



The DEI Beacon

NDC News & Resources
March 2024

From the CEO

A Celebration...and a Warning

As you may know, this year's Women History Month's theme is "Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion." And as this very special Women's History Month — one that reflects NDC's mission — draws to a close, I would like both to celebrate and gently warn against complacency. Let's salute the fact that women, while constituting 50.3% of the U.S. population, now outnumber men in the U.S. college-educated workforce, making up 51% of those ages 25 and older. But let's also observe that the gender pay gap has remained relatively flat over the past two decades, with U.S. women typically earning 82 cents for every dollar men earned.

Moreover, let's remember, with urgency and clarity, the significance of these facts every month. If we do not, we risk enabling the potential erosion of hard-won advances in women's rights and opportunities that are easy to assume are protected. That's a phenomenon that, unfortunately, we've seen all too much



of in recent years. As I touched upon with regard to Black history in [last month's newsletter](#), we must be careful not to isolate the achievements of, and challenges faced by, any particular community. To do so not only fails to honor those communities and those who have worked tirelessly for them, but also causes us to lose sight of the profound intersectionality of all those who are connected and supported by DEIB efforts.

Let us always honor women and ensure that we work together to advance *all* women.



Advances – and Stagnation

At the NDC, we value and spotlight women leaders all year round, as well as supporting the next generation of leaders (as in the Florida chapter’s [recent gathering](#)). If there is a general sense that women have made notable strides in recent years, such a perception is not unfounded, but represents only part of the picture. McKinsey’s most recent [“Women in the Workplace” report](#), released in late 2023, points out that women’s representation saw modest gains throughout the corporate pipeline, but women of color remained underrepresented. These gains have been fragile, and women of color remain severely underrepresented in leadership positions and mostly absent from the C-suite. Again, notice how the theme of intersectionality surfaces. If some women, but not all, benefit from progress in DEIB, then such victories should be considered moderate, and perhaps even tenuous.

The same report also sheds light on microaggressions, a topic which relates directly to Belonging. In a finding that is sadly predictable, women “continue to experience microaggressions at a significantly higher rate than men.” In addition, and once again pointing to the importance of an intersectional approach, it is noted that “Asian and Black women are seven times more likely than White women to be confused with someone of the same race and ethnicity.” With these realities in mind, it becomes clear that honoring women also means specifically honoring women of color, women with disabilities, LGBT+ women, and women who belong to any other marginalized group as well as women who represent experiential and cognitive diversity

Our interconnectedness is not a secondary characteristic, but part of who we are.



Our Stories, Our Future

As an immigrant Muslim woman of color who was a refugee and is trained as a lawyer, I have the lived experience of having multiple dimensions of diversity. My self identity and viewpoint is based on these intersectional identities. Like millions of others, my lived experience has been one of discrimination on multiple fronts, with the additional designation of “female” serving only to compound these tendencies. I have experienced being underestimated, disrespected, and, yes, even silenced. My non-standard American English accent is often interpreted as a sign of lesser intelligence, and when it is critical that I be heard, I need to speak twice as forcefully as others. So many millions of women still face this challenge — simply to have their voices heard and their value recognized. The goal of viewing women’s issues through an intersectional lens, then, is not to divide communities further or to compare and contrast various injustices. Rather, it is the opposite: to recognize and act from our common humanity. Indeed, our shared experiences across communities point to the common humanity that binds us all.

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In conclusion, let me share some important observations. The anti-DEIB forces at work today seek to attack difference wherever it exists, and at the first sign of cultural, legal, and political weakness, they will set out to rollback more progress for all groups. But we must and will stand up for our DEIB mission because it is right and just. The majority of Americans feel positively about DEIB, and our support of all women is a big reason why they feel this way. Women, whether leaders in their organizations, teams, or homes, are central to our workplaces and communities.

Let us always honor women and ensure that we work together to advance all women. We are 3.95 billion strong and we hold up half the sky.

