television, film, publications and other forms of media has been severely lacking. But one modeling agency is successfully changing the game forever.

Founded on the traditional, ancestral and unceded homelands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations in what is now called Vancouver, Supernaturals Modelling (Supernaturals) was created by Cree model Joleen Mitton and entrepreneur and filmmaker Patrick Shannon in 2021. The organization exclusively works with Indigenous talent to ensure they have access to the resources and opportunities they need for a successful career in media.

Supernaturals has established itself as the premier agency for



COURTESY OF SUPERNATURALS MODELING AGENCY



COURTESY OF SUPERNATURALS MODELING AGENCY

Joleen Mitton



Patrick Shannon

Indigenous people, focusing on uplifting and supporting talent from an Indigenous worldview that prioritizes people and culture over profit while giving clients the opportunity to be a part of healthy reconciliation within the media, fashion and modeling industries.

“Our mission at Supernaturals is to celebrate and make visible Indigenous peoples at a high level in media arts, culture, community, land-based wisdom and the global market,” Mitton stated in a company press release.

“Indigenous people are in high demand right now,” Shannon added, “and we want to be at the forefront of this new wave of cultural awareness supporting our own people in an industry that has traditionally been very difficult to thrive in.”

Mitton became passionate about creating the agency in the 2010s

while working with a program that cared for Indigenous children in foster care. Unable to garner the children’s attention through the classic lesson plans and instruction time, Mitton created a fashion show that immediately sparked the group’s interest. There, Mitton discovered that she could build an inclusive, Indigenous and fashion-centered group on a much larger scale.

Mitton, an industry model since she was a teenager, decided to become a modeling teacher and founded Vancouver’s Indigenous Fashion Week, where the talent of Indigenous models and artists could be showcased. However, while many models experienced success within Mitton’s organizations, those who went on to gain their industry breakthrough had poor experiences in the fashion industry. This inspired Mitton to launch Supernaturals.

“A couple of our models had gone to a non-Indigenous agency, and they were treated terribly,” Mitton said in a discussion with *TODAY*. “What Supernaturals tries to do is bring culture elders and (an) Indigenous worldview into our agency. It was just a natural transition. We wanted to keep [the models] safe, keep them protected and keep them supported.”

By uplifting communities and Indigenous talent through skills development, employment and healing, Supernaturals is facilitating Indigenous-ally relationships through collaboration, education and healthy representation at the highest level. Supernaturals features models from various nations including Cree, Dene, Haida, Navajo, Sechelt, Salish, Squamish, Métis and many others to better represent Indigenous people. Models under Supernaturals

have gone on to work for well-known brands such as Roots Canada, Lululemon, Barbie, Herschel and Wonderbra and have worked with dozens of the top Indigenous fashion designers across Canada and the U.S.

“The best part about working with Supernaturals is that I’m working with my people, and I’m represented by my people. We are a stronger community; we are a family,” Talaysay Campo, one of the Supernaturals models, explains. “I’m looking forward to showing the world my culture and where I come from, because not a lot of Indigenous models are represented in the media, and that needs to change.”

Additional information can be found at [supernaturalsmodelling.com](http://supernaturalsmodelling.com).

Sources: Supernaturals Modelling, The Issue Magazine

# VA Benefits for Disabled Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides benefits and services to meet the needs of veterans and service members. While many VA programs are designed to serve veterans, particularly disabled veterans, VA services are not limited to those who have left the military.

If you are an active-duty disabled service member and need help covering the cost of school, securing a home loan or acquiring life insurance, or require medical care for your disability, the VA can help you and your family.

## Medical Care

More than 1,300 medical centers and clinics form the core of the VA's services. In addition, the VA works with TRICARE to provide services for active-duty service members who are disabled:

- **Eligibility**—Determine your eligibility for benefits by visiting VA Health Benefits.
- **Medical Services**—For a complete listing of VA health services, go to VA Health Care.
- **Medical Care**—Contact TRICARE for service-connected injuries or illnesses. Your service branch's primary provider can

refer you to the VA for treatment of combat injuries.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Care & Resources

The VA provides a range of services to support service members and veterans with PTSD. To learn more about the programs, support groups and research for helping those with PTSD, visit the veterans post-traumatic stress disorder page of the VA website.

## Disability Compensation

The VA's tax-free disability compensation pays veterans who have service-related disabilities. The amount is based on the severity of the disability, with additional payments available if the veteran has a spouse or other dependents. You can apply for disability and find more information on your qualifying compensations at [va.gov/disability](http://va.gov/disability).

## Transition & Employment Services

The VA offers briefings on its benefits and services through the Transition Assistance Program.

This outreach effort is intensified for service members leaving active duty due to a medical problem. The VA's goal is to make sure all transitioning service members fully understand the benefits and services available to them:

- **Returning Service Member Program**—If you have returned from Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation New Dawn, visit VA's Post-9/11 Transition and Case Management webpage.
- **Disabled Transition Assistance Program**—To find out about the services available to you if you have a medical disability, visit the Disabled Transition Assistance Program's website.
- **Rehabilitation & Employment Services**—To be eligible, you must have a service-connected disability and require vocational rehabilitation. The program is also available to active-duty service members awaiting discharge because of a disability. For more information, go to the VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment web page.

## Home & Car Adaptation

Veterans and service members with specific service-connected disabilities may be eligible for grants to help them adapt homes or cars to meet their disability requirements.

The VA offers housing grants to veterans who receive compensation for certain permanent and total service-connected disabilities:

- **Specially Adapted Housing Grant**—Used to build a specially adapted home or remodel an existing home for adaptation.
- **Special Home Adaptation Grant**—Used to adapt an existing home owned by the veteran or adapt a home intended for purchase, or help a veteran buy a home already adapted.

Veterans and service members may also be eligible for home improvement and structural alteration

grants. To determine what this grant will pay for, visit the Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services page of the VA website.

For veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities, the VA offers a one-time payment of up to \$11,000 toward the purchase of an automobile. The VA may also pay for adaptive equipment, repair, replacement or reinstallation of equipment.

## Life Insurance

The VA's life insurance program offers Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance to veterans with service-connected disabilities. Supplemental coverage is available at an additional cost. Service members remain covered by VA Servicemembers Group Life Insurance until they leave the military. For more information, visit the life insurance page of the VA website.

## Other Benefits

Many VA benefits and services extend to service members and veterans regardless of disability status, including the following education and home loan guaranty benefits:

- **Education**—Montgomery GI Bill, Post-9/11 GI Bill and the GI Bill cover the cost of education and certificate programs.
- **Training Programs**—Many types of training are available through the GI Bill, including undergraduate or graduate degree programs at colleges or universities.
- **Transfer of Benefits**—Under certain circumstances, you may be able to transfer your benefits to an eligible spouse or child.
- **Home Loan Guaranties**—The home loan guaranties help service members get competitive rates on home loans with little or no down payment. Find out more by visiting the home loans page of the VA website.

Source: MilitaryOneSource



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# The Latest in Disability News

As we celebrate the contributions of people with disabilities, here are some of the most exciting developments within the disability community over the last several months:



JOE MAHER/GETTY IMAGES

## Shardlake Brings Disability Representation to a New Level

One of Hulu's newest shows, *Shardlake*, isn't just an exciting historical mystery saga but brings a new level of representation to the screen. Playing the show's lead character, Matthew Shardlake, is British actor Arthur Hughes, who lives with radial dysplasia in his right arm. The show has been praised for normalizing Hughes' real-life disability as a part of his character, especially since the show's plot isn't about a disabled character. Hughes told *Sky News* of his portrayal: "I think especially with Shardlake, it (his disability) is what people would judge him on first. But those who get to know him and work with him and see the quality of him, that's where the real interesting part of him lies."

## Tallulah Willis Receives Prestigious Autism Advocacy Honor

Autism Speaks, one of the largest autism advocacy groups in the country, will recognize social media personality and the daughter of Bruce Willis, Tallulah Willis, as this year's honoree for their Los Angeles Gala. Willis joined Autism Speaks earlier this year, shortly after she received an autism diagnosis at the age of 30. Since then, she has used her growing social media platform to discuss the importance of autism advocacy alongside her usual conversations on mental and physical health. Willis also penned an article with *Vogue* entitled *Tallulah Willis on Grief, Healing, and the Road Ahead*, which has since been praised for its openness to sensitive health topics. "It is a privilege to have the support of advocates like Tallulah in calling awareness to the most pressing issues for the autistic community," said Georgianna Junco-Kelman, Chair of the California & Northwest Autism Speaks Board. "While we are celebrating the strides we made in driving inclusion at past Autism Speaks Los Angeles Galas, work still needs to be done to ensure there are more opportunities, particularly in the entertainment sector, that allow people with autism to reach their full potential."



KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES





In 2024, Windstream was recognized as a Best of the Best Top Disability-Friendly Company and Top Diverse Employer by DiversityComm Magazine. Windstream is committed to creating a culture of innovation and belonging by developing a workforce and creating a work environment that celebrates the diverse communities where we do business. We recognize that the passion and commitment of our employees are key to our collective success.

