



**SOCIAL
INCLUSION**
DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

2023

Social Inclusion Study on Industry Partners

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

I am proud to announce the release of our inaugural social inclusion study for our industry partners. This, with participation from nearly 120 industry professionals, study represents a milestone for our association. The industry perspective provides a crucial lens on how partner organizations can improve their internal inclusion practices. In turn, they can collaborate, guide, and support destinations in their efforts to welcome all visitors and make an impact in their communities. Since the formal inception of our inclusion work in 2018 we have held discussions with our members and partners about how to cultivate a more unified industry that welcomes people of all abilities and backgrounds. We certainly have work to do, however this study is a step in the right direction and allows us to better understand areas of opportunity and growth among the partner segment within the travel industry.

As we shift the thought leadership of this work to our social inclusion framework, our team alongside the research subcommittee reviewed the questions of this study through an inclusive lens, taking board governance, succession planning, and mental health and wellbeing into consideration for our destination organization study. The same, newly revised questions have been used for this study.

I would like to thank Sophia Hyder Hock, our Chief Inclusion Officer for her leadership, Jessica Reyes our EDI manager, and two very dedicated EDI Committee co-chairs, Timothy Bush, CDM, TMP, chief marketing officer at Visit Lake Charles and Sonya Bradley, chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer at Visit Sacramento. I would also like to recognize our industry partnerships subcommittee co-chairs, Cara Frank, chief of staff with Simpleview and James Jessie, chief sales officer with Travel Portland for their thought leadership on how to create stronger points of engagement between destination organizations and industry leaders, and our research subcommittee co-chairs, Connie Kinnard, vice president of multicultural tourism and development at the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau and Melissa Cherry, chief diversity and inclusion officer with Miles Partnership for their dedication to this study and their leadership with our research related deliverables.

Destinations International remains committed to creating spaces where people of all backgrounds and abilities feel welcome. We will continue to listen to the needs of all our partners, to assist with implementation initiatives, the development of metrics and accountability mechanisms and sharing of case studies and best practices from peers to enhance learning opportunities.

We hope you take some time to read the insights in this study, discuss them with your team, and find ways where you can strengthen your inclusion related initiatives for your organization, community, and the industry.

We remain grateful for your dedication as we navigate these important topics together.



Don Welsh

Don Welsh

President & CEO, Destinations International

SPECIAL THANKS

To the Industry and Research Sub-Committees for their leadership, guidance, and support to produce this study:

Industry Partnerships Sub-Committee

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Simpleview

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JESSICA HOLT

Visit Raleigh

EMILY EILAND GONZALEZ

Visit Mobile

A photograph of three people in a meeting, overlaid with a green tint. A woman with long blonde hair is standing and pointing at a tablet held by a man. A woman with glasses and braided hair is sitting at a table, also looking at the tablet. The man is sitting at the table, holding the tablet. There are papers and a cup on the table.

INTRODUCTION

2024 Pulse: The DI Industry Partner Report

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of our inclusion work is based on establishing authentic opportunities for our members to understand and discuss how to create welcoming spaces for people of all backgrounds and abilities.

We have been intentional with our approach; engaging our membership, inclusive of destination organizations and industry partners for feedback through surveys, meetings and dialogue as a basis to strengthen our resources, events, and professional development programs.

Below, we have included key milestones that highlight our progress since 2018:

- **July 2018:** Hosted the first Equity, Diversity & Inclusion meeting during Destinations International's Annual Convention in Anaheim, CA.
- **August 2018:** Announced a member-wide call for committee participation to form the first Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Task Force.
- **December 2018:** In partnership with Association Forum, hosted a dialogue with key industry leaders from the association and CVB communities to brainstorm potential strategies to cultivate a welcoming environment for meeting and event attendees.
- **February 2019:** Launched the association's first study to collect a snapshot of racial and workforce diversity examining demographics of board leadership, executive staff, general governance and policies.
- **March 2019:** In collaboration with the Philadelphia CVB/PHL Diversity, convened a Meetings & Conventions Leaders Roundtable designed to guide industry leaders through the process of developing a common language and vision for diversity and inclusion within the meetings and convention industries.
- **July 2020:** Released a best practices for board diversity guide for destination organizations and formally made the EDI Task Force a standing committee under the bylaws of Destinations International.
- **August 2020:** Launched survey collection of Destinations International members to self-identify demographic data.
- **November 2020:** Released the first EDI Study on Destination Organizations examining overall demographics and perceptions on EDI within member destination organizations.
- **December 2020:** Launched the EDI CEO Leadership pledge for executives to be better aligned and committed to making actionable plans to drive a vision for change.

- **January 2021:** Released Destinations International's first EDI Strategy Roadmap with the goal to lead and engage strategic planning and programmatic development initiatives to benefit our members' communities.
- **February - December 2021:** Launched EDI Leadership series in partnership with The Ladipo Group designed for executive leadership around the topics of emotional intelligence, effective communication, microaggressions, unconscious bias and allyship.
- **February 2022:** Hired our first Chief Diversity Officer, Sophia Hyder Hock.
- **July 2022:** Launched the EDI Assessment Tool for destination members – a tool that is first of its kind in the industry and created by destination members to establish standards and benchmarks related to social inclusion on an annual basis.
- **November 2022:** Launched our social inclusion services for destination organizations.
- **April 2023:** Released our new working definition of social inclusion through a welcoming and belonging lens available on our website for any organization to use and adapt.
- **May 2023:** Revisited language and accountability measurements for the Inclusive Leadership Pledge, formerly known as the CEO Pledge.
- **July 2023:** Released our updated strategic roadmap through 2024, aligned with member conversations and feedback.
- **October 2023:** Held our inaugural EDI Summit in Little Rock, Arkansas.

OUR WORKING DEFINITION OF INCLUSION

Destinations International is committed to creating spaces and places in the travel industry that promote a true sense of welcoming and belonging for people of all backgrounds and abilities. As human beings we can empathize with what it feels like to receive a warm smile, to connect, and to feel like you can safely and responsibly immerse yourself into the intricate fabric of a destination.

Using this mindset, we acknowledge the array of identities that exist in this world and that every person should be valued and treated in an equitable manner. To us, this means we recognize that each person has different life circumstances and abilities, and we will do our best to allocate resources to reach an equal outcome of opportunity and respect for all.

We realize that the world is constantly evolving with many diverse perspectives and identities contributing to this industry. To align with knowledge, we will keep an open mind and acknowledge the mosaic of identities as they arise which includes and is not limited to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity and expression, sexual/romantic attraction, religious affiliation, political belief, dietary selection and preference, mental and physical abilities, neurodiversity, age, thinking styles, body size and appearance, hair texture, socioeconomic status, marital status, parental status, language, spoken accents, and educational levels.

As we recognize the importance of creating equitable opportunities and the diverse identities that make up the world, we strive break down barriers that prevent people from feeling excluded and to create spaces where people feel included, respected, feel seen, feel heard, feel valued, and feel like they belong.

OUR SHIFT TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

Our working definition of inclusion was crafted to highlight the importance of creating a welcoming environment for all, to celebrate the many backgrounds and abilities that exist in this world, alongside the commonality we all share – to be treated with respect and dignity.

This shift to social inclusion does not diminish previous work that this association has established to advocate on behalf of underrepresented populations and identities. Rather, we plan to use the knowledge we have gained over the years to create linkages between the need to cultivate inclusive and welcoming environments and to handle critical issues that destination organizations are experiencing. Examples include and are not limited to crime and safety, homelessness, workforce development, accessibility, representation of minority identities, and youth engagement. This work is never finished as many perceive it to be and by understanding that inclusion and belonging is at the root of these societal issues, we remove ourselves from the silos of 'DEI work.'

On a global scale, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) addresses the importance of inclusion and implementing initiatives that create welcoming spaces for people of all backgrounds and abilities. The adoption of social inclusion as stated by the UN can lead to increased innovation and productivity within teams and profitability through an engaged community, diversification of visitors, and increased visitor satisfaction.

Destinations International aligns with the following SDGs for our social inclusion strategy:

- **SDG 5:** Gender Equality
- **SDG 8:** Decent Work and Economic Growth
- **SDG 10:** Reduced inequalities
- **SDG 11:** Sustainable cities and communities

Social inclusion is crucial for building a more just and cohesive society where everyone has a sense of belonging and can reach their full potential.

We encourage you to think about the importance of this shift toward social inclusion and the impact it has upon the vitality of your destination or organization`.

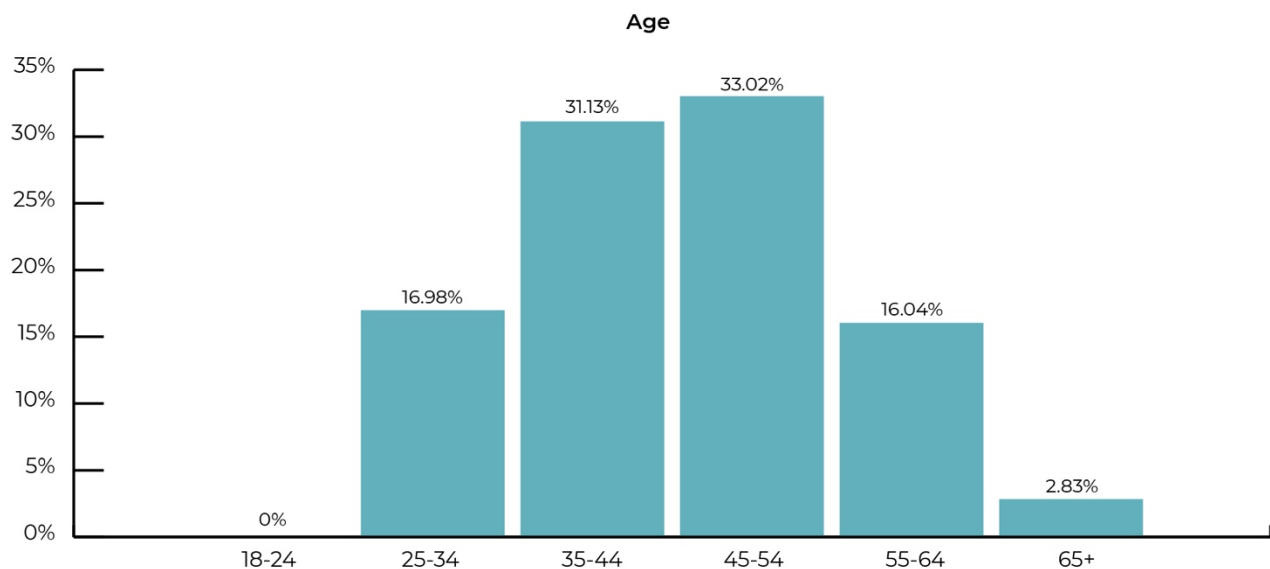


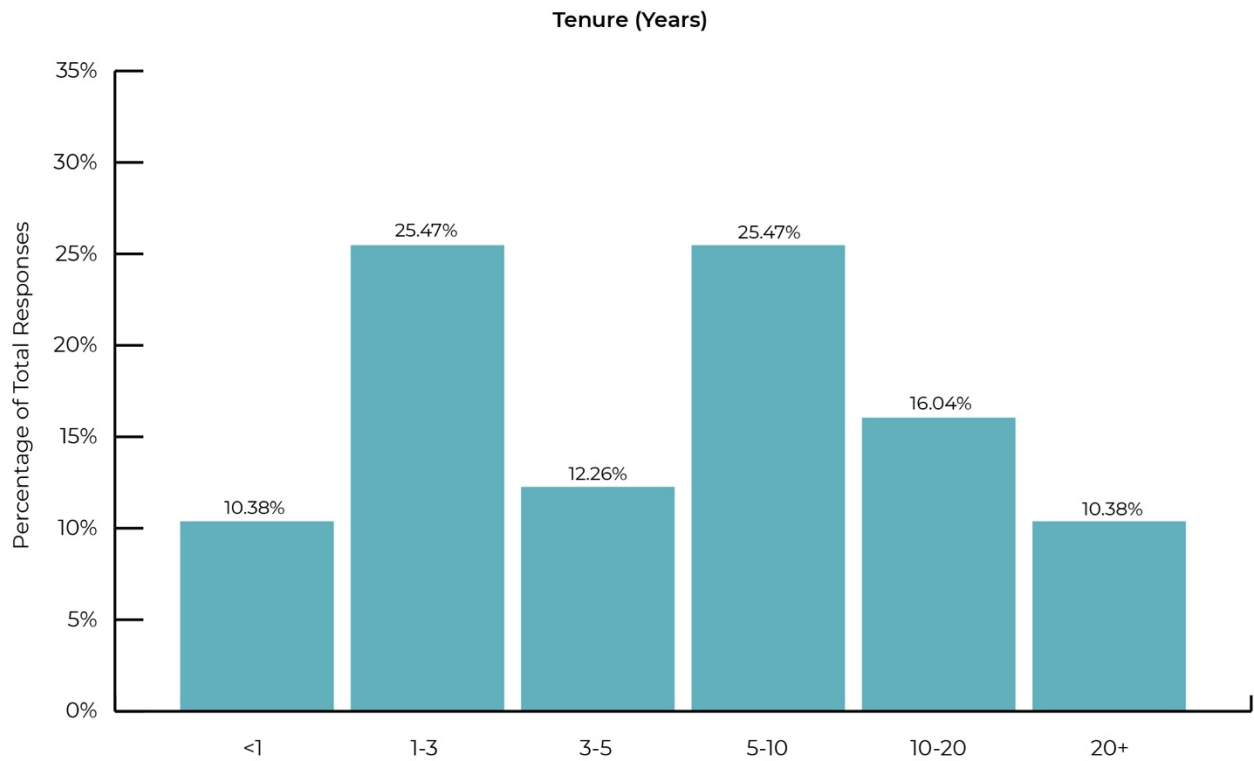
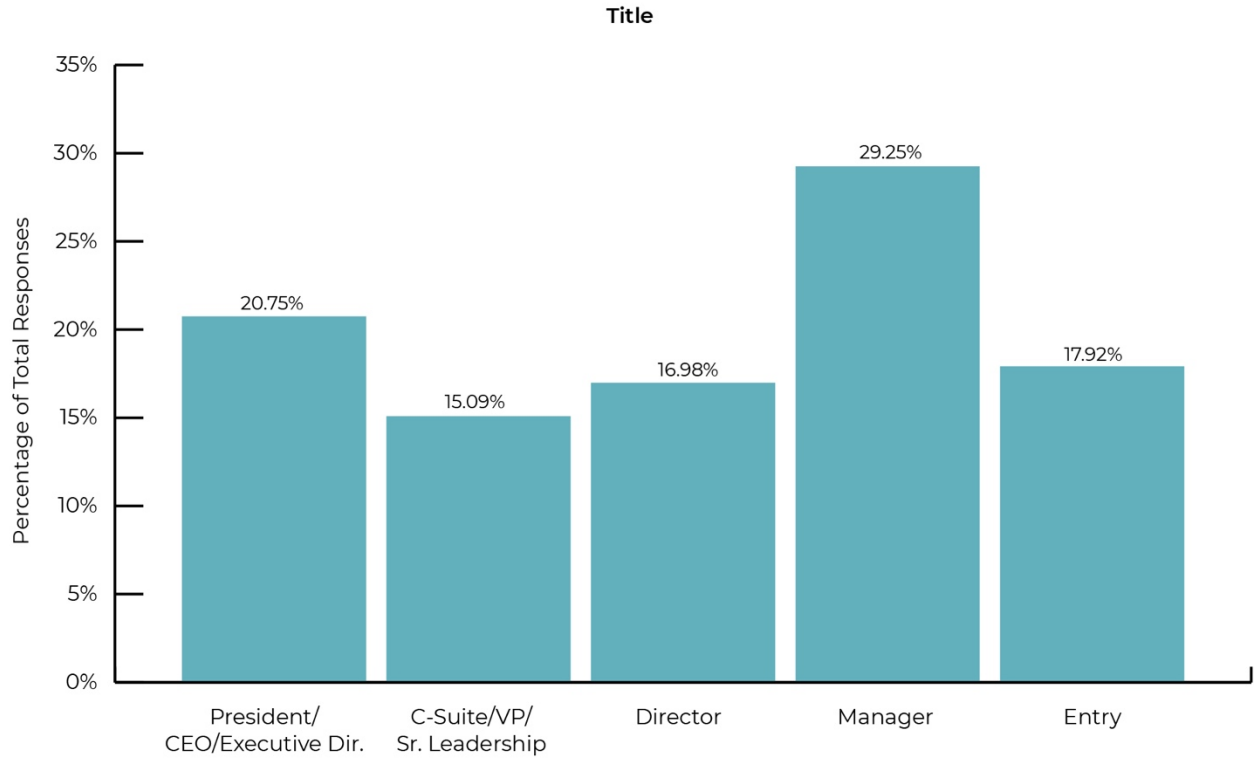
DATA, INSIGHTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

2024 Pulse: The DI Industry Partner Report

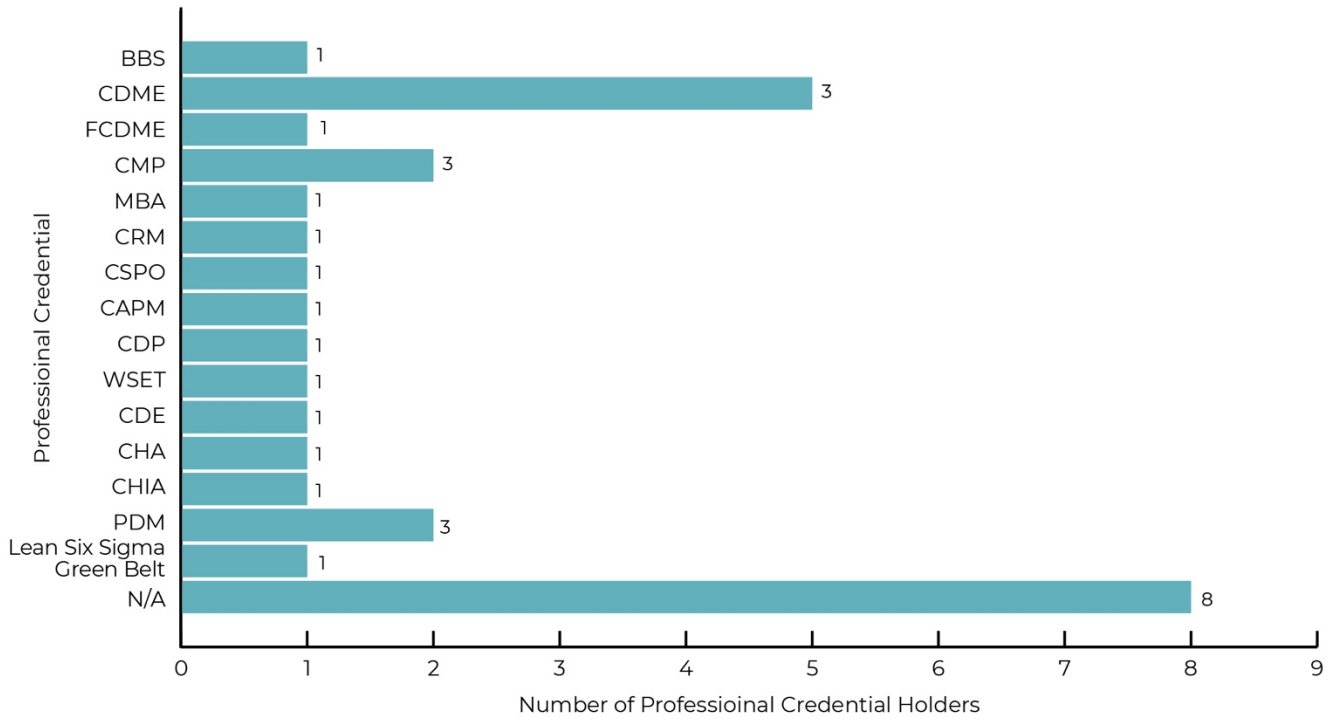
DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

- Over 64% of our respondents are between the ages of 35-54, less than 3% are over the age of 65, and there are no respondents between the ages of 18 – 24.
- Consistent representation across professional levels, with 21% in CEO positions, 15% in C-Suite positions, 17% in Director positions, 30% in Managerial positions, and 19% in Entry Level positions.
- Half of respondents have a tenure of 1-3 or 5-10 years, while 20% of respondents have a tenure of less than a year or more than 20 years respectively.
- Over 75% of our respondents identify as 'White/Caucasian'; approximately 14% identify as 'Latino/Hispanic,' and over 8% identify as 'Black or African American'.
- Approximately 60% of our respondents are female with less than 2% identifying as Transgender or Non-Binary.
- Approximately 81% of our respondents identify as 'heterosexual', over 6% 'preferred not to answer,' and over 5% identify as 'gay'.
- Over 40% of our respondents are 'Christian'; 'Spiritual-Secular/Non-Religion' was the second most identified selection at approximately 15%.
- Over 20% of our respondents have a disability, with approximately 8% selecting 'neurodivergent'.
- Over 2% of our respondents are military veterans.

