



Cornell DEI Initiative Report 2021



This report details the findings and recommendations compiled by the initiative teams.

Executive Summary

“Equity is a part of your job. With this, we are asking you to look at your job, our systems, our functions with a beginner’s mind, and surface processes, practices, and actions that prevent us from advancing an equitable and inclusive environment.”

~Mary Opperman, Vice President and Chief Human Resource Officer, Cornell University~

With the words ***“We recognize that staff are the lifeblood of Cornell*** and ***“We must therefore enhance the commitment that we make to recruiting and retaining an exceptional staff that reflects the diversity of our students,”*** President Martha Pollack called upon us to create new professional development programs with a focus on staff of color. These include leadership development, mentorship, pipeline, and succession programs, to ensure pathways to advance diverse staff into key institutional leadership roles.

The purpose of the *Cornell Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative* is to create workplace conditions and build relationships that are not historically defined but normed to be inclusive and reflect the 21st-century demographic realities. This means reducing and eliminating institutional barriers that impact the experience of historically underrepresented/minoritized individuals within the Cornell community and enhancing the lives of staff, students, the people of New York and others around the world.

The work of the initiative and task teams has centered around listening to and understanding the feedback and findings generously provided by BIPOC staff and our community partners.

We are a connected community.

Connected, one to another—from our youngest member who splashes in the Alex Haley Pool on steamy summer days, the high schooler who dreams of attending Cornell, community members who look at Cornell University with plans to find their place in the workforce, current students, staff, and faculty who with each day create purpose through their work, and to our community elders who share the wisdom and history gathered through their lives. *We are connected.* As each one of us contributes to the experiences of one another, this effort is a conscious process of seeing our wholeness. This initiative looks at Ithaca, Tompkins County, surrounding counties, the whole of New York State and beyond, and recognizes these connections.

The project teams centered their work around communities. Each focus has an important function, and each one supports one another. The final component that connects all the projects together is Wellbeing. It is the air we breathe, the culture we create. Below is a brief overview of the focus of each task teams as it pertains to recruitment and retention.



- **Community Connections** expands and strengthens the current connections that support and enhance the lived experience of our diverse population both at Cornell and in our community.
- **Building Bridges** approached it through the lens of the hiring practices and process.
- **Rising Strong** promotes retention through succession of diverse staff through leadership, mentorship, and professional development.
- **Wellbeing** looks at the seven dimensions of Wellbeing as it applies to our commitment to the whole person and one another.

This initiative recommends that the University deliberately and proactively continue to address the challenges of increasing workforce diversity; strengthen the relationships within our community; and enhance the experiences of our current BIPOC staff through a focus on wellbeing and professional development. The recommendations also include best practices that will help guide our actions into the future until they become good management practices. During discovery, it was determined that Cornell has a good foundation to leverage and support these recommendations.

Intersections

There are four areas the projects intersected: Communication, Onboarding, Continued Education, and Retention Strategy.

Communication asks us:

- How do we communicate who we are?
- How do we provide access to resources equitably?
 - Are we communicating in a way that is reaching our intended audience and in a way that can be understood by those who have rich multi-cultural lived experiences?

Onboarding wants us to explore:

- How do we provide the best experience to potential applicants, current applicants and staff who are developing and transitioning from one part of the university to another?
- How do we connect new hires to Cornell and the local community?

Continued Education positions us to ask:

- How do we support professional development?
- What practices and processes support career growth in and across Cornell?

Retention Strategy investigates the questions:

- How do we support the individual as they navigate their career at Cornell?

- How do we remain competitive in a connected and mobile workforce?

The Cornell DEI Initiative Report sheds light on the questions above in depth. The [complete report](#) consists of innovative solutions and describes the inclusive culture necessary to drive this change effort. You will find in each project report both feedback, findings, recommendations, and solutions. Further, the recommendations are categorized by effort: quick wins, low effort, and high effort.

Quick Wins

There are several quick wins in each project that will begin the momentum for future efforts. The recommendation is to socialize and implement these small wins.

Examples:

- Community Connections – Signal Cornell’s commitment and connectedness to the local community by establishing a bridge to employment through the development of a Community Connections webpage/portal and enhancing translation resources by partnering with established university programs such as CLASP.
- Building Bridges – Create a desired candidate experience by centering DEI language and goals in descriptions and announcements, ensure candidates receive interview feedback if they desire, and work toward eliminating bias at each step of the hiring process.
- Rising Strong – Provide opportunities for internal mobility through guidance and information about how to advance in careers, share information about gigs, mentorship, and development opportunities widely and consistently.
- Wellbeing – Create and communicate wellness initiatives, programming, and resource pages and provide an overview at onboarding. Create continued education opportunities of wellness benefits through workshops. Increase awareness and understanding through continuous annual training for all employees on DEI topics which foster a workforce of belonging and acceptance.

