A letter from Kelli Williams, chief executive officer of The BrandLab

The 2023 State of the Industry report is paramount for many reasons, but what makes it truly unique and impactful are the historical finds coupled with this year’s high BIPOC employee participation rate, which significantly exceeds industry demographics. This invigorated our work, as we were able to capture a greater number of BIPOC voices across organizations, seniority levels, and job roles, allowing for more statistically significant findings and a deeper understanding of the breadth of individual BIPOC experiences. The high BIPOC individual response rate also signals that The BrandLab is a trusted ally, creating courageous conversations to facilitate discussions with unfiltered experiences and perspectives without fear of retribution.

This report is your chance to hear from those voices.

To all respondents and readers, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to continue on your DEI&B journey. We are all in different places on our journey, and your decision to pick up this report says that you have a growth mindset and you’re interested in continuing to learn. Keep going.

This is an important report. We measure, track, and set goals against things that are important to us. Diversifying the marketing and advertising profession is important to us here at The BrandLab, and this report provides us the opportunity. I am proud of this report. And this report is imperfectly perfect. Our team, with support from Fusion Hill and the industry, did our best to hear from as many professionals as possible. We listened to the voices of everyone working in this profession, captured both quantitative and qualitative results, and explored the shared differences in experiences between professionals based on race and/or ethnicity. (Yes, there were also differences by gender and additional self-identifiers.) Then we pulled out what we believed to be the most critical findings and the highest areas of opportunity for the individuals we serve here at The BrandLab.

We are reporting on findings with a lens on BIPOC and White respondents. BIPOC is a term I don’t personally use to self-identify. However, for this report, combining the responses of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Brown, AAPI, and Hispanic/Latinx) allowed us to provide key themes in a digestible summary. Please offer us grace on these generalizations.

We invite all readers to listen to the voices of the 1,000+ respondents who have provided their insights. These are the experiences and opinions of you, your leaders, your peers, and your employees. To BIPOC readers, we thank you for your trust in The BrandLab as an ally and partner, bringing your experiences and voices to the industry. We see you. We hear you. We are here for you. Together, we will fulfill our vision of people of color launching and sustaining careers in workplaces of inclusivity and belonging.

The BrandLab is here to support you and your organization.
SOTI@thebrandlab.org
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**The State of the Industry Report**

Equity serves as the foundation of our work, and we know just how important it is to have benchmarks so we can track progress over time. The State of the Industry report is designed to help establish those benchmarks, measuring demographic and attitudinal changes related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging across the marketing and advertising industry.

This report gathers data via the State of the Industry survey primarily within the Midwest, focusing on the Twin Cities, Kansas City, and Milwaukee. For the report’s fourth iteration in nine years, our partners at Fusion Hill analyzed the data to uncover insights and collaborated with The BrandLab in creating this report.

**About The BrandLab**

The BrandLab introduces, guides, and prepares young people of color (ages 15–25) for successful careers in marketing and advertising.

Our mission is to change the face and voice of the marketing and advertising industry. This mission comes to life through our four pillars: equity, exposure, access, and opportunity. We use these pillars as building blocks to support the marketing and advertising profession and the youth we serve.

**Glossary**

**DEI&B** — Diversity, equity, inclusion & belonging.

**BIPOC** — Black, Indigenous, People of Color. For this report, BIPOC includes individuals who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, Brown, AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander), and Hispanic/Latinx.

**The industry** — People working in and around the marketing and advertising profession, either in advertising agencies or corporate marketing departments.

**White** — For this report, “White” includes individuals who self-identified in the survey only as White.
INTRODUCTION

Individual life experiences impact all of us and how we see the world. Each of our unique races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences influences our paradigm and how we show up, how we view the world, and the impact the world has on us.
In the spring of 2020, we all had a few shared experiences. We were living through a health pandemic, and many of us were at home with regular media check-ins. During that same time frame, Ahmaud Arbery was fatally shot while out for a run, and the video footage sparked nationwide outrage when it was released just weeks before the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. These events and many others like them impacted each of us and our communities differently. White and BIPOC individuals brought different paradigms to how they viewed such events, based on their own lived experiences.