Yours in Partnership,

Anika Rahman

Chief Executive Officer

Leadership Spotlight: Cecilia Orellana-Rojas, Ph.D. Chief of Learning & Consulting

Sometimes the timing just works out. All month long we've been honoring "Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion," and so for our featured Spotlight interview subject, it's more than apt that we have the privilege to speak with Cecilia Orellana-Rojas. Overseeing the NDC's consulting, educational, and research efforts in DEIB to serve its partners and clients across the U.S., Dr. Orellana-Rojas has not only been a tireless champion of DEIB, but has empowered countless *others* to be champions both in their organizations and nationally. In this role, she has created many of the programs and resources that

"Striving for equity through diversity and inclusion has become my purpose in life, and I guide my actions through this compass."



we regularly highlight in this newsletter: the [NDC Certification Program](#) curriculum, the [NDC Virtual Suite](#), and the NDC Toolkit.

Her background and accomplishments are suitably impressive, as one would expect. A native of Chile, she earned her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Texas at Austin, and a master's degree in Latin American Studies from the University of New Mexico. With work published in prominent peer-reviewed journals such as *Research in Urban Sociology* and *Native Peoples*, Dr. Orellana-Rojas leverages her experience in sociology and journalism, the field in which she earned her undergraduate degree, to inform her DEIB practice.

Your background is very interesting. How do these varied disciplines and your expertise in them serve you in your role at the NDC?

To my role at the National Diversity Council, I bring 15 years of experience in the corporate sector supporting the formulation and implementation of D&I strategies at a large telecommunications company. Prior to that corporate role, I worked as a journalist and later taught sociology in academia for more than 10 years, focusing on U.S. race relations, gender, Latin America, and research methods. My doctoral dissertation gave me the opportunity to learn about the process of identity construction among the Mapuche, Chile's largest ethnic minority. Finally, my own upbringing in Chile and life experience as a first-generation immigrant in the U.S. have also informed my understanding and approach to DEIB.

“DEIB leaders of the future will need to learn how to leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) as they advance DEIB efforts in their organizations.”

Let's follow up on that personal aspect. What did you witness that perhaps first drew you to DEIB?

My first personal experience with DEIB was with the equity part, growing up as a girl and teenager in my home country, Chile. I became aware of the deep socio-economic and gender stratification within Chilean society and its impact on people's life chances. At a young age, I learned about the importance of education as a great equalizer while volunteering with the literacy campaigns in working class neighborhoods. I understood that Chilean society had to undergo a meaningful transformation to achieve equity. What I didn't know then is how long it takes for change to take place. To achieve equity, we must commit to a lifetime journey of human agency both at the personal and collective level. Striving for equity through diversity and inclusion has become my purpose in life, and I guide my actions through this compass.

That's pretty inspiring. What are some core values that help you actualize that?

Courage is one of the core principles I bring to my work at the NDC. The ability to make courageous decisions while facing difficult and unpredictable situations is essential in today's environment. As a nonprofit focusing on DEIB, our organization may often face challenges such as disruption to goal attainment or a general backlash to our mission. The ability to face these challenges head-on instills confidence in my team members and helps us build a stronger foundation for our success as a team.

Collaboration is also essential in accomplishing our goals as a team. I value a collaborative leadership style vs. top-down management to encourage the exchange of information, respect for different perspectives, and a sense of shared responsibility among team members, which is reflected in our results. Collaboration also allows me to strategize and seize opportunities for our organization.

Great. With those as starting points, what's your vision for your team?

The Learning and Consulting team is small but mighty. As our field continues to evolve, we are focused on collaboration, creativity, and innovation to bring the best and most impacting solutions for organizational success through DEIB. With this vision in mind, we are bringing new, key talent to our consulting and certification efforts while identifying external partnership opportunities to expand our services to other sectors.

Speaking to other leaders, then, especially those closer to the start of their careers, what advice would you offer?

As the DEIB field continues to evolve, future leaders must gain the relevant knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a highly competitive environment. Furthermore, they must be life-long learners to elevate their impact and ROI of DEIB efforts. This is exactly what we do with our NDC Certification Program as we prepare our graduates to lead successful DEIB strategies for organizational excellence and innovation.

Also, DEIB leaders of the future will need to learn how to leverage Artificial

Intelligence (AI) as they advance DEIB efforts in their organizations. AI has the potential to help DEIB leaders identify problems, uncover hidden issues, and accurately measure inclusion in the workplace. Understanding the capabilities of AI for DEIB work will allow leaders to enhance DEIB outcomes.

But the DEIB journey can be a lonely one. Leaders of the future must be strategic from the onset, and use a systems-thinking approach to DEIB work. In addition, they must identify and engage key stakeholders across the organization to maximize accountability and impact of DEIB efforts.