WINAbility, one of our employee resource groups, fosters an environment of inclusion and a culture that welcomes people of all abilities while continually seeking opportunities to better serve our employees with disabilities. They promote equity for employees with disabilities in all aspects of recruiting, onboarding, and retention in accordance with Windstream's diversity and inclusion efforts. We strive to be an Employer of Choice for people with disabilities.



Creating a culture of innovation and belonging is vital because it ensures that everyone can contribute their unique talents. By fostering inclusive environments that welcome all abilities, we benefit from diverse perspectives and talents, enhancing creativity and collaboration. Supporting employees with disabilities promotes equity, strengthens our community, and drives collective success.



**Elizabeth Orth**  
SVP – Customer Support  
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ARELSKELEY/GETTY IMAGES

## Accessibility is Coming to Beloved Children's Shows

Paramount Global and the Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) are coming together to ensure that Nickelodeon's hit animated and live-action series will be accessible to families with young viewers and those with disabilities. The multi-year agreement will begin with children's shows such as *The Tiny Chef Show* and *Blues Clues & You!* and include closed captioning and audio descriptions that can be utilized on DCMP's free streaming services. More Nickelodeon shows will be released through this partnership over the next five years.



JUSTINI TALUS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Ancient Fossil Documents Down Syndrome in Early Humans

A fossil over 140,000 years old proves that people with Down syndrome date back to the earliest humans. In a recent study of a piece of Neanderthal bone found in Spain, which included parts of the skull and inner ear, researchers have discovered that the fossil once belonged to a young child with Down syndrome. The bone had malformations, such as a wider ear canal, that led researchers to the conclusion. This finding has led to new observations on Neanderthal societies, especially around the ideas of compassion, caregiving, parenting and the contributions of people with Down syndrome in early humans.



MATTEL PR

## Mattel Introduces the First Blind Barbie & Other Inclusive Dolls

Mattel announced the addition of a blind Barbie doll and a Black Barbie doll with Down syndrome to their collection. The toymaker stated that these dolls were created to allow even more children to find a doll that represents them and to encourage play and imagination. Barbie partnered with the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) to ensure that the details of the blind Barbie doll, including face sculpting, fashion, accessories, packaging experience and e-commerce communication, accurately depict individuals with blindness or low vision. Mattel collaborated with the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) and Black individuals with Down syndrome to create the Black Barbie with Down syndrome. Both dolls are available for purchase at major retailers.



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### Who we are

The National Employment Team (NET) is a group of designated business consultants from each of the 78 public vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies that collaborate across the country to work with company partners. The NET has consultants in all 50 states, the territories and D.C. that provide no-cost business services, technical assistance, and consultation. The team has direct access to a national talent pool of qualified candidates with disabilities, including Veterans.

The NET works with business customers to build a strategy and provide support services across the footprint of a business which includes private, public, Federal, and non-profit organizations. The team can deliver business services and candidates across a national and/or multi-state market as well as the local level. The NET collaborated with disABLEDpersons to build the Talent Acquisition Portal or TAP to provide easy access to a talent pool of candidates with disabilities across the country.

### What we do

TAP is a fully accessible talent platform that enables business to easily connect to talent and qualified candidates with disabilities have access to employment opportunities with businesses across the country.

TAP enables business to connect to candidates directly and is also able to host virtual hiring events. Businesses who are federal contractors can also use TAP to gather and track compliance data. The NET and TAP work collaboratively to support business customers across the country....connect with us!



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# The Newest Accessibility Tech: Breaking Barriers and Empowering Diverse Communities

Many products are created each year to make the world more accessible for people with disabilities, but we don't always hear about them. Here's a look at some of the tech products that have been developed to create a more accessible world:



ONECOM

## FINTIN V1: Breaks Barriers in the Tech Space

Created by ONECOM, an innovator in mobile text technologies, the FINTIN V1 is a handheld device that makes the QWERTY keyboard accessible for people who are blind. Utilizing just six keys, the device uses vibrations and tactile sensations to process up to 36 keyboard inputs, allowing those with visual impairments to use the most common communication method across technologies. The device opens opportunities for those with visual impairments to more readily utilize desktop keyboards in the workplace and creates a pathway to accessible gaming, mobile devices and computers.



PRNEWSFOTO/STIMVIA

## URIS Device: Treatment for Parkinson's Patients

With Stimvia's newest product, the URIS device, those diagnosed with Parkinson's disease may soon have access to another form of treatment. In a 12-week study by Stimvia, patients underwent daily treatment sessions with a URIS device, producing electrical transcutaneous nerve modulation. After hitting the study's halfway mark, patients stopped utilizing the device and reported improved symptoms and a reduction in tremoring after six additional weeks. While the URIS still needs to undergo more rigorous forms of evaluation, its initial results and immediate plans for investments are hopeful as an added form of treatment for those with Parkinson's disease.

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## TRIPLE FLEXION



## PROTEOR: A Different Kind of Prosthetic

Seeing success in the European markets, a new kind of prosthetic is finally coming to the United States. Designed by PROTEOR, the PDAC-verified SYNSYS microprocessor leg system, is an advanced prosthetic that gives a more unrestricted range of motion, stability and a natural look to those wanting to utilize prosthetic limbs. Using hydraulic kinetic coupling, the prosthetic provides its users the capability to walk in a flatter-footed manner, allowing for activities like walking down stairs, squatting and bending down to be done with ease. The device is also scientifically designed to have better stability through its larger toe clearance, minimizing the risk of trips and falls. Users have praised the prosthetics' variety of shoe options, stumble recovery technology, portability and battery life.



## NIIRA Smart Glasses: Accessible Eyewear

Created by the assistive technology company, Sensotec, and spatial audio solutions pioneer Eyesynth, NIIRA smart glasses are designed to help people who are blind or have visual impairments to explore the world more accessibly. These lightweight glasses utilize AI to convert visual information into auditory cues that help them read the shapes, spaces and depth perception information around them. Any potential hazards are notified via audio cue to the wearer, preventing them from falls or injury. Unlike other glasses of its kind, NIIRA smart glasses are designed with a long-lasting battery and comfortable shape.



## GyroGlove: Wearable Tech of the Future

The winner of numerous innovative technology awards, GyroGear has created what is now the world's most advanced hand tremor stabilizer: the GyroGlove. Utilizing a high-performance mechanical gyroscope, the GyroGlove is a wearable device designed to steady the shaking caused by essential tremors, Parkinson's disease and similar conditions. This allows those who previously couldn't or had trouble using their hands due to trembling to regain their independence and utilize them without interruption to eat, write, perform chores, play an instrument, garden and much more. The device has won numerous innovation awards with CES 2024—a top technology convention—and has been used to help people of all ages and abilities improve their mobility.

## Disability:IN North Carolina Fall Conference Oct 2, 2024

Join us for the **2024 Disability:IN North Carolina Fall Conference** hosted by **Trane Technologies**, to discover innovative approaches to product development, service delivery, talent acquisition, and technology. Keynote speakers include:

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**Roy A. Dockery, Author of "The Art of Leading, Truth, Love, and Empathy in Action,"** – Roy is a recipient of the 2023 Service Visionaries 100 award. Roy will explore the crucial steps organizations must take to remove barriers for applicants with disabilities. Roy will provide a roadmap for creating a workplace where everyone can thrive.

**Ross Linnett, CEO & Founder, Recite Me:** As a sprinter with dreams of Olympic glory and learning to live with dyslexia, Ross noticed a widening disadvantage online, with few resources to overcome his exclusion. Fast forward to 2024 and Ross continues to drive innovation having deployed the Recite Me tools to over 5000 websites worldwide. Other sessions include:

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- Financial INnovations: Planning for the Unexpected with a Focus on Caregiving.
- Innovative, Inclusive Internships and Apprenticeships
- Collaborative Innovation: Building Stronger Supplier Partnerships
- Disability-Focused ERG/BRG Leadership: Promoting INnovation & Business Growth
- Enjoy the debut of the Summer 2024 PhotoVoice Project, led by DI-NC in partnership with UNC Charlotte that uses the power of photography to focus on the identity of people with disabilities.
- Attend the **CommunAbility:DI-NC Mixer** to grow your network, discover new talent and learn more about NC businesses ranked among the best places to work for disability inclusion.

**Where:** Trane Technologies | 800 Beaty Street | Davidson, NC

**When:** October 2, 2024, from 9:00am to 4:30pm

**Register at:** [Events and Conferences – Disability:IN North Carolina \(di-nc.org\)](https://www.di-nc.org/events-and-conferences)

**Individual** = \$140 | **Table Sponsor (6)** = \$700.00

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# How to Land a Government Job: The Federal Hiring Process

Looking for a government job? Federal work is an excellent choice to ensure career sustainability, great benefits and a profitable paycheck, but the hiring process may be a little different than what you're used to. Here's what you need to know:

## How to Find Job Listings

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) maintains a central database, called USAJOBS, which lists nearly every federal job opening. Available job opportunity announcements (JOAs) provide applicants with information about job qualifications, duties, salary, duty location, benefits and security requirements. JOAs can help you determine if your interests, education and professional background make you a good candidate for the available job opening.