Each project focus carries equal weight. It is as important to develop the culture in which individuals work and live as it is to increase demographic diversity through community partnerships, recruitment efforts and hiring practices. All while supporting the retention of our excellent staff who have chosen to contribute their knowledge and expertise in alignment with Cornell University’s mission, vision, and values. Our recommendation would be to develop a multi-year approach to implementation taking into account each focus area: Community, Recruitment and Hiring, Retention, and Wellbeing. Short-term and long-term objectives can be found in the low and high effort categorized recommendations. A balanced approach signals the importance of each stakeholder.

Inclusive leadership requires courage and initiative. The next phase is about creating understanding of this more equitable and inclusive workplace. As this effort moves into development and implementation, it is imperative to continue nurturing the partnerships created and to communicate to our stakeholders and the Cornell community the status and progress on a regular basis. We thank you for your engagement, contributions, and support.

Thank you to our leads and teams

Nearly 40 members of the Cornell community came together to work on this initiative. We appreciate their dedication to Cornell and to creating an inclusive community for our minoritized staff.

Jennifer Fonseca: DEI Initiative Lead

Matthew Johnson: Community Connections Team Lead

Toral Patel: Building Bridges Team Lead

Maria Wolff: Rising Strong Team Lead, CNG Tri-Chairs: Brenda Rodriguez, Nishi Dhupa

Jeremy Stewart: Wellbeing Team Lead; CNG Tri-Chairs: Karen Williams, Patricia Gonzalez

Community Connections

Rehana Huq
Alexis Boyce

Jody Lynn Marnell
Shayla Nicole Combs
Jeramy A. Kruser
Susie Jackson
Darren Murphy

Building Bridges

Sonja Baylor
Taylor Shuler
Derron Borders
Xin Li
Alyssa Lopez
Carolyn Chow
Krassimira Hernandez

Rising Strong

Patricia Gonzalez
Hei Hei Depew
Susan Lin
Angelica Carrington

Recommendations:

Joe Rowe
Jada Hamilton
Davina Desnoes
Taylor Shuler
Jennifer Majjka
Trisica Monroe,
Tarek Chams
Chris Rogers
Lynda Inseque
Rehana Huq
Akua Akyea
Nakeschi Watkins
Andrea M. Rose
Savannah Bao

Wellbeing

Ray Hage
John Yates
Ben Ortiz
Joy Shri Das
Mar Pérez
Elisa Burgos
Toral Patel
Anthony Sis
Cindy Mosqueda
Akua Akyea
Ivan Solís Cruz
Jennifer Majjka

Response

Thank you for the time and care you gave to the staff DEI initiative. Your report is profound and has provided a holistic examination of the challenges and issues faced by our minoritized Cornellians, institutionally and as members of our

broader community.

Currently, the HR function is in the middle of a reorganization that we are calling Evolving HR. We will be embedding the findings and recommendations of the report into this work and structuring the HR function so that it supports and advances diversity, equity and inclusion. We recognize that the report is more than a series of individual recommendations. When viewed in its entirety, it provides a core set of needs and services that our HR function must be intentionally designed to support. This will help us, as an institution, not only address the issues that have negatively impacted minoritized staff, but also better align our work with Cornell's ethos of "Any Person."

As part of our Evolving HR work, we have begun to review and categorize your recommendations thematically. Currently, we believe that all but about 25 of the nearly 300 recommendations will be wrapped within the scope of Evolving HR.

We are seeing opportunities and synergies within the following priority areas in particular:

- Attracting top talent and removing barriers for applicants
- Expanding career and professional development support, and prioritizing internal mobility
- Increasing the reach and transparency of our HR services and resources
- Developing our supervisors and managers
- Increasing the cultural competency across the workforce

I would like to acknowledge as we look to the future, that the report points out many opportunities for improvement within HR's structures, processes, and systems; however, there are also issues identified that will require broader engagement to advance. These are the 25 or so recommendations that may not fall within the scope of Evolving HR. An example of these broader challenges include housing in the Ithaca area, transportation, and advancing local Ithaca businesses. In these spaces, it will be important that we identify the partners needed to collaborate and advance improvements.

I am committed to creating more inclusive practices by improving structures and systems in the HR function. I recognize and appreciate the enormous amount of work you have put into framing these issues and opportunities and want to be respectful of your time. I also want to elevate and amplify your lived experiences and expertise in these areas. Accordingly, I would be grateful for your continued engagement from time to time as we continue to identify and implement solutions to improve the experience of our minoritized employees.

The full report has been posted on the Working at Cornell website, along with recognition of the teams for your work and the above details regarding next steps.

Sincerely,

Mary Opperman

Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer