

‘Diversity helps the bottom line:’ A roundtable on inclusive workplaces

From flexible work arrangements to mental health support, Utah businesses embrace inclusivity beyond traditional “DEI” labels.



This story appears in the September 2025 issue of Utah Business. [Subscribe](#).

Last month, Utah Business partnered with [Dentons Durham Jones Pinegar](#) (Dentons) to host a roundtable on creating inclusive workplaces. This conversation was moderated by [Sara Jones](#), founder and CEO of [InclusionPro](#).

What’s one example of an inclusive behavior or policy that’s had a meaningful impact on your workplace culture, even if it’s not labeled DEI?

[Gabriela Benitez](#) | VP, Employee Benefits & DEI Partner | [IMA](#)

An inclusive behavior or policy that IMA has adopted — and I have also seen my clients being a big cheerleader for this — is mental health. ... It's not going to be necessarily called part of DEI, it's just part of doing business.

Jason Myers | *Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion* | *CHG Healthcare*

We have core values at our company that are not just words on a wall. We live those, hardcore. And those values are interwoven into diversity and inclusion. ... We don't get a lot of [negative feedback], because we have a broad view of what inclusion means, and that's just one way that we do it. We do focus on those underrepresented groups, but we have a broader view of the activities and things that we do.

Elena Vetter | *Employment Lawyer* | *Parsons Behle & Latimer*

At Parsons, we have three different hourly tracks for associates. You can work 1,450 hours, 1,650 hours or 1,850 hours a year. It doesn't matter which of those tracks you pick; you can be up for shareholder within the same amount of time. That allows people to pick what ... is going to work with [their] life, with [their] goals, with [their] family situation, whatever it may be. That has never been labeled as DEI, but inherently is inclusive.

What new responsibilities, risks or guardrails have helped your organization strengthen its efforts from being quietly deprioritized?

Will Shiflett | *Interim Executive Director, The Mill* | *Salt Lake Community College (SLCC)*

It is now part of our culture. We can't kill it, and for the record, I'm glad we can't. Even though people are out there trying to say, "No more of this, push it down," it's too late. It's American, it's us. That's our responsibility, to make sure it continues and it doesn't die out.

Kim Grob | *Founding Partner* | *Right On*

There's this concept of "anticipatory silence." ... It's this idea that, right now, everybody just needs to lay low, stay off the record and just ride it through. But this is not a strategy that can sustain us. Businesses have a responsibility to keep communicating consistently.



From left: Randell Hoffman, Melanie Jones, Manal Hall, Sebastian de Freitas, Gabriela Benitez, Jason Myers | Photo by Mekenna Malan

How are you balancing changing regulations with your organization's core values and business objectives?

Jason Myers | Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion | CHG Healthcare

Because we were doing things the right way to begin with, and we were tied to those core values ... we didn't have to change a whole lot. ... We weren't being swayed by big political shifts.

Randell Hoffman | Co-Founder | [The Mildred Berryman Institute for LGBTIQ+ Utah History](#)

We've quickly learned how fickle it is to rely on public institutions to safeguard our stories, our artifacts, or to tell stories for us. As frustrating as it is to not have those spaces anymore, I've always been a believer that each community should be responsible for its own history. That's what we've been able to do: create a space where we can hopefully wrestle that back.

Gabriela Benitez | VP, Employee Benefits & DEI Partner | IMA

It's a challenge not only for [immigrants] coming to a new country, but also for employers. As a benefits consultant, [employers] reach out to me for culture practices about whatever they're doing or they have done with their current workforce. ... They have to create practices that everybody understands. It represents a challenge for everyone, and obviously, there is an opportunity to help those minorities.

What are your thoughts on the United States Department of Justice discouraging the use of exclusionary training programs?

Melanie Jones | CEO | Women's Leadership Institute

A few years back, I was at the helm of a women's conference for women dentists. ... I did get emails from our customers saying, "Wow, how sexist that you would exclude me. ... So my reply was, "... There will be sessions on what it's like to return to the dental practice after the birth of your baby, ... on starting your morning with yoga. If these topics are interesting to you, you are welcome to attend." And I did not have a single man sign up. ... There are times when it can seem exclusionary, but maybe it's just specialized.

Elena Vetter | Employment Lawyer | Parsons Behle & Latimer

It really is important to focus on inclusion rather than exclusion. ... I have told my clients for a long time, [regarding employee resource groups,] you want to open up the table to everyone. ... The people who are interested will show up, and the people who are not interested won't have anything to complain about.



From left: Jimmy McDonough, Andrew Bagley, Will Shiftlett | Photo by Mekenna Malan

What are the metrics you are following that signal your organization is staying aligned with inclusion and diversity principles?

Manal Hall | *Franchise & Distribution Law Partner* | [Dentons](#)

Study after study has shown that diversity helps the bottom line. ... So if you can point to that and instead of saying we're hiring because of color, you say it's helping the bottom line, then I think it's hitting the same goal.