## Common Terms

Many of these job postings use common terminology and acronyms to describe the kind of work they're offering. Some of the most frequently used terms include:

- "All U.S. citizens:" Open to everyone in the public who is a U.S. citizen and wishes to apply.
- "Competitive service:" One of the two classes of non-executive positions in the federal government. Competitive service positions are subject to the civil service laws passed by Congress.
- "Excepted service:" The other of the two classes of non-executive positions in the federal government. Excepted service positions are not subject to the same appointment procedures as competitive service.
- "Knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs):" Characteristics that you need to have to successfully perform a job.

- "Selective placement factor:" There are some positions where specific qualifications are absolutely required because a person cannot perform successfully in the position without such qualifications. These may include specific KSAs, or federal or state licenses and/or certifications.
- "Veterans' preference:" Gives eligible veterans preference in appointment over many other applicants.

## Completing Your Application or Resume

Employee applications should accurately represent your skills and competencies applicable to the position. For each past job, give the standard information found in most resumes. Begin with your current position and list all other positions held in chronological order. Specifically, state the job title, starting and ending dates (including month and year), your prior employer's name and address (or write "self-employed" if that applies) and major duties and accomplishments.

Include any positions temporarily held and any relevant volunteer experience. Show the average number of hours worked per week, or simply state full-time or part-time, and whether your most recent supervisor may be contacted. Include the occupational series numbers and the starting and ending grades of any prior government positions held.

Most importantly, describe job duties and accomplishments in a way that demonstrates how you are qualified. Study the JOA and emphasize the parts of your work history that match the qualifications listed there.

Remember, human resources specialists might not be familiar with your career field. To help them understand how your experience matches what is required for the vacant position, make sure that you put it in layman's terms.

## Applying for the Job

Submit your application by the closing date of the JOA. Sometimes, applications only need to be postmarked by the due date. Applications usually must arrive at

their specified destination by either 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time (EST) or by the close of business on that date.

Submit any additional documentation outlined in the JOA that verifies all qualifications, such as transcripts, SF-50 Notification of Personnel Action (as proof of eligibility to apply), performance appraisals and/or Veterans' Form DD-214. If you fail to submit a required document, you may be found ineligible for consideration.

## The Interview Process

The names of the best qualified candidates will be forwarded to the supervisor or hiring official. If that is you, the supervisor or hiring official may interview you in person or by telephone to ensure that all applicants receive fair and equal treatment in the hiring process.

Interviews are tests designed to measure a variety of competencies important to performance on the job. Interviews may include scenario-based questions that measure selected competencies, for example, leading others, team building, performance and results management, decision-making and problem-solving, oral communication, interpersonal skills or technical questions.

## What to Expect Next

The application you submit will go through many levels of review. First, human resources specialists will screen it to see if you meet the basic eligibility requirements for the position. They will then rate your application according to the additional qualifications listed on the JOA. If your application rates among the best qualified, it will be forwarded to the hiring manager, who will conduct an interview, and/or possibly a series of panel interviews, making the final selection.

Source: Department of Labor





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# 8 Top Scholarships for the Disability Community

With the rising costs of higher education, it's never too late to look into scholarships. For those living with a disability—visible or not—there are numerous scholarships available to help students of all experiences to obtain their degree. While we cannot list all of the scholarships available to those with disabilities, here are a few of the best we found:

## AG Bell College Scholarship Awards

- Amount: \$5,000
- Deadline: Unannounced, estimated for March 2025
- Application website: [agbell.org/financial-aid](http://agbell.org/financial-aid)

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing offers multiple scholarships for full-time students wanting to pursue a two- or four-year degree at an accredited college or university. To be considered, the applicant must be deaf or hard of hearing and use either spoken language or sign language to communicate. Those that are chosen must already be accepted into their higher education program and may reapply every year they're in college for additional funds.

## American Council of the Blind Scholarship Program

- Amount: \$2,000-\$7,500
- Deadline: Feb. 14, 2025



Application website: [acb.org/scholarships](http://acb.org/scholarships)  
Co-created by the American Council of the Blind and the American Foundation for the Blind, these scholarships are designed to help those with visual impairments attend technical school. This scholarship is eligible to incoming freshman, undergraduate students and graduate students, and can be used to cover anything from tuition to adaptive technology costs. Applicants must provide proof of legal blindness, maintain a 3.0 GPA and be involved in their community to be considered.

## Anne Ford Scholarship

- Amount: \$10,000
- Deadline: Unannounced, estimated for April 2025
- Application website: [nclد.org/scholarships-awards/anne-ford-scholarship](http://nclد.org/scholarships-awards/anne-ford-scholarship)

The Anne Ford Scholarship is a \$10,000 scholarship awarded over the course of four years by the National Center for Learning Disabilities. The funds are allocated to one graduating high school senior who has a documented learning disability and either is or will be enrolled in a bachelor's degree program. Applicants must submit proper documentation of their learning dis-

ability diagnoses to be considered. Students with ADHD and a learning disability are especially encouraged to apply.

## Beth Carew Memorial Scholarship

- Amount: \$6,000
- Deadline: Unannounced, estimated for March 2025
- Application website: [colkeen.org/beth-carew-new](http://colkeen.org/beth-carew-new)

The Beth Carew Memorial Scholarship is a competitive education scholarship sponsored by the Colburn-Keenan Foundation and created in honor of Beth Carew—one of the few women to be diagnosed with hemophilia A. This scholarship awards \$6,000 to an undergraduate student diagnosed with an inherited bleeding disorder, such as hemophilia and Von Willebrand disease. Interested applicants must also be involved in their community and entering into an accredited undergraduate program for a two- or four-year program.

## Google Lime Scholarship

- Amount: \$10,000
- Deadline: Unannounced, estimated for April 2025
- Application website: [buildyour-](http://buildyour-)

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future.withgoogle.com/scholarships/google-lime-scholarship  
 The Google Lime Scholarship, created in partnership between Google and the nonprofit Lime Connect, is an annual scholarship for individuals with disabilities pursuing a computer science or computer engineering degree. To be eligible, the applicant must be enrolled full-time in a bachelor's program, demonstrate past academic excellence and have a passion for computer science and technology to be considered. Canadian students who meet the qualifications may also apply, with their reward amounting to 5,000 CAD.

**Millie Brothers CODA International Scholarship**

- Amount: Varies

- Deadline: Feb. 28, 2025
- Application website: [coda-international.org/scholarships](http://coda-international.org/scholarships)  
 Awarded by the Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) International, the Millie Brothers Scholarship is dedicated to helping children of deaf parents pursue a higher education. This scholarship is available to undergraduate students of any accredited institution of higher learning (including community colleges and trade schools) and may be awarded to several recipients. Applicants must submit an application and an essay retelling their experience as a CODA to be considered.

**Schwallie Family Scholarship**

- Amount: \$3,000
- Deadline: Unannounced, estimated for April 2025

- Application website: [researchautism.smapply.io/prog/schwallie\\_family\\_scholarship](http://researchautism.smapply.io/prog/schwallie_family_scholarship)  
 Created by the Organization for Autism Research, the Schwallie Family Scholarship is for autistic students pursuing an undergraduate degree. There is no minimum GPA required to apply for the funds, however, applicants do need to provide proof of college enrollment and an essay response (written, audio or slideshow) to be considered. Proof of diagnoses is not needed to submit an application, but must be provided by those chosen as finalists for the award.

**UCB Family Epilepsy Scholarship Program**

- Amount: \$5,000-\$10,000
- Deadline: Unannounced, registration opens in January 2025

- Application website: [ucbepilepsyscholarship.com](http://ucbepilepsyscholarship.com)  
 The UCB Family Epilepsy Scholarship, founded in honor of Sandra Helmers and John M. Pellock, awards up to \$10,000 to students diagnosed with epilepsy or who have a family member living with the condition. An award of \$5,000 will be given to at least 30 of the applicants, with three additional applicants receiving a \$10,000 prize. Students must demonstrate academic and personal excellence to be considered and use the funds in pursuit of an associate's, undergraduate, graduate or trade school education.

Enrich minds  
 and shape futures.  
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# Rowing, Wheeling & More: The Best Ways to Stay Active with a Disability

A 2021 Lancet study found that people living with a disability are 16% to 62% less likely to meet the needed physical activity threshold recommended by medical professionals.

While this is mostly due to the disability itself, many have a difficult time being active as they aren't aware of or don't have access to resources that could help them get moving.