Unfortunately, neither of these murders was a “first”; however, the national lockdown gave the events a larger captive audience, resulting in a new racial awakening. Since then, discussion of racial inequity has expanded, and, likely, individuals and organizations in our industry have grown in understanding and acknowledging the deep racial disparities facing America. Some employees demanded that their organizations make DEI&B a priority, and in other cases the public brought pressure on organizations to change. Overall, there has been progress in organizations’ desire to continue DEI&B initiatives and conversations, and these efforts should be encouraged and celebrated.

When we listen to the voices of BIPOC respondents, we continue to hear very different lived experiences from those of White respondents.

But when we look at the demographic data since 2016, it is nearly unchanged. And when we look at the survey responses against past years, they too are nearly unchanged. When we listen to the voices of BIPOC respondents, we continue to hear very different lived experiences from those of White respondents. And when we ask respondents about their organizations, we continue to hear a lack of authenticity in discussing DEI&B with each other, management, and clients.
What the 2023 State of the Industry report shows us is that there is still a gap between intent and impact. There is still significant room for improvement in creating an industry that is as diverse as the population it markets to and creating organizations where leadership represents the staff. Because, as we know, policy and decisions that shape culture and progress are positioned at the top.

The report also shows us that we have an opportunity as an industry to reevaluate and recommit to DEI&B initiatives and goals that fundamentally shift the experience of BIPOC employees and translate to authentic diversification.

In this report, you’ll hear the voice of the new majority. We hope the report serves as a tool to help you make not just movement, but progress. And we hope the 2025 State of the Industry report reflects that impact.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the pages that follow, we share the data and the voices behind the numbers, including those of BIPOC individuals across organizations, seniority levels, and job roles. We encourage you to take the time to read, ponder, and ask yourself what you can do to help move the industry forward. And rest assured, we wrap up the report with action items too. Keep reading for ideas on how you can do more in your continued efforts along this journey.

AS YOU WORK TO DIGEST THIS REPORT, FOCUS ON THESE FIVE KEY FINDINGS:

1. There is still a gap between the positive intent of the organization and the real impact on all employees, with a focus on BIPOC employees.

2. The marketing and advertising industry is not nearly as diverse as the general population. While the U.S. as a whole is becoming increasingly more diverse, the industry has largely stagnated.

3. BIPOC and White employees have very different lived experiences in the workplace. Because this lived experience is different, we are not creating inclusive environments.

4. The lack of BIPOC representation in leadership has a drastic impact on workplace culture. This perpetuates the difference in lived experiences at work.

5. The difference in lived experiences of BIPOC employees and the slow growth in diversity in the workforce weakens the industry’s ability to create work that represents the consumer population.

The BrandLab is here to support you and your organization — SOTI@thebrandlab.org.
DEMOGRAPHICS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SEEN

While we are, of course, energized to see an increase in BIPOC participation in the survey, the data shows that representation within the marketing and advertising industry itself hasn’t improved much. Over the last six years, there’s been only minor growth in the percentage of BIPOC employees. In fact, representation remains 8%–10% lower than that of the employable population.

DIVERSE VOICES

Respondents presented a wide range of race, gender, and sexual orientation identities and current positions (entry level to C-suite). For more details on the respondent breakdown, please check out page 32.
Percent of employees who identify as BIPOC

Advertising and marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWIN CITIES</th>
<th>MILWAUKEE</th>
<th>KANSAS CITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%2022</td>
<td>%2020</td>
<td>%2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>+0.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>+1.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>+1.6%</strong></td>
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All industries

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<tr>
<td>%2022</td>
<td>%2020</td>
<td>%2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>+2.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>+1.4%</strong></td>
<td><strong>+1%</strong></td>
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</table>