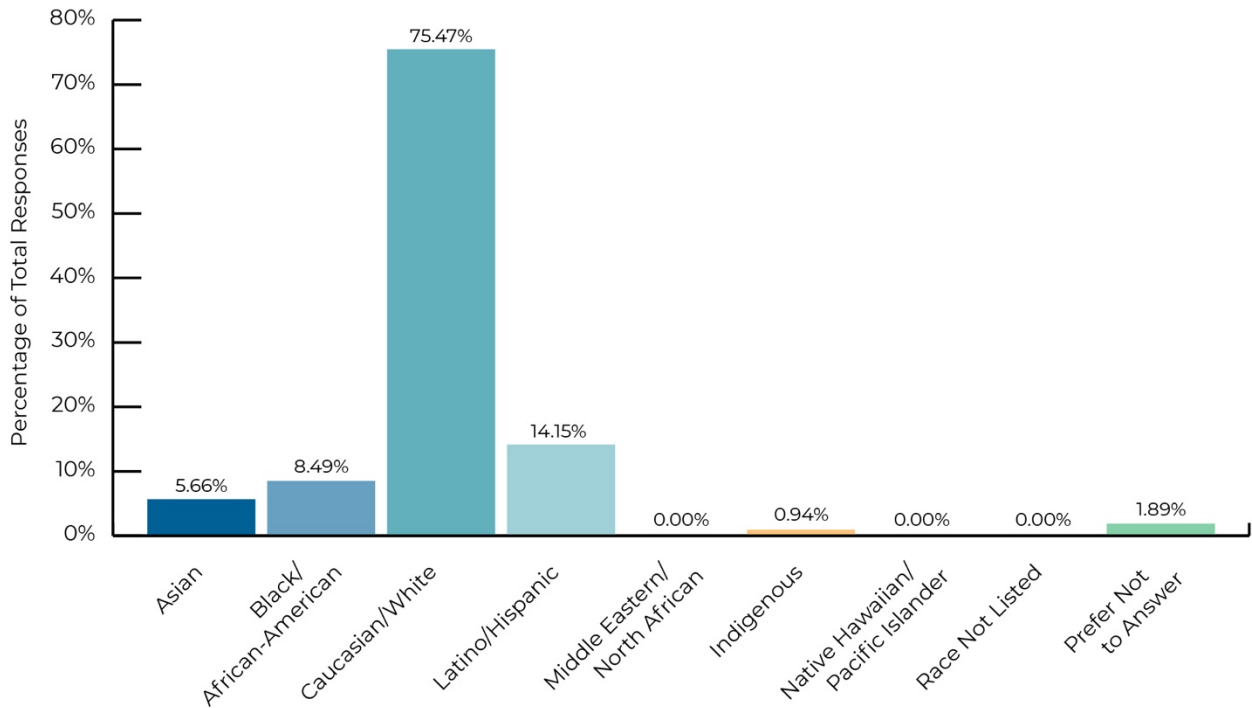




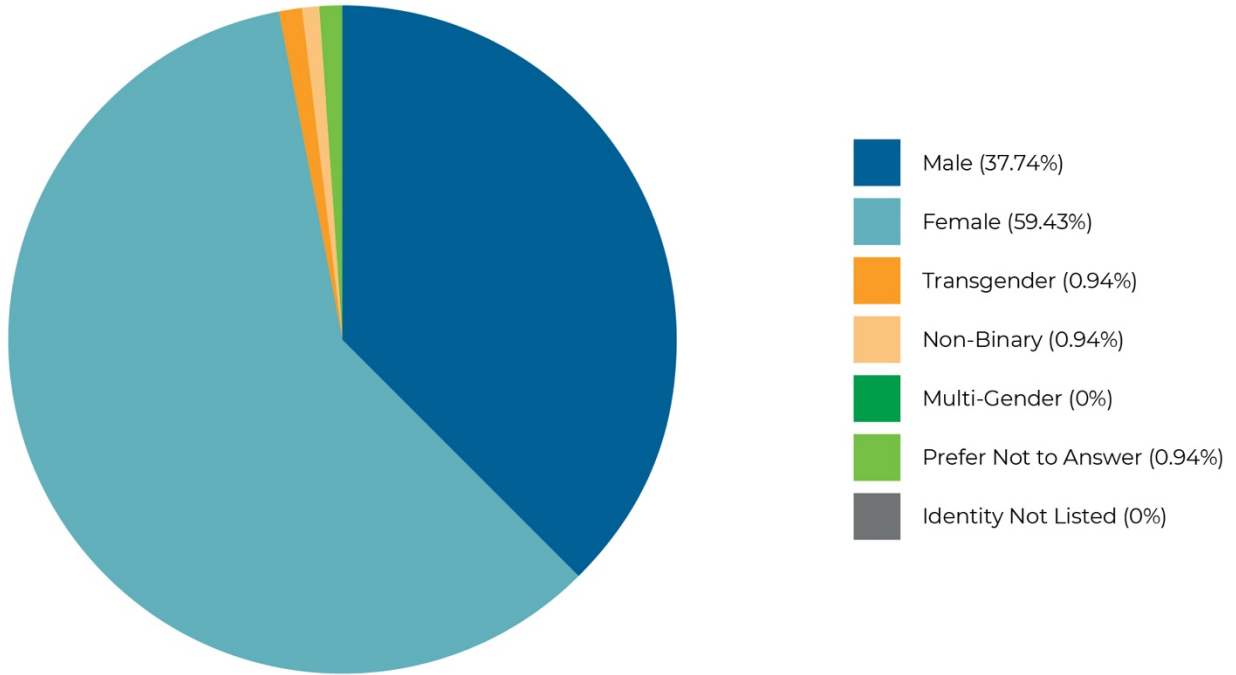
Professional Credentials



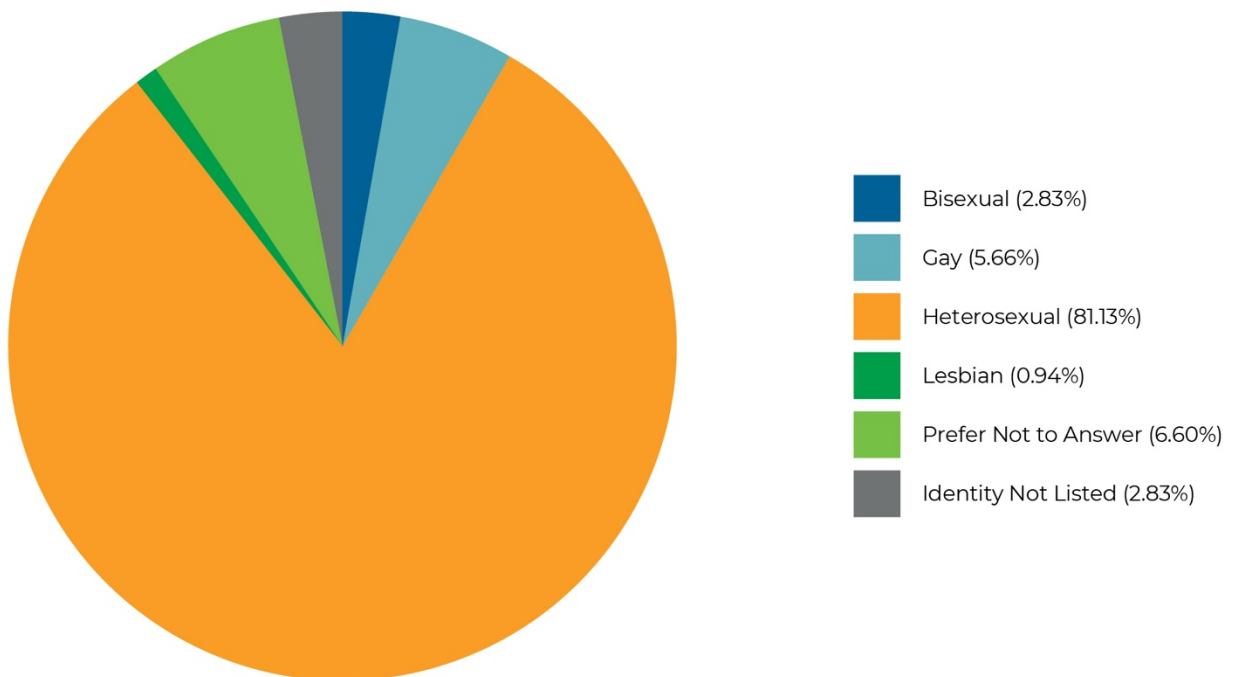
Race



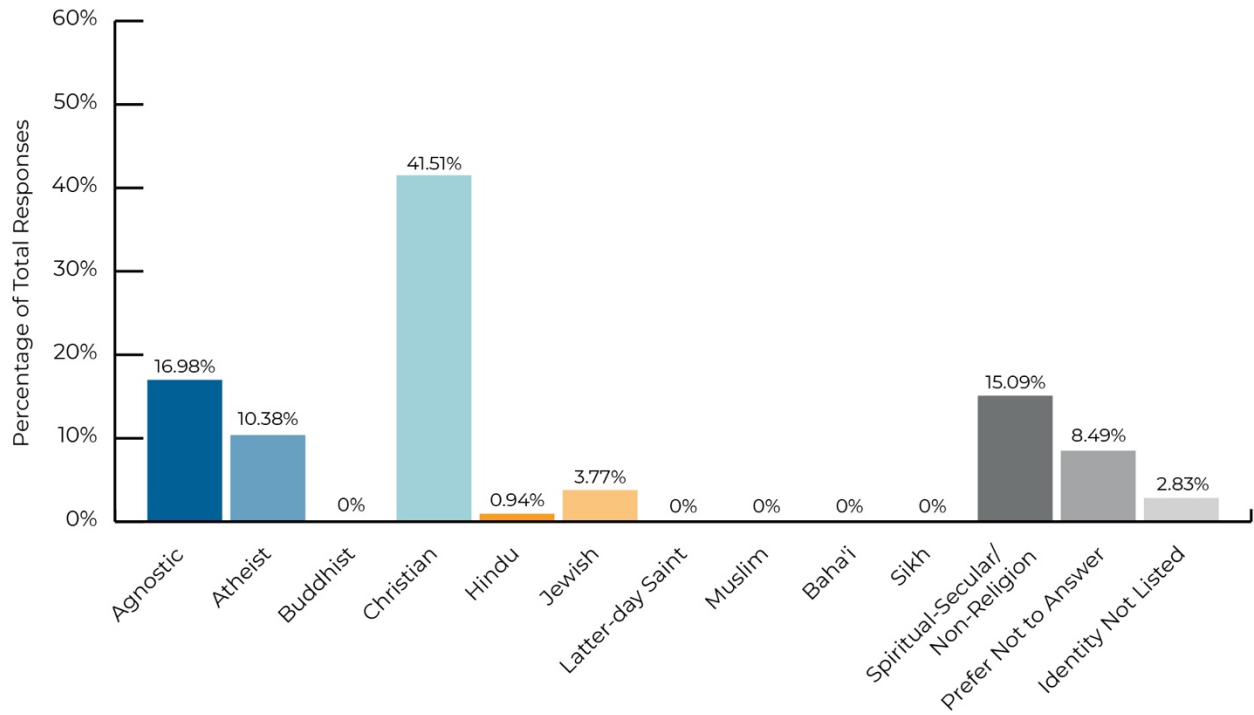
Gender



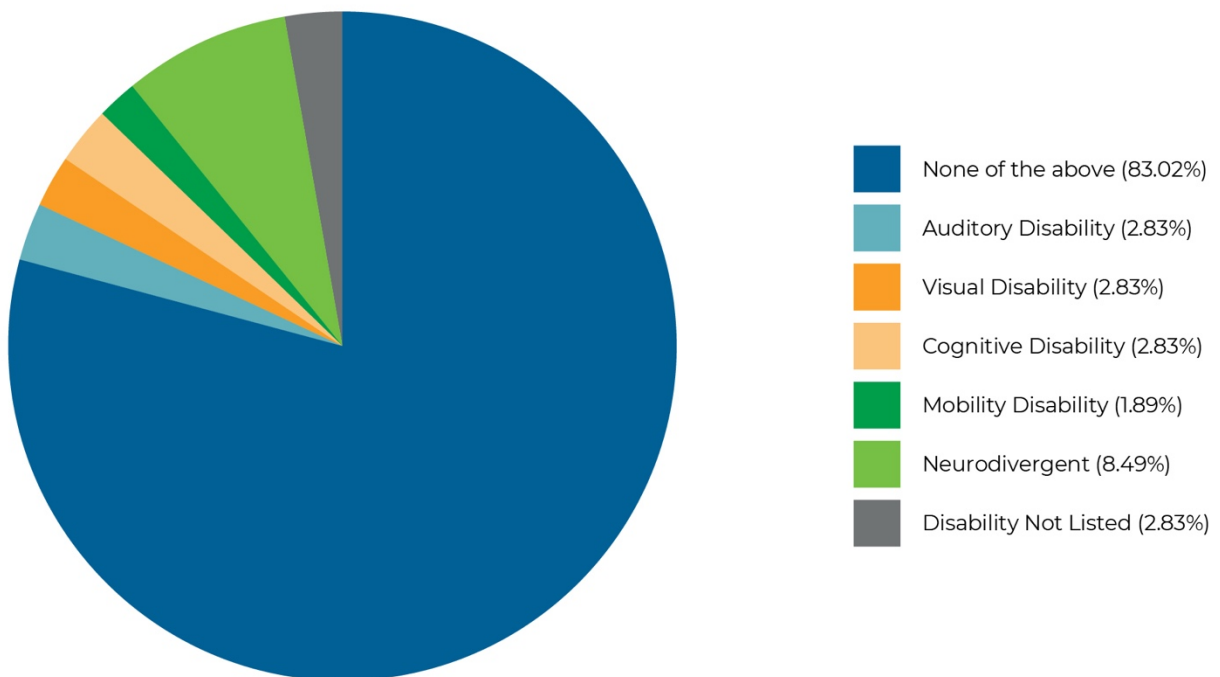
Sexuality



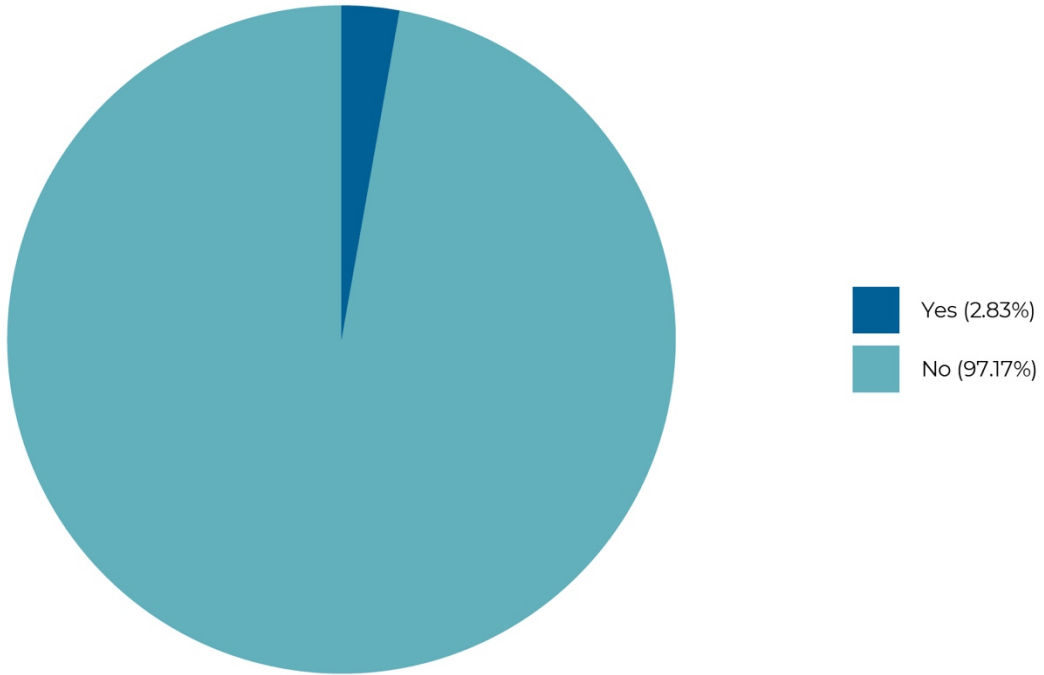
Religion



Ability



Veteran Status

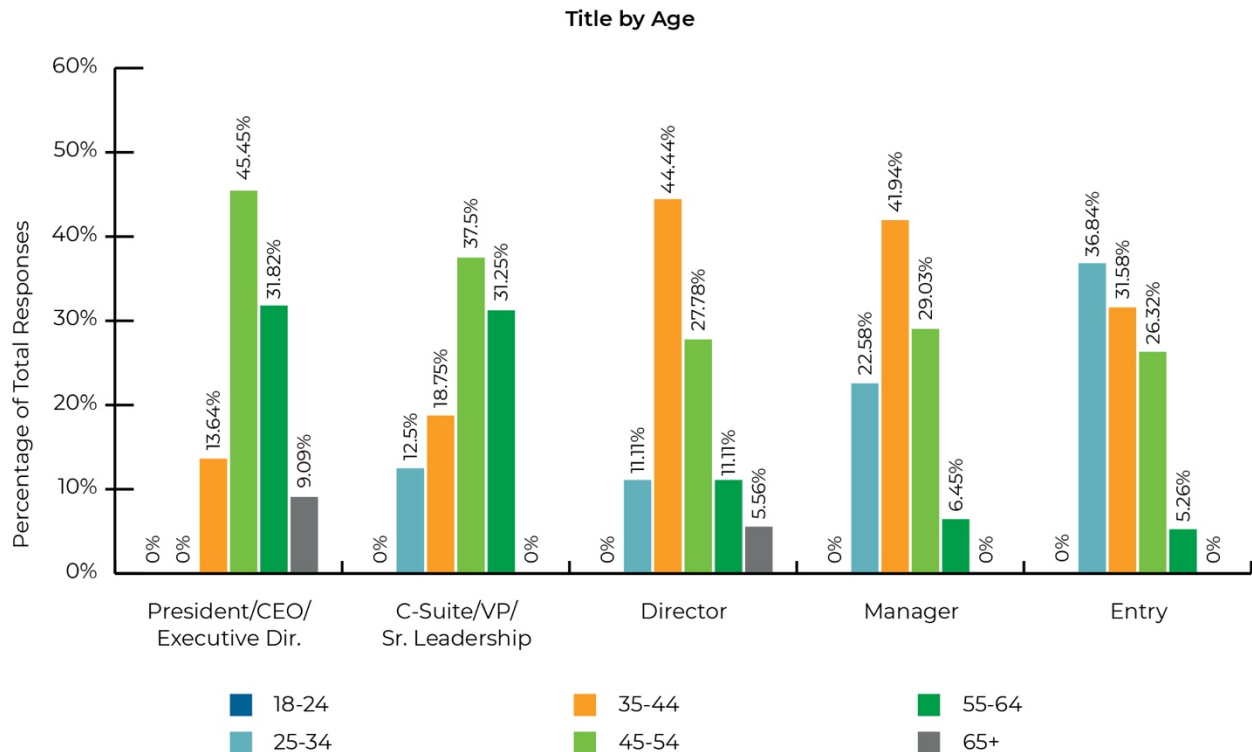


DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT BY TITLE

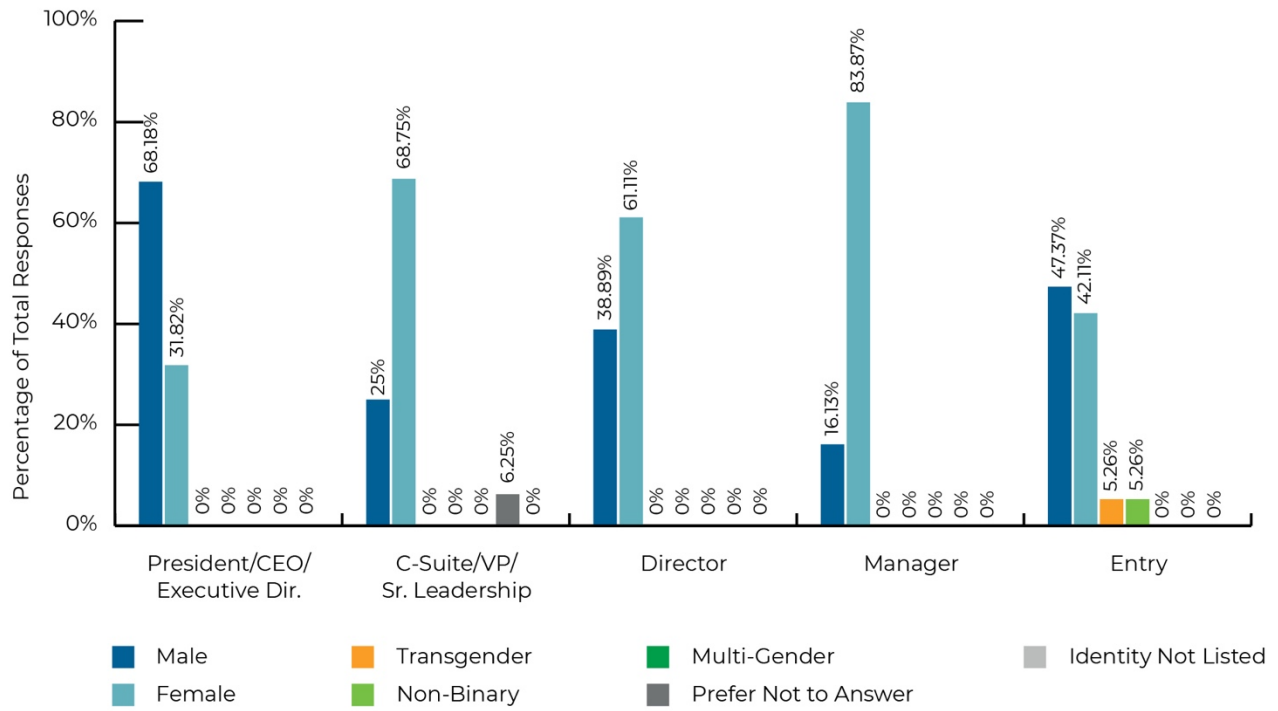
The data below segments responses by age, gender, race, sexual preference and ability through the lens of professional titles.

Insights

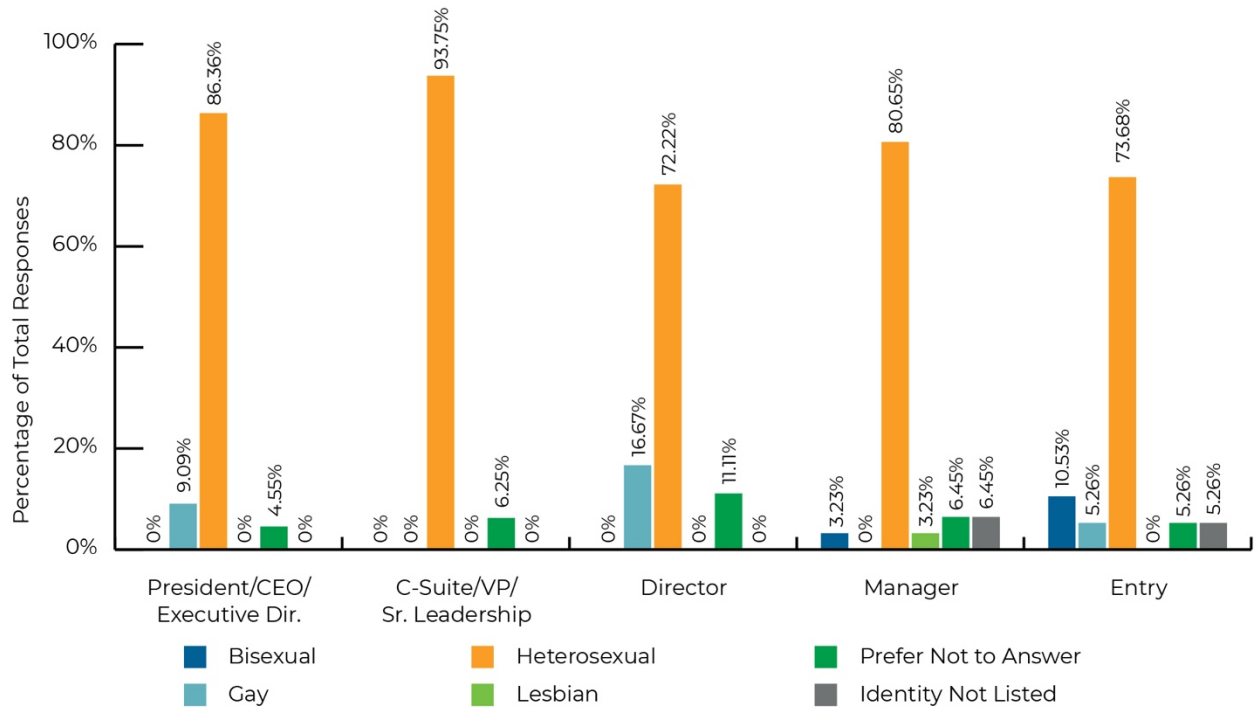
- The majority of respondents identify as Caucasian heterosexual females between the ages of 45-54 in managerial roles.
- 77% of respondents in President/CEO, Executive Director or Managing Director roles are between the ages of 45-64.
- Gender diversity and diversity of sexual preference is most prevalent at the 'entry level' positions.
- Racial diversity decreases for 'Latino/Hispanic' identities beyond entry level positions; respondents who identify as 'Black or African American' are represented in every position level; there is an increase in 'Asian' respondents at the C-Suite and President/CEO positions.
- One respondent identifies as Indigenous and is in a managerial role.
- Though the majority of respondents do not identify as persons with disabilities, 23% of respondents in President/CEO positions indicated having various disabilities. Neurodiversity is present among all professional levels and is highest among Entry Level at 11%.