Regardless of your circumstances, here is what you can do to lead a more active lifestyle safely:

## Talk to Your Doctor

Everyone has a different threshold of what they can do physically, but this can be especially true for people with certain disabilities. Adults with disabilities should talk to their doctor about the amounts and types of physical activity that are appropriate for them. Let them know about your specific barriers and discuss what would be the best methods of activity for you. This may include implementing the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)-recommended 150 minutes of physical activity a week, or it could just be methods to avoid inactivity in small ways. Everyone will have different standards and start in different places according to their circumstances. Your doctor may also be able to suggest specific activities you could engage in and the best places for you to access them.

## Know Your Resources

What many people don't know is that there are tons of programs and spaces that can be utilized for physical activity, especially for those with disabilities. For example, the CDC hosts 10 state disability and health programs designed to provide an accessible, safe place for people with mobility limitations, as well as intellectual and developmental disabilities, to meet their health goals.

If you're not in an area that has



one of these facilities, consider looking into the resources your city does have and what you can utilize. It's more than likely that your area has public parks and pools, walking trails, a community or a recreation center that can be utilized for exercise.

Other resources you should consider include:

- **Your support system:** people that can exercise with you or help you access the spaces and resources you need.
- **Your college campus:** for students, many colleges offer spaces for physical activity and exercise classes at little to no cost.
- **Coaches and fitness professionals:** people who can help you find the best resources and plans for your health.

## Recommended Activities

As mentioned before, every person's activity threshold will look different, but some general tips to get started include:

- Finding opportunities in your day-to-day life to increase regular physical activity, such as going on walks or moving around the house.
- Starting slowly based on your abilities and fitness level. You may start off with a couple minutes of activity before slowly increasing frequency.
- Engaging in aerobic activities or anything that makes your heart beat faster. These exercises decrease the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke and certain cancers—all diseases that people with disabilities are more prone to getting.

It's also important to remember that physical activity is not just limited to walking or running and should be something that you enjoy doing. Activities that people living with disabilities often partake in include:

- Dancing
- Downhill skiing
- Hand-crank bicycling
- Horseback riding
- Rowing
- Seated volleyball
- Swimming
- Water aerobics
- Wheelchair sports

Remember, everyone's needs and solutions are going to look different. What's most important is that you are staying active in a way that's safe, accessible and fun for you.

# A First-of-its-Kind Children’s Show is Bringing Autistic Voices to Screens Across the Country

For children and adults alike, being able to see yourself represented on your favorite television shows, movies and other forms of media can be life-changing. These representations not only make the person feel seen, but can also create a sense of normalcy and understanding for the individual being represented and the communities in which they exist.

This fall, one children’s program is coming to PBS KIDS that not only brings marvelous storytelling and vibrant characters, but also autism and neurodivergence awareness to screens across the country.

The 2D animated show, *Carl the Collector*, created for children between the ages of 4-8 and their families, will be the first PBS KIDS show to feature central characters on the autism spectrum. The show will focus on Carl, an autistic raccoon who enjoys collecting things, and the everyday adventures he embarks on with his family and friends.

Many of Carl’s friends are also neurodivergent, including Lotta the fox—who has hypersensitivity to loud sounds and food textures.



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*Carl the Collector* creator Zachariah O'Hora.

The show will strive to normalize different ways of thinking and the experiences of neurodiverse individuals with a team of neurodiverse

writers, production staff, animators and voice talent.

Ahead of the show’s release, *DiversityComm Magazine* had the



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*Carl the Collector* writer Ava X. Rigelhaupt.

honor of interviewing the show’s creator, Zachariah O'Hora, and one of the lead writers, Ava X. Rigelhaupt, on their experience of creating an original show like *Carl the Collector* and why its presence is so important to young audiences.



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A still from episode five of the first season of *Carl the Collector*, including Carl, his parents and his best friend Sheldon the beaver.

**DiversityComm Magazine (DCM):**  
How did the idea of *Carl the Collector* and its characters first come about?

**Zachariah O'Hora (ZO):** I had become obsessed with raccoons in general and wanted to create a raccoon character. Being a collector myself, I thought a raccoon who collected things could be fun. At the same time, my kids were starting school, and we were lucky enough to have them go to a school where kids have equal access in the classroom to learn both academically and socially.

As a picture book author, I was doing a lot of school visits and was impressed by this level of inclusion and how the kids accepted and embraced one another, no matter

their differences. I had a lightbulb moment that the more exposure kids have to each other—in this case in the form of relatable TV characters—the more it would help all kids understand each other’s differences and likeness. One of my personal missions with *Carl the Collector* is the idea that exposure to the entire spectrum of humanity will have a positive effect on society as a whole.

**DCM: What goes into crafting each episode’s theme and storyline?**

**ZO:** A ton of thought and input from our advisors as well as the individual experiences of our neurodiverse writing team. We aim to reflect childhood experiences and feelings in a nuanced, truthful and fun way.

Showing how the world is and exploring our differences is what makes life so interesting. I have a guiding principle of storytelling in that it has to be fun, foremost, a little weird, hopefully, and have a lot of heart.

**Ava X. Rigelhaupt (AR):** A lot of the stories I’ve written thus far stem from my lived experiences as an autistic woman and meshing in friends’ experiences, along with



A still from a recent episode of *Carl the Collector*.

in positive portrayals onscreen. This is also something that is meaningful for families and caregivers. And it’s also vital for neurotypical children to see all kinds of kids, especially as they enter early school age and are forming friendships. Seeing and understanding people who look or act or process things in a unique way is the first step toward growing empathy.

**DCM: Ava, what has your perspective been, as someone who is on the spectrum, writing for autistic children’s characters?**

**AR:** As one of my first big TV writing jobs, writing on a show that features characters with my neurotype is so meaningful and wonderful! This is an extraordinary neurodiverse team. I always feel that my lived experience as an autistic

**AR:** So many things! But I think one of the first things is getting more people in positions of power (i.e., executives who greenlight shows) understanding that there’s an audience for this important programming. And when it’s greenlit, hire and cast authentically!

- Some persuasive statistics:
- 1 in 4 people in the U.S. have a disability.
  - 7.3 million disabled students in the U.S. made up 15% of national public school enrollment during the 2021-22 school year.
  - Students with autism made up 12% of the nation’s school-children with disabilities in 2021-22, compared with 1.5% in 2000-01.

**DCM: Anything else you would like to add or feel is important for us to know?**

**AR:** I think the intention behind each episode to make the characters authentic and relatable to a wide audience will really shine through in each episode!

*Carl the Collector* will premiere on Nov. 14, 2024 on PBS KIDS in both English and Spanish.

“Through *Carl the Collector*, autistic children will see Carl and Lotta, both autistic, being fully embraced by their friends—a seemingly small but impactful detail that will hopefully lead to more autistic kids being accepted.”

- *Carl the Collector* writer Ava X. Rigelhaupt

simply adding fun, real-life scenarios for young audiences! I work with head writer, Adam Rudman, on premises/ideas for Carl and his friends, matching those ideas with our advisors’ overall concepts for the series. Sometimes a concept influences me, and I write to that curriculum, and sometimes the advisors match my idea to a concept or create a new one just for that story.

**DCM: How important is a show like *Carl the Collector* for neurodiverse children and their families?**

**ZO:** It’s incredibly important for children to see themselves reflected

**AR:** Our communities are hungry for authentic shows like this. While representation of the autistic community in TV series and films is slowly trickling in, it’s still very sparse. Through *Carl the Collector*, autistic children will see Carl and Lotta, both autistic, being fully embraced by their friends—a seemingly small but impactful detail that will hopefully lead to more autistic kids being accepted. FUZZYTOWN is a world where children are encouraged to be who they are, learn and make mistakes, while always feeling supported.

woman is valued and often asked for when creating new stories for Carl and his friends.

**DCM: In both your opinions, what needs to be done to create more diverse and inclusive programming like this for children?**

**ZO:** I think the best thing to do is have truthful portrayals of all kinds of people and circumstances. Being human means so many different things and we are all trying to figure out what that means, kids and adults, neurotypical and neurodivergent.

# NMSDC's Business Diversity Leadership Summit Provides Valuable Training for Supplier & Business Professionals

Over 300 corporate supplier diversity professionals came together recently at the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) Business Diversity Leadership Summit (BDLS) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This membership benefit for NMSDC corporate members reflects NMSDC's shift in focus from supplier diversity to business diversity. The 2024 BDLS programming was designed by a committee of NMSDC's top corporate leaders and focused on the following topics:

- Best practices in supplier diversity and how to shift to a business diversity strategy.
- Content focus on innovation, career development and learning solutions to meet supplier/business diversity professionals where they are.
- Soft skill development in executive presence, board development, career acceleration, technical skills, business case creation, supply chain management and available certifications that help support career goals.

BDLS kicked off with an in-depth technical workshop hosted by Dupont's Luis Concepcion and ISM's Jim Fleming covering the topics of strategic sourcing, negotiation, legal and contractual management, supplier relationship management and supplier diversity.