Percent of total population that identifies as BIPOC

<table>
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<th>TWIN CITIES</th>
<th>MILWAUKEE</th>
<th>KANSAS CITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%2022</td>
<td>%2020</td>
<td>%2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note on data sources:
The above employment data (blue and red visuals above) was pulled from the national Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) 2022 data set. The specific geographies for each market's DEED data are as follows: Minneapolis-St. Paul, Milwaukee-Waukesha, and Kansas City (Missouri only). The total population demographic data (orange visuals above) utilized 2021 and 2022 U.S. Census Bureau data from datausa.io aggregator tool to mirror the specific geographies of the national DEED data.
As we view these numbers, it’s important to note that diversity is disproportionately concentrated in lower-seniority positions. This lack of significant BIPOC growth within the industry — and within leadership positions, in particular — is disheartening considering the amount of attention given to the issue and despite the overwhelming existence of DEI&B policies, employee resource groups, and teams. Most respondents said their organization has only been “moderately” effective at diversifying its workforce. The good news, however, is that respondents feel more can be done. And respondents believe it should be.

Of both White and BIPOC respondents say that creating a diverse workplace is either extremely or very important.

94%

BIPOC respondents* say it’s “extremely important,” signaling a greater feeling of urgency/importance on the issue.

69% BIPOC
58% White

11% more

*Because we did not ask participants to share their age, we cannot be certain that age is not a compounding factor.
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING HEARD
NOT FEELING VALUED AND SUPPORTED

While the numbers may be an important place to start, any discussion of DEI&B must go far beyond demographics and consider lived experiences. Overall, BIPOC respondents feel less supported and valued than their White colleagues do.

The impact of feeling less valued — and even held back — by their identity has made many BIPOC respondents hesitant to bring their authentic selves to work. Not feeling valued can also silence BIPOC voices.

“Being ‘the only’ person of color on a team can bring certain challenges, so it’s not always easy to bring your whole self to work when that whole self looks and feels so different than everyone around you.”
—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

Strongly agree that they feel comfortable being their whole selves at work and authentically voicing their opinions and sharing their perspectives

<table>
<thead>
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<th>BIPOC</th>
<th>White</th>
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<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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Across seniority levels, BIPOC respondents are more likely to feel their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background have prevented them from thriving in their organization.
Sometimes imposter syndrome sets in, and the majority of my team is predominantly White, so homogeneous thinking can [happen]/has happened. So a combination of these two things can make me feel uncomfortable to be my full self at work (especially in a virtual setting).”

—BIPOC participant (Entry level)

Organizations must consider the experience their employees are having outside of the four walls of the workplace. Employees bring that experience to work with them every day, especially employees of color that may be grappling with something as basic as their physical safety in the city where they live and work. As a result, direct managers must be equipped to acknowledge the lived experience of their team members, and the organization must be prepared to support employees in ways it may not have deemed relevant before.”

—Tiffani Daniels, managing director, Minnesota Business Coalition for Racial Equity
NOT FEELING COMFORTABLE WITH DEI&B CONVERSATIONS

At the same time BIPOC respondents are experiencing the negative and isolating results of not feeling valued or welcome, they are tasked with fixing the problem — or at least finding a way to fit in. Fitting in may require BIPOC respondents to acclimate or code-switch to avoid standing out.

In a predominantly White culture/environment, most BIPOC employees work with team members of a different race/ethnicity. This places greater emotional labor on BIPOC employees than on their White peers, leaders, and clients across all interactions.

BIPOC respondents carry a greater burden in DEI&B conversations with peers, management, and clients. Yet BIPOC respondents feel less comfortable having those conversations with co-workers than their White colleagues do.

While the numbers look high when we include “somewhat agree,” when we focus just on “strongly agree”, less than half of both White and BIPOC respondents say they’re able to have open conversations. This may signal that, regardless of race, respondents do not have strong confidence about having DEI&B conversations with people from races/ethnicities different from their own.
Along with not feeling comfortable having these conversations, the majority of both BIPOC and White respondents do not feel comfortable bringing less popular ideas to their teams.

While having conversations with colleagues around DEI&B is difficult, having those same conversations with management brings even bigger discomfort. 16% of BIPOC respondents strongly or somewhat disagree that they are able to have these difficult conversations, compared to 6% of White respondents. On the flip side, less than half of both White and BIPOC respondents strongly agree that they can have these conversations openly with management, which may signal a broader fear of communicating honestly.

I’m uncomfortable expressing disagreement because my colleagues may not grasp the systemic barriers faced by people of color, requiring extensive explanation and potential resistance."