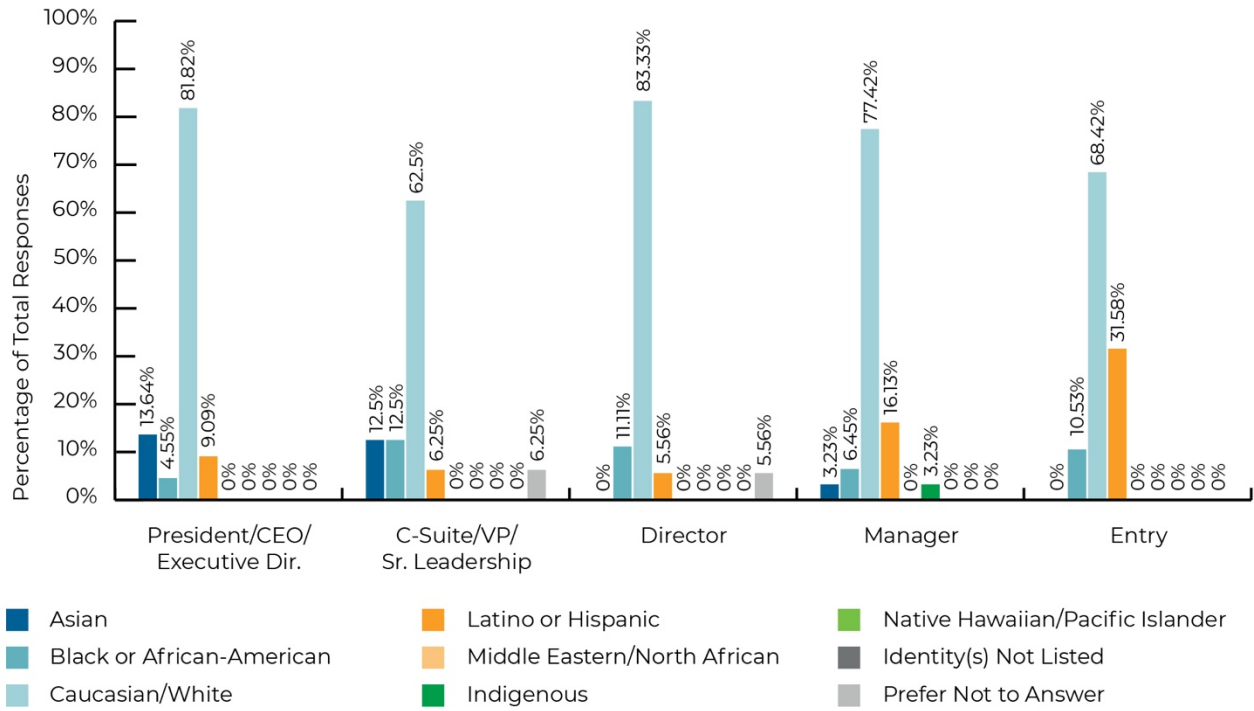
Title by Gender



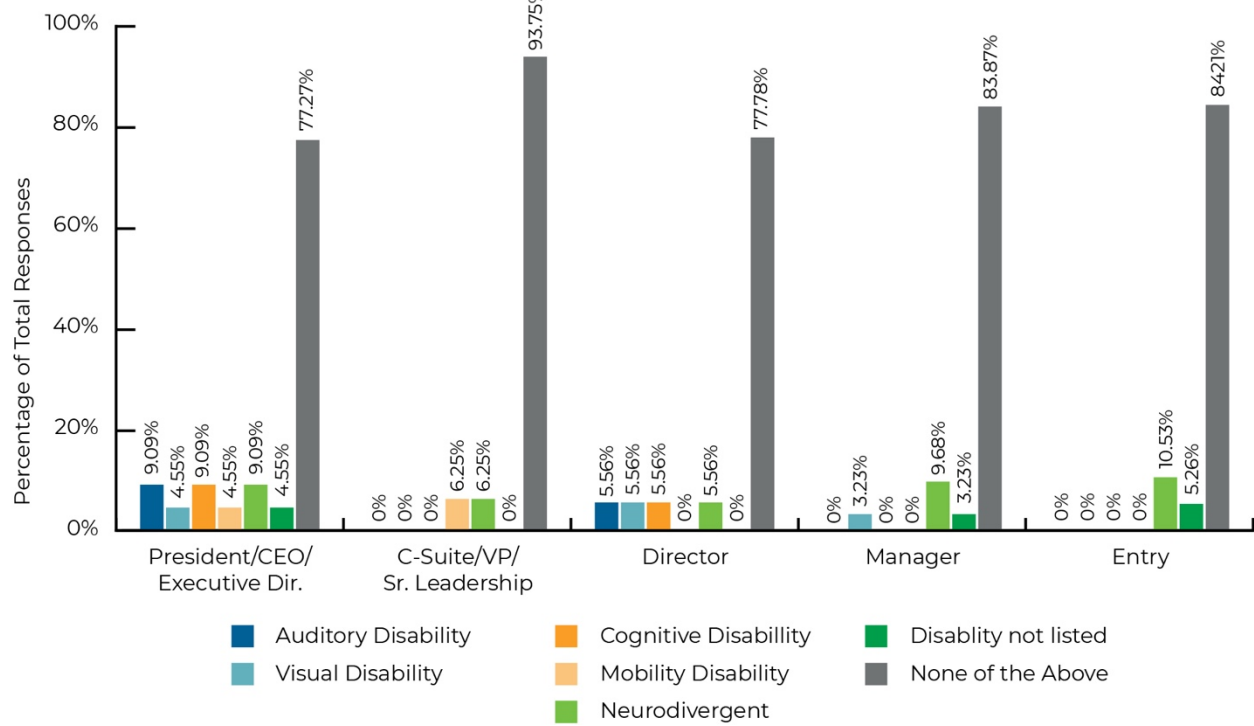
Title by Sexuality



Title by Race



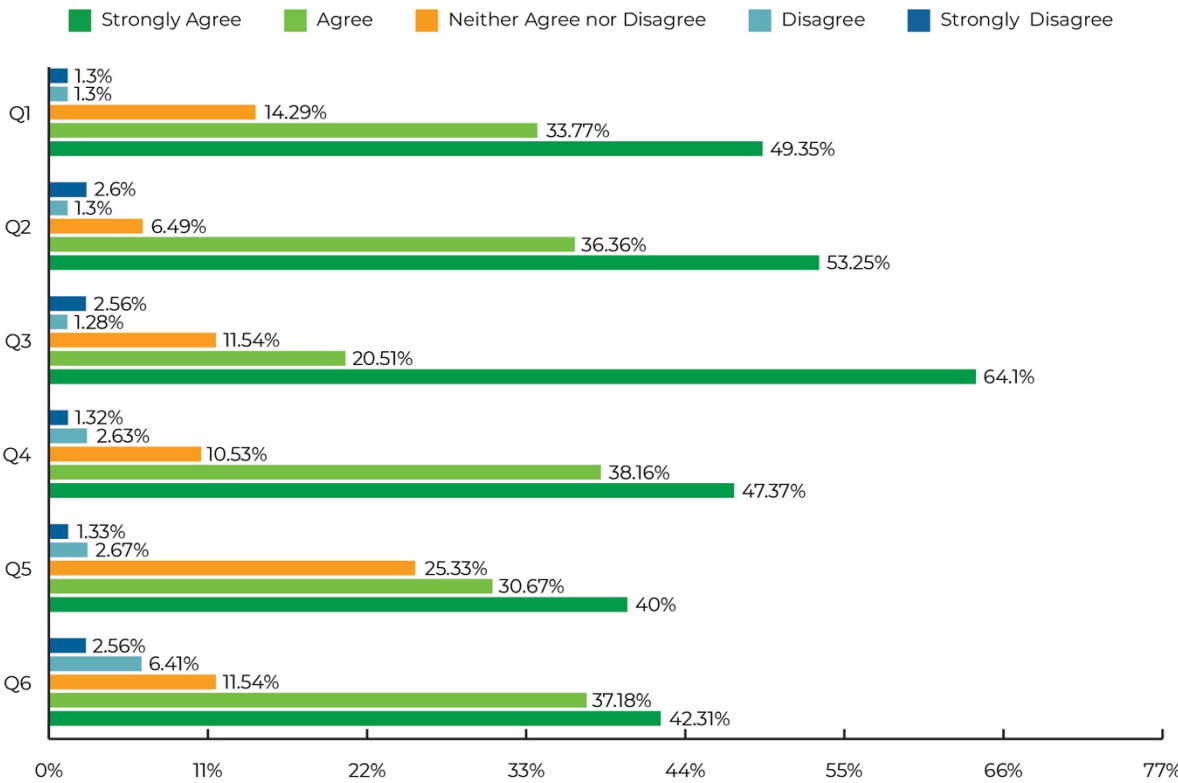
Title by Ability



INCLUSION RELATED SENTIMENTS AMONG INDUSTRY PARTNERS

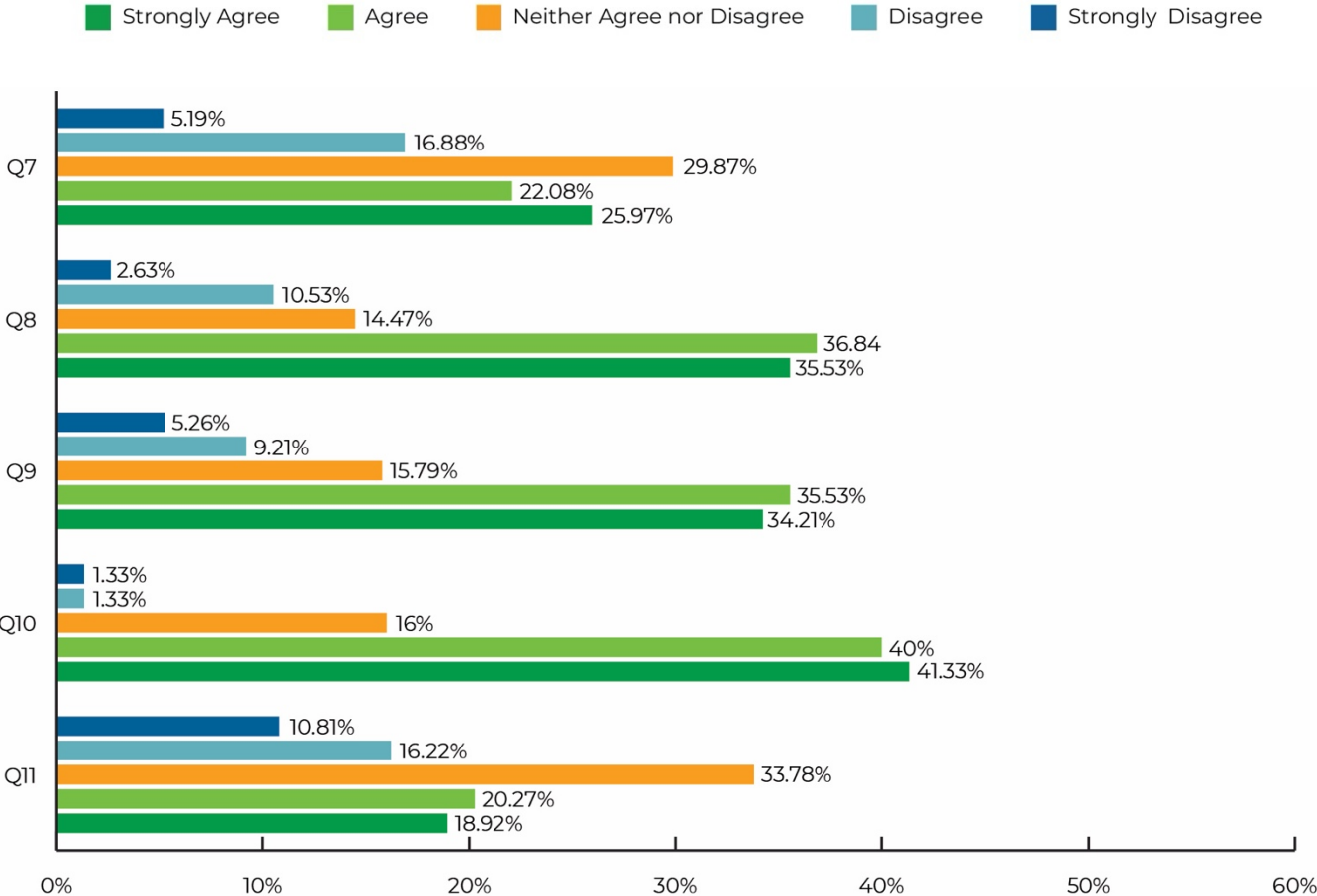
We asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on statements summarizing an individual's sense of welcoming and belonging within their organization.