Following a brief break for lunch, NMSDC hosted an opening plenary featuring a robust discussion of AI's implications for businesses, the current state of DEI in America and a sneak preview of the documentary, *51%: The*



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## *Certification of Our Blackness, A Supplier Diversity Documentary.*

On day two of the summit, attendees were able to choose from two different training tracks: one for those just getting started in supplier diversity, and another for those looking for more advanced training. The former included sessions with insights from companies like Toyota, Right Sourcing by Magnit, Fortive, Volvo Group NA, Bristol Myers Squibb and American Water. Meanwhile, the advanced track included in-depth learning opportunities from companies like VistraCorp, Atrium Health, Ford Motor Company,

ExxonMobil, UPMC and Skanska.

On the final day of BDLS, attendees came back together for a closing plenary that featured a fireside chat with Bristol Myers Squibb's Tarrance Frierson, Yasmin Davidds of the Dr. Yasmin Davidds Leadership Institute and Global LeaderSHYFT's Steven Jones. Before leaving, attendees were treated to a demo of NMSDC's new MBE search experience—a key feature of NMSDC's efforts to provide a more modernized and streamlined experience for its corporate members.

This year's Business Diversity Leadership Summit provided

corporate members the essential training they need to help NMSDC reach its shared goal of \$1 trillion in NMSDC-certified MBE revenue. We look forward to continuing the conversation and discussing how corporate America can assist in defining new norms at the 2024 NMSDC Annual Conference & Exchange, taking place Oct. 20-23 in Atlanta, Georgia. Learn how you can join at [nmsdcconference.org/2024](https://nmsdcconference.org/2024).

Interested in becoming an NMSDC corporate member? Learn more at [nmsdc.org/join/become-a-corporate-member](https://nmsdc.org/join/become-a-corporate-member).





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# NMSDC On Track to Complete March to \$1 Trillion in MBE Revenue by End of 2030

When NMSDC CEO and President Ying McGuire joined the organization in late 2021, the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) aligned on a crucial mission: to accelerate the growth of NMSDC-certified minority business enterprises (MBEs) for generational wealth building and economic equity. As part of that effort, it unveiled its 2021 Economic Impact Study that showed certified MBEs generating \$261 billion in revenue and sustaining 1.7 million jobs. While those numbers sounded impressive, they represent just over 1% of GDP, despite minorities making up 40% of the U.S. population. Considering that gap, and to rally its stakeholders around a visionary goal, NMSDC launched a bold initiative at the inaugural 2022 Minority Business Economic Forum: achieving \$1 trillion in annual revenue for certified MBEs.

## 2023 Economic Impact Report Shows Continued Progress

That ambitious vision has sparked three consecutive years of double-digit revenue growth for certified MBEs, including a 15% increase in 2023 in its most recent NMSDC Economic Impact Report. According to that report, MBE revenue is now \$363.2 billion and generates \$548.2 billion in total U.S. economic output,



creating two million jobs and generating \$149.6 billion in wages. As a result of this continued, double-digit growth, NMSDC now believes it can achieve its March to \$1 Trillion by the end of 2030—a mere five years away.

## Black & Hispanic Businesses Lead the Way

The most recent economic impact report showed particular progress for Hispanic and Black MBEs. On the back of a strong showing in the construction

industry thanks in part to historic federal investments made possible by recent legislation like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Hispanic businesses increased their revenue by 50% to a staggering \$114.2 billion.

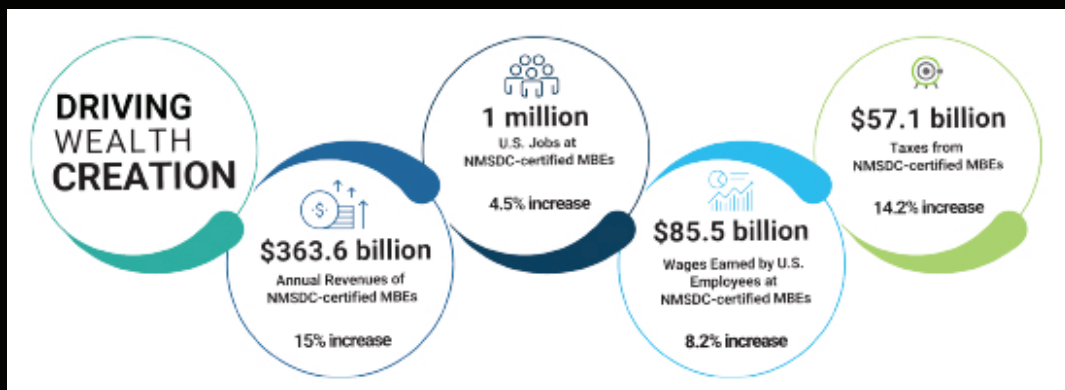
Meanwhile, after slow growth in 2022, NMSDC-certified Black businesses rebounded in 2023, with a 12% increase in annual revenue that brought their total amount to \$66.5 billion. This was thanks in part to a concentrated effort by NMSDC and its partners to better engage Black MBEs

through innovative programming like the BeyGOOD Foundation's Black Parade Route and NMSDC's Acres: Cultivating Equity in Black Agriculture.

## Reaching \$1 Trillion & Beyond

While trends are pointing in the right direction, NMSDC knows that nothing is certain. In fact, after leading the way in MBE revenue in 2021 and 2022, AAPI businesses saw one of the lowest percentage increases of all the communities it serves in 2023. It is why the organization continues to look forward as it develops a network-wide strategy for building on this momentum that includes several initiatives:

- A modern and centralized certification system that will make it easier for MBEs to become and remain certified. NMSDC is currently in the initial stages of rolling out this new certification process with full implementation planned for completion sometime in 2025.
- The 2024 Annual Conference





COURTESY OF NMSDC

& Exchange is taking place in Atlanta from Oct. 20-23, with a goal of bringing together over 6,000 MBEs, corporate members, policymakers and thought leaders to begin defining the new norms needed to spark the next wave of MBE development and entrepreneurship.

- The MBE Center for Accelerated Growth, Innovation, and Resiliency is a new transformation center focused on delivering comprehensive contract and capital readiness programming nationally throughout the NMSDC network. The program brings together network members as well as leading minority business nonprofits and government agencies committed to scaling MBEs.
- The continued expansion and development of existing efforts like the Centers of Excellence Certification, Emerging Young Entrepreneurs, the Advanced Management Executive programs and others that ensure NMSDC-certified

MBEs have the skills and tools needed to grow their business and remain competitive.

During a recent webinar highlighting the key takeaways from NMSDC's 2023 Minority Businesses Economic Impact Report, McGuire shared the organization's commitment to creating an environment for MBE success:

"As we navigate the unprecedented challenges posed by shifting economic and political landscapes, this year brings not only validation but also hope. It proves that our efforts to drive MBE growth and economic parity are effective and inspires us to persist in our mission. The NMSDC network and this transformative path we're on is crucial for creating sustainable, generational wealth in the communities we serve and advancing towards true economic equity."

Learn more about NMSDC's March to \$1 Trillion at [nmsdc.org/about/the-march-to-1-trillion](https://nmsdc.org/about/the-march-to-1-trillion).

## The Results Are In: NMSDC Releases the 2023 Minority Business Economic Impact Report

The National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) has released its 2023 Minority Businesses Economic Impact Report. This year's report showed impressive growth by NMSDC-certified minority business enterprises (MBEs) from 2022 to 2023, including:

- \$363.6 billion in annual revenue (15% increase)
- 1 million U.S. jobs created (4.5% increase)
- \$81.5 billion in wages earned by MBE employees (8.2% increase)
- \$57.1 billion in taxes generated (14.2% increase)

It not only provides strong overall data on the state of NMSDC-certified MBEs and an important update on NMSDC's progress on its March to \$1 Trillion in MBE annual revenue, but also insight into critical trends across the network, including:

- Black businesses began to overcome historic disparities, achieving double-digit revenue increases—up 12% to \$66.5 billion.
- Hispanic businesses saw huge gains, including a 50% increase in revenue—up to \$114.2 billion.
- AAPI business growth slows down (though still shows strong performance)—up 4% for Asian Pacific businesses (to \$97.8 billion in annual revenue) and down 1% (to \$70.2 billion) for Asian Indian businesses.
- Improved parity among all the MBEs NMSDC serves.

"The Minority Businesses Economic Impact Report is a crucial evaluation of how certified MBEs have performed over the past year and identifies further opportunities for NMSDC and its corporate members to act as powerful catalysts for minority business growth," said NMSDC CEO and President Ying McGuire. "If the trends in this year's data continue, we are confident we can reach our goal of \$1 trillion by the end of 2030," she added.

The report also includes important state, regional and industry data that NMSDC hopes will help identify further opportunities for NMSDC regional affiliates as well as local and state governments to spur MBE growth and development in their individual communities.