—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)  

There’s always the fear of repercussions or not speaking in a way that leadership wants to hear; people mishearing or misconstruing your words."

—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

The biggest pain point is there is no acknowledgment of the importance of having [DEI&B] within the company. I would love for people at my workplace to be discussing and making others in the organization who may not understand the importance be exposed to it.”

—BIPOC participant (Entry level)
Within an industry that markets to people of all races, ethnicities, genders, ages, abilities, and backgrounds, representation is essential, and having discussions about DEI&B simply makes sense — not just because it’s the right thing to do but also because it affects clients’ bottom line.

Yet fewer than half of employees strongly agree that they’d feel supported by their organization if they raised concerns around client work that does not value DEI&B.

These numbers may, again, signal a broader fear of communicating honestly and openly with management.

The lack of comfort in bringing up DEI&B concerns in client work and internally with teams, along with the fact that the industry is significantly less diverse than the general population, impacts our industry’s ability (or inability) to produce outputs that represent the diverse populations we serve.

Only 28% of respondents strongly agree that their organization creates products and services that represent and/or reflect the diverse world we live in.

I have flagged client concerns regarding how they talk about diverse individuals and how they treat people, and nothing has been done about it other than placating me and saying they acknowledge my feelings, but no action was taken to remedy the situations.”

—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

“Most clients and client teams are still very much homogeneous and majority White, which sometimes makes me feel as if I need to assimilate and be less authentic.”

—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)
ORGANIZATIONAL PROGRESS

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSTANT RECOMMITMENT

THE INTENT FOR DEI&B PROGRESS EXISTS

As we noted in the introduction, a significant gap remains between intent and impact. Particularly over the past few years, we’ve seen good intent demonstrated with the creation and growth of DEI initiatives, but today we get to read and learn about what the impact has been.
But are these programs making an impact? The answer often depends on whom we ask — with differences by race and seniority level.

When asked if their organization has goals and measurements in place to track progress on DEI&B, lower-level employees are less likely to strongly agree. This may be due to a lack of communication, and companies may need to do a better job of telling all staff, not just those at director level and above, about DEI&B goals and how progress is tracked.

DEI is discussed on a regular basis and evolves in how we approach work, hiring, and ensuring everyone has a voice. The biggest thing for me is that it has become a norm in our workplace, so conversations around DEI are more natural and don’t feel forced or awkward.”

—BIPOC participant (Senior level)
INITIATIVES VARY IN SOPHISTICATION

The most commonly selected examples of DEI&B initiatives include DEI trainings, employee resource groups (ERGs), and unbiased hiring practices.

The least commonly selected examples tend to require more organizational change and financial commitment, such as including DEI&B activities as part of performance reviews and supporting wage equity.

Every month during our town halls, we have an ‘inclusion contact’ — this gives someone the platform to speak about DEI topics. This generally ties to monthly themes (Black History Month, Asian Pacific Islander Month, Pride, etc.), but each one is great. They are personal experiences from employees. They share stories that are vulnerable, authentic, and eye-opening. I really love that we do this as it helps build connections with those who come from different backgrounds or have varying experiences.” —BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

The biggest challenge is putting teeth behind the policies and establishing measurable goals.” —BIPOC participant (Executive level/C-suite)

I do think the actions don’t back up the words. It’s still very difficult to get budget committed to the promises made. Very minimal pro/low bono work focused on BIPOC businesses/community organizations, have to scramble for any training or development budget, etc.” —BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

Our leadership has been much more transparent about things like salary administration, diverse candidate hiring practices, staff promotion planning process, etc. These have all been good additions.” —White participant (Executive level/C-suite)
Respondents provided additional examples of initiatives to support DEI&B as well, including the creation of DEI councils and task forces, transparent goal setting, charitable donations, third-party vendor DEI metrics, and more.