Because, as you say, this journey can be lonely, what rewards make it all worthwhile? That is, why will DEIB continue to be so vital to the well-being of the nation?

Diversity is changing the U.S. landscape. By 2044, more than half of the U.S. population will be people of color and there will be no clear racial or ethnic minority. By 2032, people of color will become a majority of the American working class. Many other changing demographics and trends are driving the business case for DEIB, including an increasingly multigenerational workplace. With our mission, the National Diversity Council is poised to elevate our impact and contribute to greater understanding of the value of DEIB for a sustainable and just future.



Want to catch Cecilia in action?

Well, then you're in luck because there are still a few spots left in April's in-person Certification Program session in Chicago. There she'll be joined by nationally recognized leaders in the DEIB field, such as Lucy C. Arciniega, Ph.D., Hanadi Chehabeddine, Stan Kimer, and Al Sullivan!



NATIONAL
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NDC VOICES WEBINAR

What We're Doing: Webinars

We've been busy at the NDC, so let's use this space to catch you up on what we've been up to and where you can find upcoming events!

On March 6, as part of our ongoing #NDCVoices series, we hosted a webinar on "DEI in the Age of Cultural Chaos and a Presidential Election Year." The webinar discussed how DEI has become a hot-button issue for organizations, posing political and reputational challenges

that need to be crisis-managed. If you missed this event, you can check it out via [YouTube](#) (from which the screenshot below is taken).

Then, on March 22, we hosted a high-energy webinar focused on the question, "Can We Move Diversity Forward in 2024?" Want to learn more about #NDCVoices and register for future webinars? Just visit our [webinar page](#).



Did you know...

...that the NDC was founded back in 2008, making it one of the oldest national organizations dedicated to the advancement of DEIB?



www.nationaldiversitycouncil.org





Learning and Consulting: The NDC Virtual Suite

The [NDC Virtual Suite](#) is a resource that many in our community take advantage of, so check it out if you haven't recently. You'll find industry-leading learning solutions that will empower you to take action and engage team members around business success and strategic efforts involving diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

As just one example of many, you'll see links to sessions such as a highly practical and strategic one on "[Interrupting Unconscious Bias: Raising Social Awareness and Fostering Inclusive Workplaces](#)" coming up on April 17.

So expand your knowledge on a range of critical topics while enhancing your skills to champion DEIB in your workplace. Our four-hour workshops are designed for all team members. As a participant, you'll receive both an e-Book and e-Certificate of Completion.

And don't forget these upcoming [NDC Certification Program](#) course dates...

- April 22-26 (Chicago Central Time)
- May 13-17 (May Mountain Time Virtual)
- June 3-7 (Detroit Eastern Time)

Join Us!

Let's talk about upcoming gatherings — first, please know that through March 28, there will still be time to register for the [March National Chapter Meeting](#), which will be held on 29th. The topic: “Achieving Representation in Leadership.”

Excitement is already growing, though, for the [April National Chapter Meeting](#) on the 24th. The topic will be “Modern DEI in a Highly Divisive World & Politically Charged Environment.”

Looking ahead to May, its [National Chapter Meeting](#) will take place on the 22nd with the topic “Mental Health & Wellbeing.”

The same month also sees a very special gathering — the [National Asian American, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Leadership Summit](#), which will be held on May 28, 2024, in New York City. As an organization that was founded on promoting an inclusive and equitable community and workforce, the National Diversity Council is using its platform to host this 5th annual AANHPI Leadership Summit. This event provides an opportunity for you to observe, network with, and learn from AANHPI leaders who will offer their perspectives and experiences on leadership development and advancement in the corporate suite. The focus will be on bringing together successful AANHPI leaders who — through dialogue on today's pressing issues — will help educate, inspire, and empower attendees to become leaders within their workplace and community.

#YouBelongHere

Remember a couple of pages ago, when we shared a YouTube link to a recent event? Well, did you know that the NDC has its own [channel](#)? There you'll find long-form practical guides to DEIB, highlights of past conferences and summits, and much more. Subscribing to the channel is free, but in any case please take a look and leave a comment, telling us what you think.

And of course all the resources that the National Diversity Council provides to practitioners and advocates is made possible through your generosity. It's something that we never stop being grateful for.

[Donate](#)