The full report can be found at [nmsdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2023-Minority-Businesses-Economic-Impact-Report-FINAL.pdf](https://nmsdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2023-Minority-Businesses-Economic-Impact-Report-FINAL.pdf).

# Inspiration Abounds at NABA Inc.'s 54th Annual Convention, Insight 2024: FLOW

NABA Inc. recently held its 54th annual convention with over 3,700 attendees in Las Vegas, Nevada. The theme for this year's gathering, FLOW, was one that provided an immersive and engaging experience for Black professionals in the accounting, business, finance and entrepreneurship fields.

The convention offered a variety of enriching sessions and an incredible line up of speakers who took to the stage to inspire, educate and elevate attendees.

"FLOW is about embracing our source, and our source is power," said Guylaine Saint Juste, NABA president and CEO. "It is about owning our story and manifesting our significance. It is upon us to choose to take what we learn and do better."

Award-winning actress Viola Davis was this year's keynote speaker for the opening plenary sponsored by Deloitte. She shared her experiences navigating Hollywood as a Black actress, and those stories revealed lessons of resilience, determination and grit.

An unforgettable highlight of the

convention was NABA's Juneteenth celebration. Inigorating performances by Mike Ellison and Bebe

Winans left attendees feeling empowered, and the evening reception was an experience that embodied

the essence of Black culture.

NABA's lead sponsor for the convention, Deloitte, hosted their



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Panelists gather after an inspiring 'Women of NABA' fireside chat on their journeys to the C-suite at leading companies, including PwC, Microsoft, Boeing, Wing and Fidelity.



The Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada set the stage for NABA Inc.'s 54th annual national convention and expo.



COURTESY OF NABA

Members of the NABA board of directors open the expo hall to attendees with a ceremonial ribbon cutting.



A captivated crowd watches the engaging presentations at the NABA national convention & expo.

MADE for You event that featured a fireside chat, an insightful panel discussion on life at Deloitte and an interactive breakout activity. KPMG sponsored their Emerging Leaders Institute, where students explored

their value systems, pondered key life questions and engaged in a dynamic SMART goals workshop.

Attendees were able to participate in on-site interviews with corporations and were connected with top



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A candidate engages with one of the 100+ exhibitors who participated in the NABA expo hall at Insight 2024: FLOW.

employers who provided insightful workshops and offered guidance at the career expo.

This annual gathering amplifies industry insights, fuels career growth and cultivates a vibrant

community of quality talent. See more highlights from this year's convention on NABA's website at [nabainc.org/2024-convention-expo](http://nabainc.org/2024-convention-expo).

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# Disability:IN's 2024 Global Conference Celebrates Largest Yet with 5,000+ Attendees



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Disability:IN's 2024 Global Conference has come to an end with another year of resourceful conversations, impactful testimonies and long-lasting connections. This year's conference was one of the largest yet, with 5,000 attendees joining in on the conversation both virtually and in-person in Las Vegas, Nevada. Attendees came from 37 different countries and included:

- 170 certified Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBEs)
- 760 DOBE matchmaking meetings
- 66 NextGen Leaders
- 874 interviews and matchmaking opportunities
- Over 16 job and internship offers
- 120 exhibitors
- Over 235 speakers

Along with the many workshops, panels and conversations held at the four-day event, one of the most anticipated events was the 2024 Inclusion Awards—an annual

ceremony recognizing companies fostering disability inclusion and equality in business.

Disability:IN named Wells Fargo the winner of its Inclusive Business of the Year award, which recognizes a company for exemplary implementation of policies, strategies and initiatives that result in measurable impact in the area of disability inclusiveness in the workplace, marketplace, accessibility and supply chain both inside the U.S. and internationally. The company displays a commitment to the comprehensive inclusion of people with disabilities both internally and externally, recognizing the value of employees and customers with disabilities in developing a more inclusive workplace and business.

The additional 2024 Inclusion Awards winners are:

- **Autism Inclusion Company of the Year:** DXC Technology
- **Accessibility Impact Award:** Procter & Gamble
- **Global ERG Impact Award:**

BNY

- **Inclusive Marketing Campaign of the Year:** Amazon Devices and Services
- **Top Corporation for Inclusive Procurement:** Google

The awards also recognized the following individuals for their direct impact:

- **ERG/BRG Executive Sponsor of the Year:** Elizabeth Joyce of State Street, chosen for her longstanding commitment to furthering disability inclusion. Notably, she recently commissioned a new program at State Street to establish a dedicated talent pipeline targeting individuals within the neurodiverse community.
- **Mary Brougner Supplier Diversity Advocate of the Year Award:** Nedra Dickson of Accenture, who has worked tirelessly as the leader for Accenture's well-established efforts to diversify the company's

suppliers and subcontractors across 16 countries, growing the firm's supplier diversity spend to over 30% in the U.S. and opening so many doors for Disability:IN-certified DOBEs to contract with Accenture and more.

- **NextGen Alumni Achievement Award:** Sena Pottackal of Current Global for her contributions to her workplace and community, as well as her ongoing support of students and recent graduates with disabilities.
- **John D. Kemp CEO Award:** Michael Wirth of Chevron, whose leadership with the company has achieved so much for the disability community.

The DOBE of the Year was awarded to Synterex, Inc., a woman-owned, disability-owned clinical and regulatory consulting firm specializing in agile methodology, automation and artificial intelligence-driven technologies

that help deliver important new therapies to patients in an expedient manner. Synterex is recognized with this award for its exceptional contributions to the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries while remaining firmly dedicated to sustainability and disability inclusion.

Along with the Inclusion winners, the Disability:IN conference recognized 360 Direct Video as this year's Pitch Perfect Challenge winner and also awarded nine college students with a spot on the NextGen Leaders iLab Pitch competition. These individuals are: Andy Zhou, Christopher Engelbart, Ian Pearce, Jennifer B, Jessica Dagit, Justin McCarthy, Monica Murray, Raymond (Trey) Buzzard III and Vraj Patel.

The 2025 Disability:IN Global Conference is hopeful for even more attendees, discussions and impactful moments when it returns to Orlando, Florida, July 14-17, 2025. For more information, visit [disabilityin.org](http://disabilityin.org).

Source: Disability:IN



The 2024 Disability:IN Inclusion Award winners.



Andrew Holbrook, senior vice president of Wells Fargo, accepts the Inclusive Business of the Year award.



Synterex, Inc. receives the DOBE of the Year award.

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## DISABILITY EQUALITY INDEX



# Comprehensive benchmarking for disability inclusion

## Celebrating 10 years of the Disability Equality Index®

The Disability Equality Index is the most comprehensive benchmarking tool helping companies build a roadmap of measurable, tangible actions towards disability inclusion and equality.

### Understanding the Disability Equality Index

**Minimum # of employees:** 500

**Scores:** 1-100 based on weighted questions, scores of 80, 90 and 100 are featured in the annual Disability Equality Index Report

**Breadth:** Measures across 6 categories and takes approximately 40+ hours to complete

**Company Reach:** United States, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Japan, Philippines, United Kingdom

**Cost:** No cost for Disability:IN Corporate Partners; \$600 administrative fee for non-partners

Email us at [DisabilityEqualityIndex@DisabilityIN.org](mailto:DisabilityEqualityIndex@DisabilityIN.org) to learn more.





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**Registration Opens Fall 2024**

Learn more at [DisabilityIN.Org](https://DisabilityIN.Org)

## **Take Action to Accelerate Disability Inclusion**

The 2025 Disability Equality Index builds upon 10 years of data and insight into corporate inclusion trends. Since its inception in 2015, participation in the benchmark has grown exponentially – from 80 companies in its inaugural year to 542 in 2024. The Disability Equality Index has become the leading independent, third-party resource for benchmarking disability inclusion policies and programs in business, and is now trusted by more than 70% of the Fortune 100 and over half of the Fortune 500.

Your company will receive individualized feedback with a scorecard that outlines areas for improvement and advancement year over year. This gives you the ability to measure your company's efforts against those of your peers. So...Are You IN?



# Embracing Excellence at the 2024 NGLCC International Business & Leadership Conference

The National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) once again brought together a global network of leaders, entrepreneurs and advocates at the 2024 NGLCC International Business & Leadership Conference, held from July 30 to August 2, in the vibrant city of Palm Springs, California. Themed “BE EXCEPTIONAL,” this year’s conference lived up to its promise, offering an unparalleled platform for innovation, inclusivity and empowerment within the LGBTQ+ business community.

## Key Sessions & Highlights

### Opening Reception | Presented by Molson Coors

The conference kicked off with a dynamic opening reception sponsored by Molson Coors in partnership with WBENC. Set against the backdrop of Palm Springs’ iconic charm, attendees were welcomed with lively activations, including putt-putt presented by Capital One. This event set the tone for the conference, fostering an atmosphere of



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sales to breaking free from imposter syndrome, these sessions equipped participants with the tools and confidence to excel in their business ventures.

One standout session, “Never Ask for the Sale: Unleash the Power of Persuasion,” led by Allison Kube of Capital One and Chala Din-

business connections and engage with industry leaders.