- Q1:** Our organization is committed to creating, respecting, and valuing spaces that champion welcoming and belonging for people of different backgrounds, identities, and abilities.
- Q2:** I feel included and respected within my destination organization.
- Q3:** I am comfortable talking about my background and culture experiences with my colleagues.
- Q4:** Employees of different backgrounds, identities, and abilities interact well within our organization.
- Q5:** Management demonstrates a commitment to meeting the needs of employees with disabilities.
- Q6:** Our organization provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs.



We asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on statements summarizing an individual's sense of inclusion efforts made by their organization.

- Q7:** Our organization has accumulated enough resources committed to achieve our DEI goals. Such as budget, dedicated staff and community outreach.
- Q8:** Our organization has provided professional development opportunities on how to create an environment that welcomes people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities.
- Q9:** Our organization has provided professional development opportunities that provide an understanding of how to become aware of unconscious biases.
- Q10:** Our organization has provided everyone access to equal employment opportunities regardless of their difference.
- Q11:** Achieving DEI objectives is part of our annual performance review.



We asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on statements summarizing the role social inclusion plays within their organization.

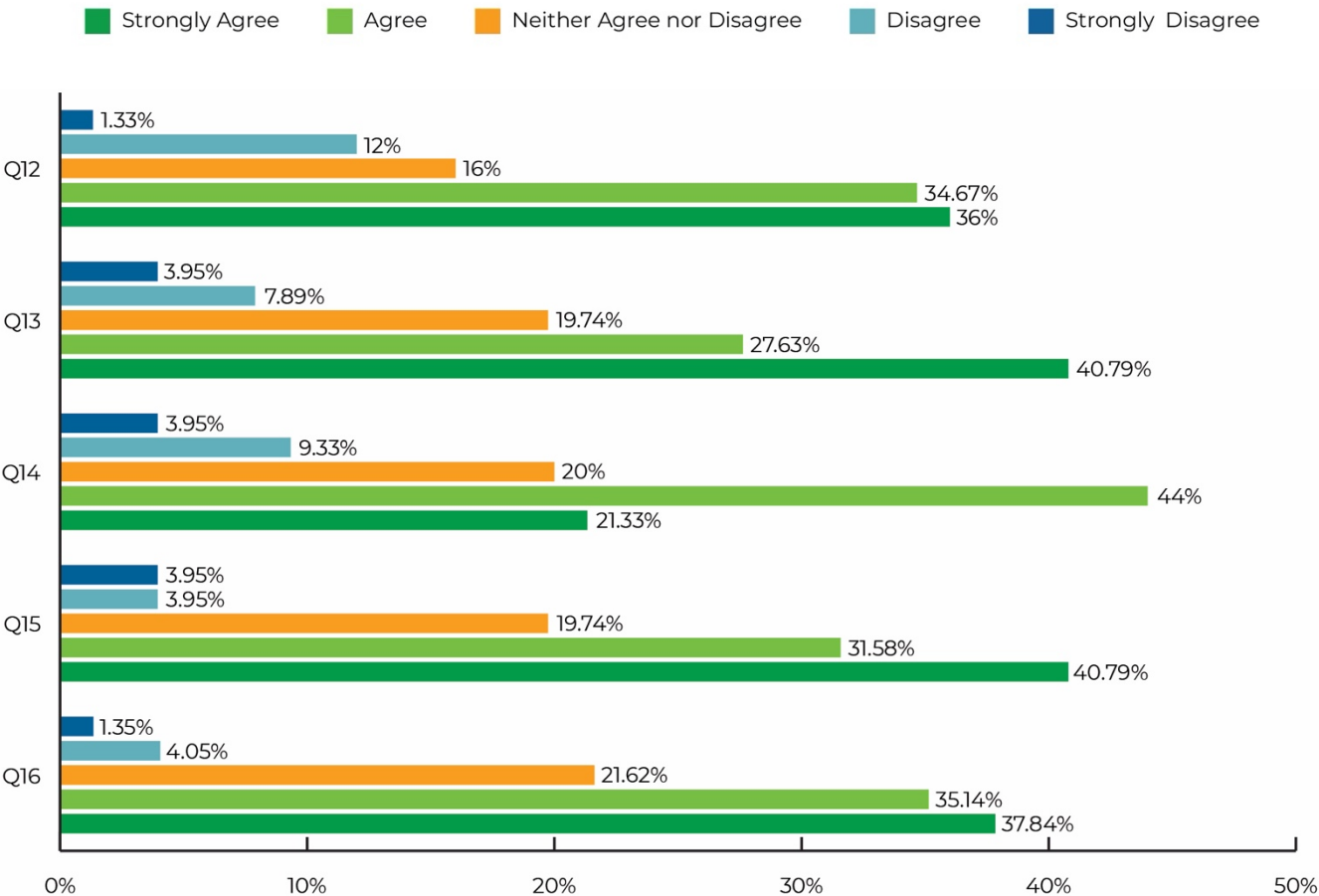
Q12: There is cultural diversity among the employees at our organization.

Q13: I can voice a contrary opinion without fear of negative consequences.

Q14: Our organization has processes in place when DEI principals are not followed.
Such as incidents of discrimination.

Q15: Perspectives like mine are included in decision making.

Q16: I want to see more cultural diversity in our organization.



We asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on statements summarizing their understanding of how to implement inclusion initiatives within their organization.

Q17: I have a clear understanding of what diversity, equity, and inclusion means.

Q18: I have a clear understanding about what welcoming and belonging means.

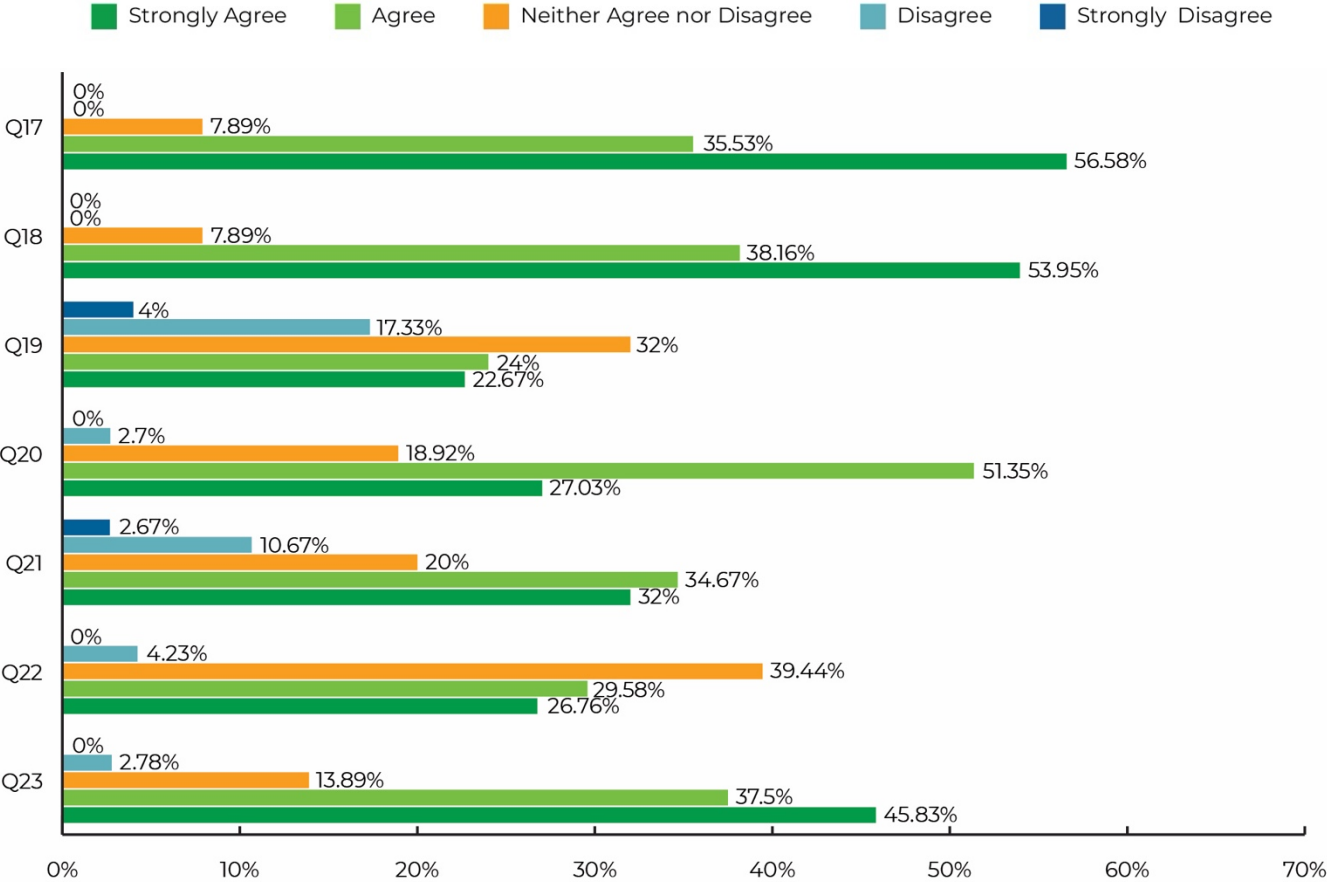
Q19: Our organization has measurable DEI objectives.

Q20: I have a clear understanding about how to create spaces that are welcome for all.

Q21: Our organization does a good job of hiring a workforce that is inclusive of different perspectives, identities, and abilities.

Q22: Our organization does a good job of discussing how to develop destinations that intentionally welcome people of all backgrounds and abilities in meetings and annual planning sessions.

Q23: Our organization creates a culture of belonging and is welcoming to all.



We asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on statements summarizing the role inclusion has in organizational promotion and community engagement efforts.

