

IT Teams Recommit to Diversity Efforts

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FULL TEXT

Chief information officers in 2020 helped introduce or bolster initiatives to increase the ranks of minorities and women on their technology teams, as well as programs designed to retain and advance those underrepresented groups.

Also, in a year in which the police killing of George Floyd prompted many companies to address racial disparities internally and across American society, CIOs took steps to educate themselves about race and bias.

"While we've always talked about [diversity, equity and inclusion]," the killing of Mr. Floyd was "a real wake-up call," said Maya Leibman, chief information officer at American Airlines Inc., one of 45 information technology executives who responded via email to CIO Journal's annual end-of-year questionnaire, which surveyed them on diversity and other topics.

"Enough talk, time for action," she said.

Among its diversity initiatives this year, the airline's IT department honored job offers to students at historically Black colleges and universities -- or HBCUs -- extended before the pandemic, even amid hiring freezes and furloughs elsewhere across the company.

Black people accounted for about 7.8% of those employed in core IT occupations across all industry sectors in the U.S. in 2019, according to an analysis by IT trade group CompTIA based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Hispanic or Latino people made up about 7.3% that year.

The figures helped fuel renewed criticism in June that the tech sector wasn't doing enough fast enough to improve diversity.

"Racism, inequality and discrimination are unequivocally wrong. Yet we continue to see them in society and in the tech industry," said Suresh Kumar, global chief technology officer and chief development officer at Walmart Inc.

"We can change this and I believe in turning talk into action."

Target Corp. and Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co. are among companies that unveiled or expanded programs this year aimed at attracting and developing diverse tech talent.

Target's tech team in October, for instance, launched a partnership with racial equity nonprofit Dream Corps that aims to recruit more Black and Latino tech workers through a skills and training boot camp at the retailer, said Target CIO Mike McNamara.

Nationwide's tech team this year started a four-year partnership with Central State University, an HBCU, to support its computer science, mathematics and management information systems programs. That builds on an existing relationship Nationwide has with Winston-Salem State University, another HBCU.

Matt Carey, CIO at Home Depot Inc., said his department continues to invest in programs to attract talent from HBCUs as well as nontraditional paths to tech careers. One program trains employees to become software developers in 16 weeks.

Cisco Systems Inc.'s IT organization in June launched a task force focused on recruiting and developing diverse talent, said Jacqui Guichelaar, group chief information officer at the company.

New efforts also target women in technology. The tech arm of insurance company Travelers Cos. said it joined this summer with nonprofit group Girls Who Code to host a virtual immersion program for 32 high-school students.

Mojgan Lefebvre, chief technology and operations officer for Travelers, said the team also started a professional

network called EmpowHER+, which is focused on advancing the careers of women in the department. She said "+" indicates "the importance of allies," referring to people who support an underrepresented group but aren't members.

Credit: By Jared Council

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