### Improving Business Performance Through Inclusion Efforts

A pivotal session on diversity and inclusion delved into the strategies for achieving C-suite buy-in for DEI initiatives. Expert panelists, including Diego Lazaro and Jim Flynn of JPMorgan Chase, emphasized the importance of KPIs in tracking DEI progress and offered actionable insights into enhancing workplace inclusion and supplier diversity.

### Annual NGLCC & EY BRG Challenge

The conference also featured the 7th Annual NGLCC & EY LGBTQ+ BRG Challenge, a pitch competition that highlighted the innovative efforts of LGBTQ+ Business Resource Groups (BRGs) in advancing supplier diversity. The finalists presented their impactful initiatives, demonstrating how BRGs can drive change within their organizations and the broader marketplace.

### Interviews with Key Stakeholders & Participants

Throughout the conference,

interviews with key stakeholders provided deeper insights into the significance of the event. Participants, including corporate leaders and LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, shared their experiences and perspectives on the evolving landscape of LGBTQ+ business opportunities.

One notable interview was with Jenn Lederer, a comedian and storytelling consultant who led the session “The Perfect Pitch: Say Less, Do More Using A Tight 5 Formula.” Lederer emphasized the importance of authentic storytelling in business and how humor can be a powerful tool for connecting with audiences.

### Impact & Outcomes

The 2024 NGLCC International Business & Leadership Conference was more than just a networking event; it was a catalyst for change. The sessions and discussions underscored the growing importance of supplier diversity, the need for inclusive business practices and the role of LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs in driving economic growth.

The conference also served as a launchpad for new initiatives and collaborations. The “Supplier Diversity and NGLCC: Empowering LGBTQI+ Suppliers in the U.S. and

“The energy and inspiration at the 2024 NGLCC Conference were truly remarkable. It was a powerful reminder of how far the LGBTQ+ business community has come and how much more we can achieve together.”

collaboration and connection among businesses, corporate partners and LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs.

### Corporate Development & Engagement

A major focus of the conference was on capacity building and empowerment for LGBTQ Business Enterprises (LGBTBEs). The NGLCC & Wells Fargo XLR8 Certified LGBTBE Capacity Development Program offered a series of transformative bootcamp sessions. From mastering the art of persuasion in

coy of The Repositioning Expert, challenged attendees to rethink their sales strategies and harness the power of subtle influence.

### NGLCC Marketplace Expo | Presented by Toyota

The Marketplace Expo, a cornerstone of the conference, showcased nearly 200 exhibitors, including corporate partners, certified LGBTBEs and government allies. This sold-out event provided a unique opportunity for attendees to explore innovative products and services, forge new



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Worldwide” panel highlighted the global impact of NGLCC’s efforts, with success stories from U.S. and international suppliers demonstrating the tangible benefits of certification and global networking.

**Promoting Initiatives & Success Stories**

The conference theme, “BE EXCEPTIONAL,” resonated throughout the event, as participants were encouraged to share their success stories and initiatives. From the innovative solutions presented during the BRG Challenge to the inspirational journey of Tay and Val in the “Imposter No More” session, these stories are a testament to the resilience and creativity of the LGBTQ+ business community.

“The energy and inspiration at the 2024 NGLCC Conference were truly remarkable. It was a powerful reminder of how far the LGBTQ+ business community has come and how much more we can achieve together.”

As we reflect on the 2024 NGLCC International Business & Leadership Conference, it’s clear that the event not only celebrated the achievements of LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs but also paved the way for future success. The insights, connections and knowledge gained during these four days in Palm Springs will undoubtedly contribute to a more inclusive and prosperous business landscape for years to come.

Looking ahead, we are excited to announce that the 2025 conference will take place in Las Vegas, Nevada on Aug. 19-22, 2025, where we will continue our mission of empowering LGBTQ+ businesses. The NGLCC continues to take charge of ensuring that these businesses have the resources, support and opportunities needed to thrive. As we anticipate next year’s conference, the message is clear: to “BE EXCEPTIONAL” is not just an aspiration—it’s a commitment to excellence, innovation and inclusivity.



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# Unleashing Potential at the 27th Annual National Sales Network Conference

The 27th Annual National Sales Network (NSN) Conference, held from August 7-9, 2024, at the Hilton Americas in Houston, Texas, was an event to remember. With an impressive 2,800 attendees, 70 partners, over 200 job opportunities and 75 presentations, the conference truly embodied its theme: “The Customer’s Sales Experience.”

For three action-packed days, sales professionals from across the globe gathered to learn, network and grow. The atmosphere was electric, with opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals and gain valuable insights from some of the most influential thought leaders in the industry. The conference offered a wealth of programs and events designed to elevate every attendee’s experience, ensuring there was something valuable for everyone.

Participants had the chance to learn from over 45 expert speakers, including keynotes from Caroline A. Wanga, president & CEO of Essence Ventures; Bozoma Saint John, a trailblazing brand marketing executive; and the dynamic Tabitha Brown, a vegan food influencer and actress. Each keynote speaker brought a unique perspective and inspired the audience with powerful messages. Brown’s session was particularly memorable, as she delivered an inspiring and motivational talk and took the time to engage with attendees through photos and personal interactions.

In addition to the keynote presentations, the conference featured a wide array of workshops and panels designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of attendees. From the “Harvard Strategic Sales Management Certificate” to the “ECD Under 30” sessions, there were tailored learning opportunities for professionals at every stage of their careers. Notable workshops included “Prepare Yourself for a Sales Management Role,” “Closing the Deal: Leveraging a Sales Funnel That Converts” and “Master the Side Hustle: What You NEED to Know.”



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NSN shares that the Conference was, “An electrifying experience, showcasing the incredible potential of sales professionals everywhere. It was a powerful testament to the strength and innovation within our community and a reminder that when we come together, there’s no limit to what we can achieve. If someone is looking for an organization to lead them to success, this is the place to be, and I do not doubt that by 2025, they will have over 3,000 conference attendees.”

Networking was a key highlight of the event, with dedicated sessions like the NSN “Signature Networking Activity” and various corporate hospitality suites providing the perfect environment for attendees to connect with peers and industry leaders. The career fair and interviews offered tangible job opportunities in sales, marketing, HR, finance, IT and business development, making the conference a pivotal moment for many in attendance.

As part of the NSN community, attendees had the privilege of networking with fellow sales profes-



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sionals, including CEOs, VPs, sales managers and other thought leaders from some of the most impactful companies in the world. The conference provided inspiration, education and the tools needed to advance careers and build lasting professional relationships.

The NSN Conference celebrated diversity, innovation and the relentless pursuit of excellence in sales. If you missed this year’s event, be sure to mark your calendar for the next one—it’s an opportunity you won’t want to miss! Registration opens Jan. 1, 2025 at [salesnetwork.org](https://salesnetwork.org).

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# CSAVR: Facing Fears to Become a Proud Business Owner

By the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Phetmany Phommasing arrived in Lynn, Massachusetts when she was just three months old, the daughter of refugees from Laos. Today, with the support of her family, her instructors at the Chelmsford Beauty Academy and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), she's become more than an esthetician; she's also a small business owner.

Phommasing was a stay-at-home mom, caring for her two children, and wanted something more. With the support of her family, she began to investigate what she would need to do to work as an esthetician specializing in lashes.

While attending the Chelmsford Beauty Academy, one of her instructors saw that she was having trouble with some of the work and suggested she reach out to the MRC to see if there was anything the agency could do to help her.

"She described herself as scatterbrained and had faced challenges with anxiety and an inability to focus," said Sam Khoeun, a vocational rehabilitation counselor for MRC's Lowell's office who was assigned to Phommasing's case in 2019. "She was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) in middle school," he shared.

After having Phommasing meet with a doctor to update her diagnosis, Khoeun was able to find resources to help her thrive in her classwork and stay focused while studying for her statewide licensing exam.

However, the pandemic slowed down the process. In March 2020, she was about to begin her coursework when COVID-19 shut everything down. As schools reopened in the fall, Khoeun called Phommasing and asked her when she could start. Her answer? "I can start now."

MRC was able to provide financial aid to help pay for her books and the skills training at Chelmsford Beauty Academy. While there, Khoeun found ways for Phommasing



to maximize all the resources he could provide for her through the MRC, including extra training and one-on-one practice. "Sam pointed me in the [right] direction to get help," she shared.

Along with the aid she received

from her teachers and the MRC, Phommasing is also thankful to her family for encouraging her and being able to provide support. "There's that saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' Well, for me, it took a village to help me achieve my goal," she said.

"I was so scared because I didn't know what I was getting myself into. But I took that leap of faith and

saw what it was all about. And I'm very thankful for it."

Phommasing continued, "When I was introduced to the MRC, I didn't know what it was, but I was going to try it. I was going to go for it. Now, with their help and support, I

give me a little encouragement," she remembers. "It was never, 'I don't want to answer his phone calls.' I looked forward to them because he was a pleasure to talk to and had my best interests in mind. We always communicated well. I'm very thankful for his and the MRC's help to help me achieve my goals."