Jimmy McDonough | *Assistant Commissioner, Higher Education Workforce Programs* | [USHE](#)

If you're doing business in your target population, it only makes sense for you to market to that demographic and for your workforce to represent that demographic. That just makes good business sense. I had an employer who was here last year, [and] it was obvious he did research because he asked me about Pioneer Day. You can't come to Utah without knowing our culture. It's the same exact thing. ... When I look at it from a workforce perspective, we are in a situation as a state where we cannot exclude any group.

Paul Lambert | *President* | [Paul Lambert Consulting](#)

We did a study recently [that] found if there's a decrease in faith-friendly climate, we see a 46 percent increase in turnover. ... For every step up in our faith-friendly climate scale, we see a 40 percent increase in willingness or desire to address company problems. We see a 30 percent increase in a desire to improve the organization structurally or otherwise ... and an 84 percent increase in a desire to defend the organization when others criticize it. ... These are just a few [statistics] that we help people within the organization use to say, "This matters."

Sebastian de Freitas | *Marketing Communications Manager, Community Relations* | [SelectHealth](#)

The new generations, millennials and Gen Z, are more value-oriented than maybe what my generation was. ... They want to go to work and look at their employer on social media and their CEO and [see] if what they are saying publicly expresses their views. So they come to work and say, "I'm proud to tell others in my social network I work for this company."

Andrew Bagley | *President* | [Boncom](#)

I've had people come into the workspace who were so concerned about creating change that they actually made it unsafe for everybody else around. ... People do their best and most creative work when they feel safe. ... What I've heard around this table is that the good work we do in this space is through the success of the business. ... It's through the work that we make change, not spending all your time trying to change the company.



From left; Sara Jones, Andrew Bagley, Will Shiftlett, Kenzie Koehle | Photo by Mekenna Malan

What advice would you give to leaders who are feeling a bit paralyzed right now?

Will Shiflett | Interim Executive Director, The Mill | SLCC

Two pieces of advice: First, always be authentic to yourself. If you're a jerk, be a jerk. If you're a good person, be a good person. Second thing ... is that people like slow change. They don't want to be forced to change quickly. ... Society evolves. Generally, it takes 20 to 30 years to make a big impact. ... Just keep going. Understand it's a long game, not a short game.

Kim Grob | Founding Partner | Right On

Keep showing up, keep telling your story and also think carefully ... about who your audience is and speak to their needs and wants, not the corporate needs and wants. ... The language you use is going to be different.

Jimmy McDonough | Assistant Commissioner, Higher Education Workforce Programs | USHE

Culture matters, and it's the vehicle to success. ... Your successful organization or your failing organization usually comes down to the culture of the organization, which is at the leadership level and comes down.

What's one action you've taken recently that felt both bold and smart in today's climate?

Paul Lambert | President | Paul Lambert Consulting

The action that we've been trying to take ... is to be principles-based. ... I think that's bold because it's a refusal to be defined by blue and red, or left and right, or the culture wars. Principles-based means we're finding the principle that's true and good, and we're acting on that. ... We're building on principle, not on something more fickle like a political ideology.

Sebastian de Freitas | Marketing Communications Manager, Community Relations | SelectHealth

On my side, it's relying on your social capital and using your social capital wisely, especially when it comes to assisting other less sophisticated organizations that may need help. All of us ... don't just have a responsibility as neighbors, as members of the community, but also [should] use that type of influence that you have in order to assist, especially communities that are going through a lot of anxiety and fear right now.



From left; Randell Hoffman, Melanie Jones, Manal Hall, Sebastian de Freitas, Gabriela Benitez, Jason Myers, Paul Lambert | Photo by Mekenna Malan

Melanie Jones | CEO | Women's Leadership Institute

There's a formula that I use pretty consistently. First of all, identify a problem. Second, express how we got to that problem with empathy. And this is a really important point: Not just landing judgment on someone for what's going on in their company, but expressing empathy for how we got here. And then proposing a solution instead of a complaint — a solution that is palatable, that seems easy and seems like a no-brainer. And with just that little formula, I've been able to move huge things at previous employers and even in the community.

Randell Hoffman | Co-Founder | The Mildred Berryman Institute for LGBTIQ+ Utah History

Something bold [was] asking the IRS under this current administration to give tax-exempt status to something with LGBTQ in the name. Feels like a trick, but we got it. ... I'm all about learning and knowing the past so that we can do better now. We've studied local LGBT organizations, even Utah LGBT history groups that have existed and dissolved, ... building that into our bylaws and practices to ensure we don't make those past mistakes.

Andrew Bagley | President | Boncom

People connect with people more than they connect with organizations. Gwyneth Paltrow has more followers than Goop, ... Elon Musk has more followers than Tesla. ... As leaders, we have to put ourselves and our thoughts out there. I've been doing that more, ... helping people understand and come to the middle and deal with really wicked problems, knowing that we're not going to get the language or solution right every single time. But we've got to come together and try to solve them rather than be so afraid of getting canceled.