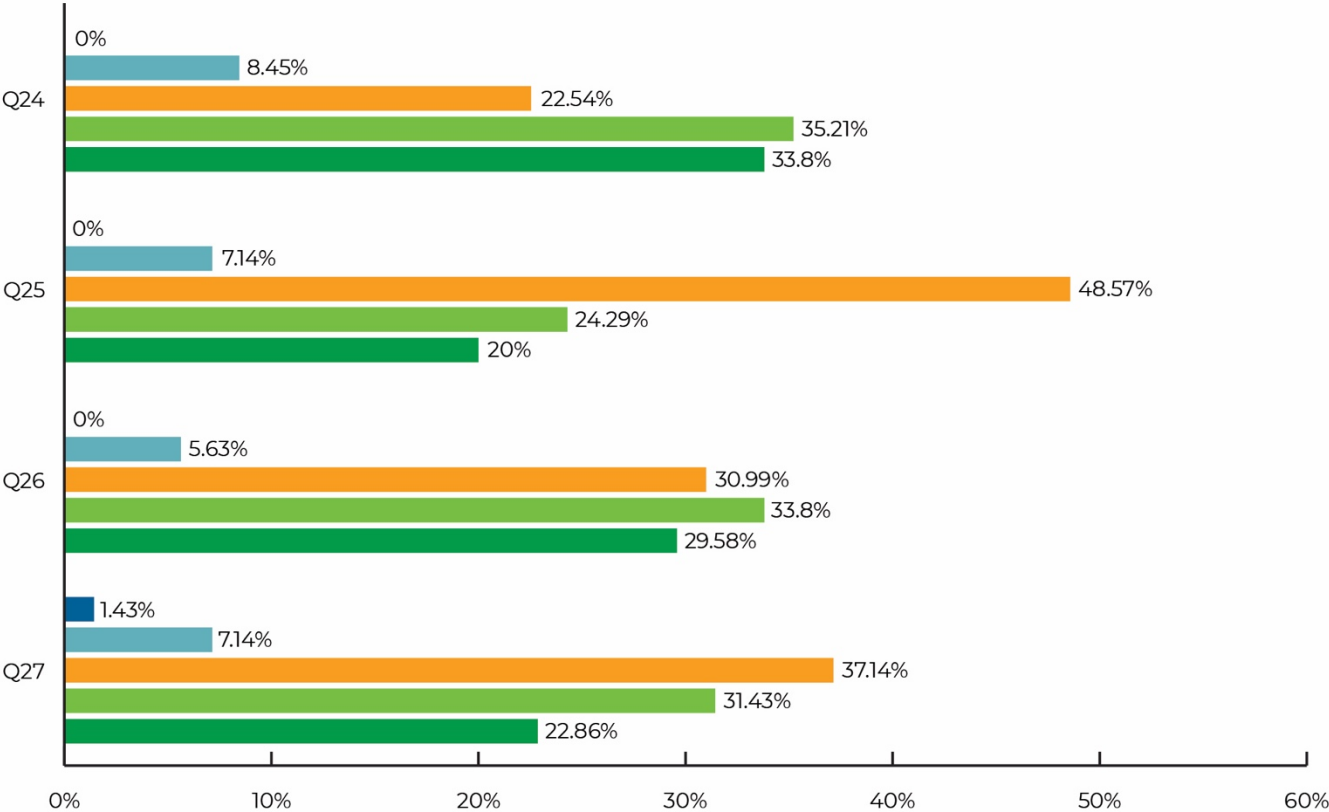
Q24: Our organization utilizes diverse representation in our marketing and media promotions.

Q25: Our organization actively seeks and uses diverse vendors when purchasing products or services.

Q26: Our organization’s external messaging demonstrates and reflects the different perspectives, identities, and abilities of our community.

Q27: Over the past year, I have witnessed significant change in my organization’s commitment to welcoming people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree



We asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on statements summarizing how industry partners have stayed accountable and benefits as part of their social inclusion efforts.

Q28: Accountability is in place for our organization if DEI goals and/or objectives are not met.

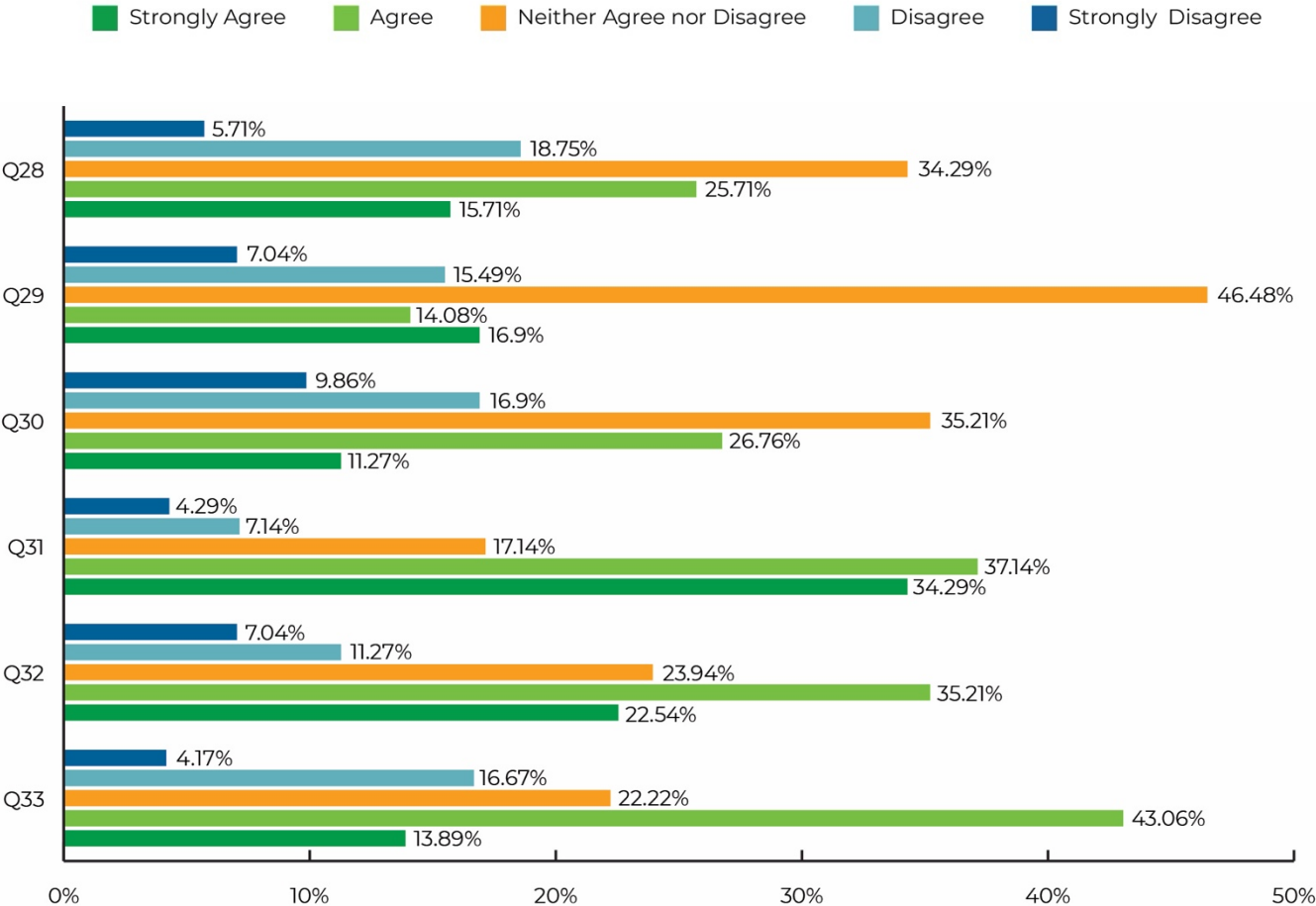
Q29: Our board of directors includes people with different backgrounds, identities, and abilities and is representative of our community.

Q30: Our organization has discussed the meaning and importance of succession planning.

Q31: Our organization benefits package directly supports mental health and wellbeing.

Q32: Our organization offers at least three months of family leave to take care of a new child (Minimum 100% paid for 90 days).

Q33: I feel my salary is compensated fairly to my peers within my organization.



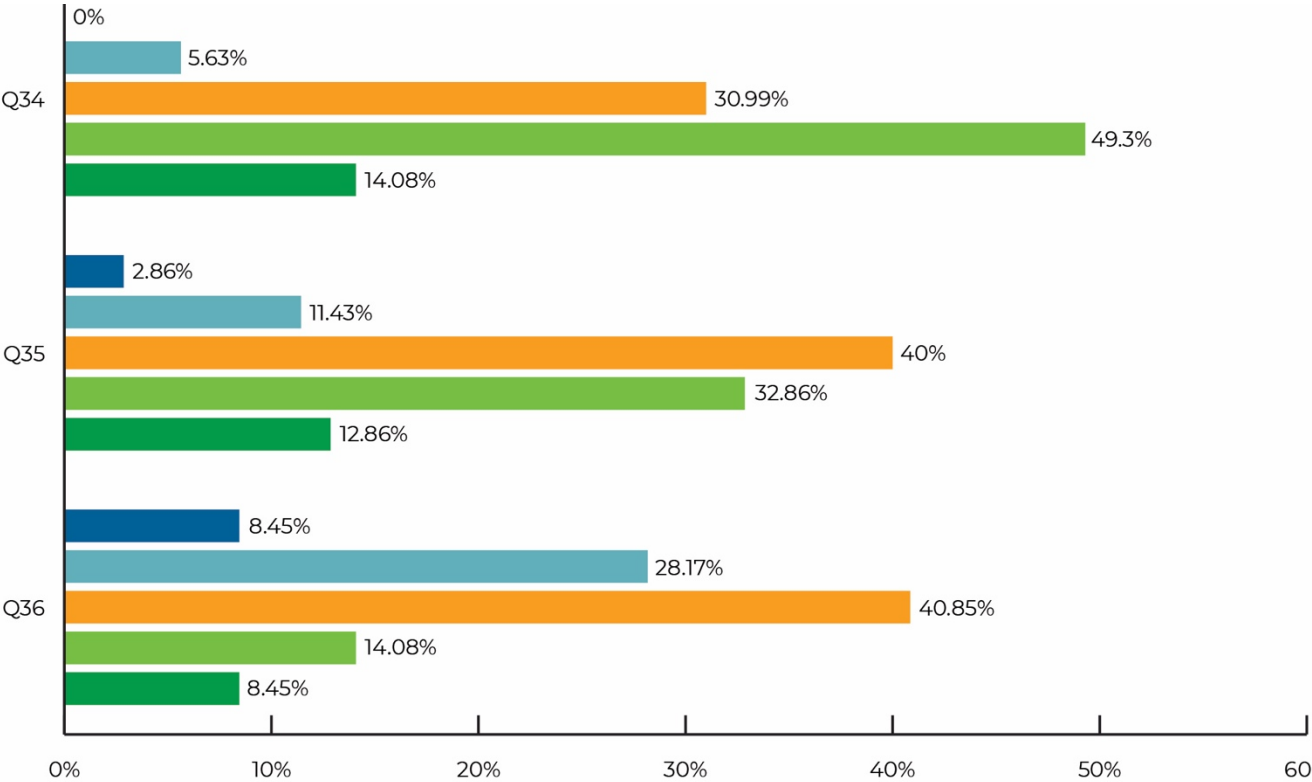
We asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on statements summarizing the role EDI fatigue plays within the industry and their organization.

Q34: Certificates and accreditations in creating welcoming environments would provide me and our organization with knowledge to create actionable strategies to welcome people of all backgrounds, perspectives, and abilities.

Q32: "DEI fatigue" is taking place in the travel industry.