Now, Phommasing wants to help others who might feel intimidated about asking for help. "I want to help other people out there because I know how hard it can be," she said. "Don't be afraid to take that step of getting help. If there's an opportunity for you to go to school or pursue your dreams, take it.

"I know because I was able to do it, and I'm confident now," she said. "Take baby steps. It's the baby steps that will help you achieve your goals. My baby step was calling Sam."

Source: CSAVR



Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

have confidence in my abilities."

The MRC gave her the opportunity, but she added, "It was up to me to pass the state licensing board. Since then, I've been able to work as a lash artist and even start my own business, Wink Lash Lounge."

For Phommasing, her partnership with the MRC and Khoeun couldn't have been better. "Sam wasn't pressuring, but he was always there to

# October

## Minorities In Banking

October 2-3  
Cleveland, OH  
kansascityfed.org

## AISES National Convention

October 3-5  
San Antonio, TX  
aises.org

## Women of Color STEM Conference

October 3-5  
Detroit, MI  
intouch.ccmag.com

## NSN Student Conference

October 5-7  
Atlanta, GA  
salesnetwork.org

## USHCC National Conference

October 6-8  
Kansas, MO  
ushcc.com

## WIM Summit

October 7-9  
Boston, MA  
womaninmanufacturing.org

## MWC Las Vegas

October 8-10  
Las Vegas, NV  
mwclasvegas.com

## Grace Hopper

October 8-11  
Virtual & Philadelphia, PA  
ghc.anitab.org

## The Business Show 2024

October 9-10  
Los Angeles, CA  
thebusinessshowus.com

## MBA Veterans Career Conference & Expo

October 10-11  
Atlanta, GA  
mbaveterans.com

## CSAVR 2024 Fall Conference

October 12-18  
Seattle, WA  
csavr.org

## HACR Annual Symposium

October 14-16  
New York City, NY  
hacr.org

## AUSA Annual Meeting & Exposition

October 14-16  
Washington, D.C.  
ausa.org

## Newport Beach Film Festival

October 15-17  
Newport Beach, CA  
newportbeachfilmfest.com

## M Enabling Summit

October 15-17  
Washington, D.C.  
m-enabling.com

## Abilities Expo

October 18-20  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
abilities.com

## NMSDC Annual Conference & Exchange/MED Week

October 20-23  
Atlanta, GA  
nmsdc.org

## WITI Technology Summit Virtual Event

October 23-24  
summit.witi.com

## Global ERG Summit

October 23-25  
Charlotte, NC  
globalergsummit.com

## 2024 AFWA-Women Who Count Conference

October 23-26  
Hilton Head Island, SC  
afwa.org

## SWE Conference

October 24-26  
Chicago, IL  
swe.org

## Prospanica Conference

October 29 – November 1  
Orlando, FL  
prospanicaconference.org

## The ARC Summer Leadership Institute

October 30-31  
Columbus, OH  
thearc.org

## SHPE Conference

October 30 – November 3  
Anaheim, CA  
shpe.org

## SACNAS Conference

October 31 – November 2  
Phoenix, AZ  
sacnas.org

## BBBC Conference

October 31 – November 2  
Arlington, VA  
bbbc.uta.edu

## City Career Fair Diversity Employment Day

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
citycareerfair.com

## Small Business Expo

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

## From Day One Forum

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
fromdayone.co

## NVTSI REBOOT Virtual Workshop

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
nvt.si.org

## Hire GI

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
hiregi.com

# November

## HACU Annual Conference

November 1-3  
Aurora, CA  
hacu.net

## The Arc National Convention

November 1-3  
Columbus, OH  
thearc.org

## GMIS Conference

November 6-9  
Fort Worth, TX  
gmisconference.org

## Military Mojo

November 7-8  
Raleigh, NC  
militarymojo.org

## NVBDC National Veteran Matchmaking Conference

November 7-8  
Detroit, MI  
nvbdc.org

## OSTEM Conference

November 7-10  
Atlanta, GA  
ostem.org

## Linkage's Women in Leadership Conference

November 11-14  
Orlando, FL + Virtual  
linkageinc.com

## HBCU Career Development Marketplace

November 12-14  
Baltimore, MD  
hbcucareermarket.org

## 7th Annual VIB National Conference

November 13-14  
San Diego, CA  
vibnetwork.org

## Afrotech Conference

November 13-16  
Houston, TX  
afrotech.com

## ABRCMS Conference

November 13-16  
Pittsburgh, PA  
abrcms.org

## SAME Federal Small Business Conference

November 20-22  
New Orleans, LA  
samesbc.org

## SkyBall

November 21  
Arlington, TX  
airpowerfoundation.org/skyball

## From Day One Forum

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
fromdayone.co

## Small Business Expo

Multiple Events  
See Calendar  
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

**SCAN FOR  
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USDA's Risk Management Agency serves America's agricultural producers through effective, market-based risk management tools to strengthen the economic stability of farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. We are committed to increasing the availability and effectiveness of Federal crop insurance as a risk management tool.



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

“ We are securing the future of American agriculture by developing world class risk management tools with the brightest minds in the industry.”

— Marcia Bunger, Administrator of  
USDA's Risk Management Agency

USDA's Risk Management Agency, along with the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, serves America's farmers and ranchers with products, programs, and training that provides economic opportunity, helps rural America thrive and nourish the nation, and preserves natural resources.

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Read more about the Risk Management Agency by scanning the QR code on this page. For a list of current vacancies for USDA jobs, visit <https://usda.usajobs.gov/>.



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## Working for the **USDA Risk Management Agency**

### **Catharine Anderson Risk Management Specialist, Risk Management Agency**

I am proud to say that I am 71 and grew up in Minnesota. I defected to California when I was 18, because I decided, I no longer wanted to live where I had a relationship with ice, other than it being in a glass. I now live near Napa and I am well suited for the Mediterranean climate. Prior to Napa, I worked in various industries before going back to school when I was 43. I earned five degrees at the community college level and then continued at UC Davis, earning my B.S. in Biotechnology. I then pursued my Masters in Geography with an emphasis in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). My introduction to working for the government happened while getting my master's degree as a 52-year-old intern at the Risk Management Agency (RMA). I helped with the initial digitizing of the Davis region paper maps and a year later became a Risk Management Specialist. As a Specialist, I coordinate with farmers and grower groups, ensuring that the crop insurance products we provide meet their ever-changing needs. Our office provides subsidized crop insurance to agricultural producers in rural America. Our long-standing relationship allows us to tailor the crop insurance programs to specifically meet the needs of our producers.

One such program was the fire insurance protection for smoke. It added specific coverage for smoke damage for all California counties, and this was especially valuable in Napa, where there is a significant amount of grape production for various wines that could be impacted by wildfires and controlled burns.

Besides multiple silent physical disabilities, the main one that impacted me while attending college was my severe hearing loss. When I started community college, I was not aware that there were programs that could help me succeed with the disabilities that I had. For two years I struggled and at the urging of a friend, I reluctantly went to the California Department of Rehabilitation to see if they could help me at school. I didn't expect them to help me, but to my surprise, they paid for my tuition, books, transportation and computer equipment for my whole education. The Disability Office supplied me with a captioner (like a court reporter) who would go to all my classes with me and transcribe what was being said in class (I became very popular having the full transcript of the class notes). I also was given a specialized wearable microphone for the professor, and I received the specialized receiver to hear the professor's voice. In addition, the chronic pain made it difficult to complete exams in the usual time allotted and I was given the additional time needed. Due to my challenges, it took me 10 years to complete my education, graduating at 53. This level of assistance continued at RMA's Target Center, when they supplied me with the same microphone/receiver equipment so that in large group meetings, I would not miss out.

This equipment, in conjunction with my ability to lip read, has helped me to be successful in my position.

In addition to equipment, RMA also allowed me to have a work schedule and assignments that helped me to be successful in my position while highlighting my strengths, not my disabilities. My decision to work at RMA has been one of the best career choices I could have made! RMA fosters an environment of inclusion and wanting all employees to succeed. RMA encourages its team to grow in their positions and to expand their skill level. I enjoy that my job has diverse responsibilities, so I am never bored. A federal career is an excellent option; besides the obvious benefits of a pension and retirement program, you have the opportunity to move around and expand your career skills. My only regret is that I started my career with the government at the age of 52. As I have gotten older, being able to work remotely has allowed me to continue to work with a great team, in a job that I love! Most of all, I especially like that we are making a difference in the lives of those that grow our food.



**Catharine Anderson  
Risk Management Specialist**



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# People with disabilities are America's most underutilized workforce.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. We connect people with disabilities to meaningful employment opportunities every single day. Your next opportunity starts with SourceAmerica and our nationwide nonprofit network.



Scan to find jobs and resources.



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