Q33: "DEI fatigue" has taken place within our destination organization.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree



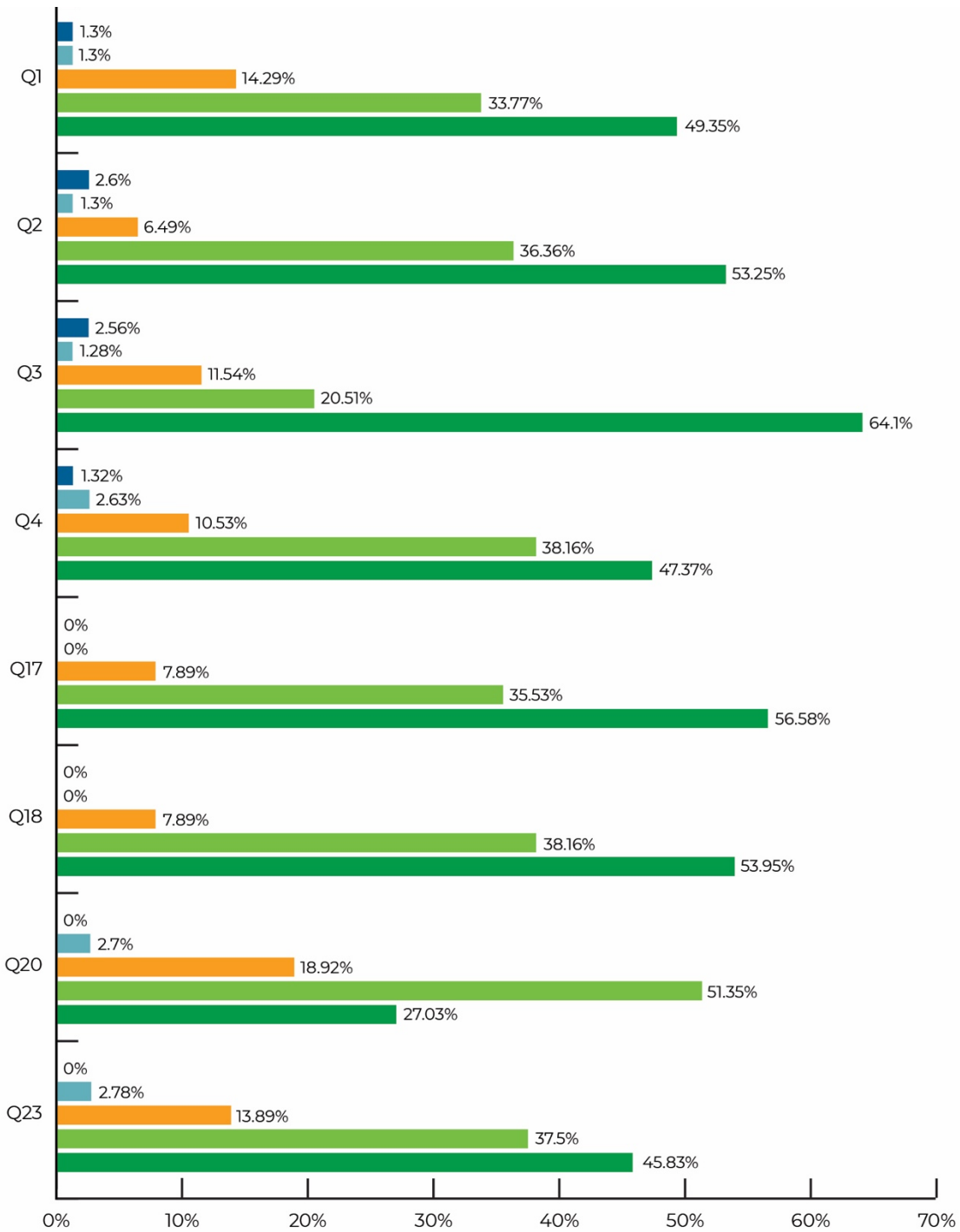
OUR HIGH SCORES

- Q1:** Our organization is committed to creating, respecting, and valuing spaces that champion welcoming and belonging for people of different backgrounds, identities, and abilities.
- Q2:** I feel included and respected within my organization.
- Q3:** I am comfortable talking about my background and cultural experiences with my colleagues.
- Q4:** Employees of different backgrounds, identities, and abilities interact well within our organization.
- Q17:** I have a clear understanding of what diversity, equity, and inclusion means.
- Q18:** I have a clear understanding about what welcoming and belonging means.
- Q20:** I have a clear understanding about how to create spaces that are welcome for all.
- Q23:** Our organization creates a culture of belonging and is welcoming to all.

INSIGHTS

A commitment to inclusion is strong, with over 50% who strongly agree that they feel included and respected within their organization. There are positive sentiments about the creation of an inclusive environment where differences are accepted, and everyone is welcome. Our respondents feel like they have a clear understanding of what welcoming, belonging, and inclusion means.

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree



WHERE WE NEED TO IMPROVE

- Q7:** Our organization has accumulated enough resources committed to achieve our DEI goals. (Such as budget, dedicated staff and community outreach).
- Q11:** Achieving DEI objectives is part of our annual performance review.
- Q19:** Our organization has measurable DEI objectives.
- Q25:** Our organization actively seeks and uses diverse vendors when purchasing products or services.
- Q28:** Accountability is in place for our organization if DEI goals and/or objectives are not met.
- Q29:** Our board of directors includes people with different backgrounds, identities, and abilities and is representative of our community.
- Q30:** Our organization has discussed the meaning and importance of succession planning.
- Q32:** Our organization offers at least three months of family leave to take care of a new child (Minimum 100% paid for 90 days)
- Q34:** Certificates and accreditations in creating welcoming environments would provide me and our organization with knowledge to create actionable strategies to welcome people of all backgrounds, perspectives, and abilities.

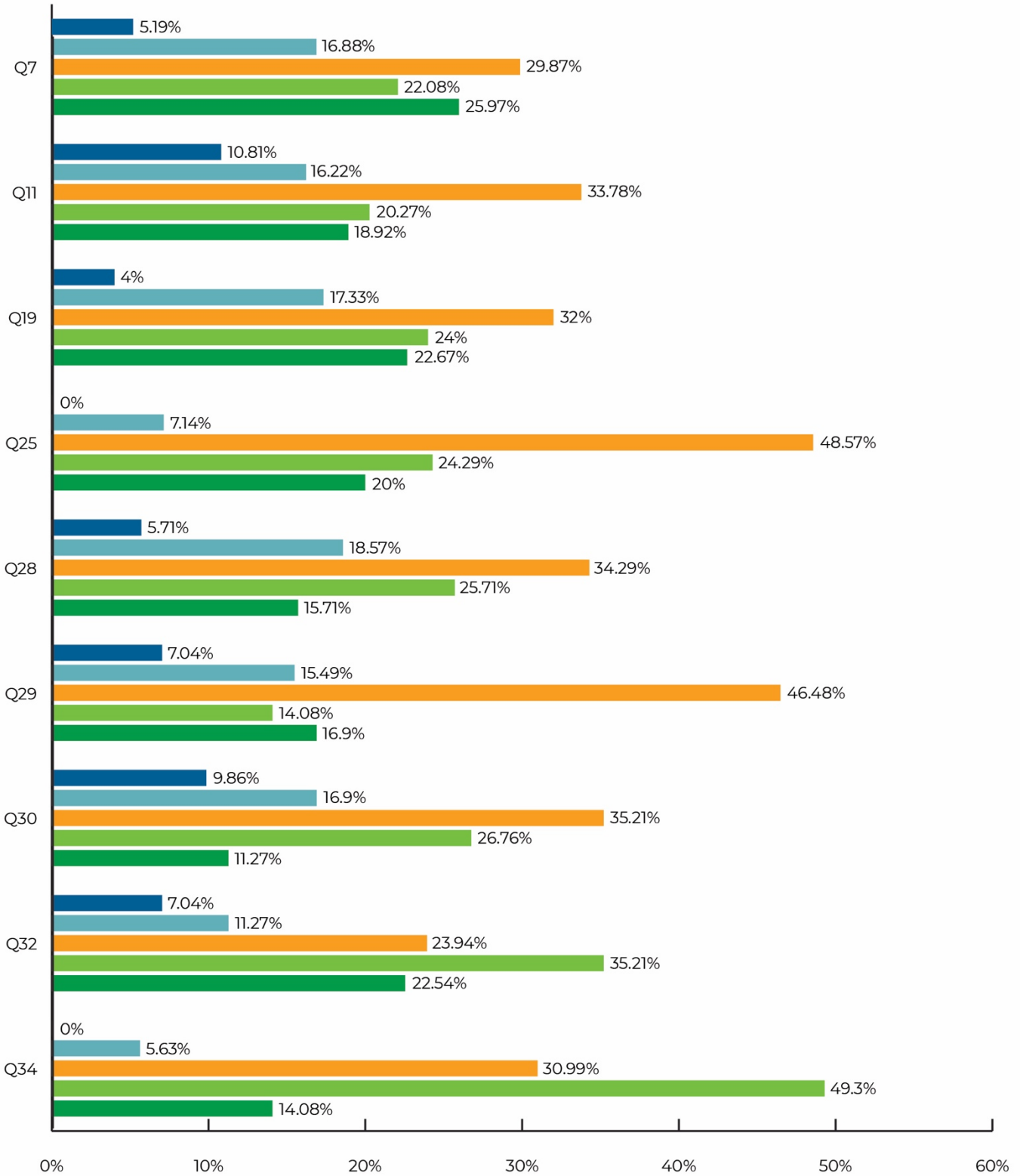
INSIGHTS

While the commitment to inclusion and cultivating a healthy workplace exists, accountability metrics and implementation of inclusive practices are two areas where industry partners are facing challenges.

The creation of tangible inclusion related goals to measure impact in diverse vendor/supplier sourcing, incorporation of inclusion related actions in performance reviews, and the selection of board members with diverse backgrounds are some examples where greater strategic planning and accountability metrics are needed.

Succession planning is another major area destination organizations need to improve upon to retain employees in this industry in addition to holding discussions that explain the organizations' compensation package inclusive of how salary is calculated.

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree





CONCLUSION

2024 Pulse: The DI Industry Partner Report

CONCLUSION

A foundation of inclusion has been established. However, similar to destinations, industry partners must define what success looks like and establish accountability mechanisms.

The findings from this inaugural study show that a strong foundation of welcoming people of all backgrounds and abilities exists internally for staff and externally for clients. Our respondents have an understanding about what inclusion, welcoming, and belonging means. Understanding the meaning and importance of inclusion is a critical part to creating actionable accountability mechanisms and related initiatives.

DEFINE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE AND TRACK YOUR PROGRESS.

Creating accountability mechanisms to track progress can be challenging but is necessary for sustainable growth. Here are some tips to get started:

- Define what success looks like in the long term, 3 to 5 years from now.
- Develop goals that you can accomplish within one year, keeping those long-term goals in mind.
- Develop realistic and measurable goals that you can act upon within a month, three months, and six months. Consider the stakeholders and collaborators you'll need to work with to achieve progress.
- Get started by placing those short-term goals on your calendar.
- Incorporate these goals into your scope of work and performance reviews.

Here are some ideas to consider when developing these actionable initiatives:

- **Humanizing the warm welcome:** We can all conceptualize the definition of a warm welcome, it's time to delve deeper; to empathize and to feel what a warm welcome truly means. Think about the experiences you had when you felt welcome. How can you capture those sentiments internally for your colleagues and externally for your clients?
- **Attracting people with diverse backgrounds and abilities:** Many studies have shown that hiring people with diverse perspectives and backgrounds contributes to innovation and growth. Go beyond the traditional forms of recruitment and take the time to visit with kids starting from age 4 through 18, along with technical and vocational schools. Youth need to be aware of and inspired by all the opportunities that exist in this industry. Many job descriptions mention equal opportunity employment; take the extra step to find ways to recruit people with different abilities and ensure you can provide the appropriate accommodation in advance.

- **Collaborate with diverse vendors/suppliers:** Small businesses may not be aware that your organization is looking to engage with them. Work with local co-working spaces, entrepreneurial hubs, and local chambers of commerce or small business administrations to connect with diverse vendors and make them aware of how to work with your organization.
- **Lean into traveler diversity:** Have discussions with your clients on how they are diversifying segments within their target audience. Consider the communities these travelers represent. Refer to industry research and DI's definition of Social Inclusion on page 4 for inspiration.

The [inclusive leadership pledge](#) (formerly the CEO EDI pledge) is another resource for leaders to get started and to be held accountable. This pledge includes six pillars that acknowledge the importance of this work, how to get started, and how to learn from industry colleagues.

Industry partners can apply our [Social Inclusion framework](#) to align with their destination clients. Facilitate conversations to best support and create accountability for them. Each person is responsible for taking action toward creating a more inclusive industry, however a supportive community exists within DI to share lessons learned and to ask for advice. As you review this data individually and with your teams, we also encourage you all to celebrate your wins and discuss tangible goals to improve your inclusion initiatives together.

Follow our inclusion work: DestinationsInternational.org/Social-Inclusion