“We now have a dedicated Culture Leadership Team that works with executive leaders to shape DEI&B at our agency. We have established six commitments to advance DEI&B, including elevating BIPOC talent, training managers, hiring representative talent, reflecting DEI&B in our work, community support, and equipping our ERGs with allyship training and resources.”
—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

Creating an environment where all employees belong and thrive does not happen overnight. It requires a great amount of intentionality and accountability at all levels: top down, down up, and specifically the frozen middle. In addition, there needs to be multiple touchpoints, from prospective to tenured employee, to ensure employees feel seen and belong from every phase of their employee experience. Many companies are not there yet; but upon realizing this truth, a significant shift can happen.”
—Delphanie Daniels, The BrandLab board member, strategic community engagement director at Best Buy Co., Inc.

One example is a recent presentation our DEI Council gave to the entire company that shared aggregate concerns on the state of DEI at the company, and then shared some concrete suggestions by discipline on areas for improvement. This was presented by individuals from across the company and across different levels and gave us some clear, concise, measurable goals to work towards going forward as an organization.”
—White participant (Senior level)
IMPACT DOESN’T NECESSARILY MATCH INTENT

While there is acknowledgment of general progress, there are signs that respondents see a slight decrease in progress and commitment since 2020. Many employees are starting to question leadership’s continued commitment. Only 63% of respondents strongly or somewhat agree that since the racial awakening in 2020, their organization shifted existing policies to reflect an increased commitment to DEI&B practices.

“It’s worth noting that the great resignation made it more difficult to measure progress over time, as only 47% of respondents have been in their current role for more than three years. That said, we chose to not remove respondents who have been at their role for less than three years, as they still likely have insight into progress based on discussions with peers/management. They may also bring insight from progress at their previous organization.”

“[Since the racial awakening in 2020], there is a little bit more flexibility around showing up in the way you want to show up, but it is [still] very much White corporate culture.”
—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

“Although we are committed to DEI&B strategies and action, and believe it’s a business-critical effort, we remain very White, and likely culturally similar.”
—White participant (Executive level/C-suite)
Looking back at the commitment companies expressed three years ago — in the midst of racial awakening — many respondents say DEI&B practices have lost steam. Only 44% of respondents strongly or somewhat agree that they can identify the same level of commitment to DEI&B practices today as they saw in 2020.

When asked how they think their organization is doing compared to other organizations in terms of workplace diversity, respondents’ “much better” responses have fallen 9% since 2020. Interestingly, the number of BIPOC respondents who say that their organization is doing “much better” is 7% higher than that of White respondents. This likely signals a self-selection bias to find workplaces that are making progress in DEI&B.

Also interesting, executives/C-suite are more likely to respond with “somewhat worse” by a statistically significant rate. This could suggest they are holding themselves to a new higher standard as they see other organizations ramp up their efforts.

“We have had a lot of ebbs and flows in our inclusion work the past three years. We have had moments that demonstrate great progress and change, and other times where one might wonder if we have changed any of our DEI practices at all.”

—BIPOC participant (Director level)

“We’ve focused more on creating programming, safe spaces for belonging, and developing hiring initiatives than [on] creating policies around DEI&B.”

—White participant (Executive level/C-suite)
MIXED PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGEMENT’S COMMITMENT TO DEI&B

Are the leaders of organizations truly committed to advancing DEI&B at their workplaces? Again, the answers break down along racial and job-level lines.

Part of the disconnect by seniority may be attributed to poor communication practices and a lack of transparency on behalf of leadership teams. When asked if their organization shares information with its employees about internal progress made on DEI&B practices and procedures, employees lower in seniority exhibit a lower percentage of “Agree” responses.
We have some great leadership, but we also have a few that have not stepped up and fully participated. And that is a disappointment.”
—White participant (Senior level)

While not specific to DEI, there is a dichotomy between our leadership and board and the views of younger people in the organization on social issues and business’s role in these conversations. As such, it creates a hesitancy amongst employees to act or voice their opinions on these topics. This is not from fear of reprisal or bad intent. It is simply the conservative nature of the company and general lack of energy, action, and conversation about the topic as a business priority.”
—White participant (Mid-level)

[Management needs to practice] what they preach. They promised wage transparency by role nearly a year ago and that hasn’t happened. They said they would commit to increased budgets for trainings/development, but still [there's] constant pushback when opportunities are suggested.”
—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

While these responses tell a strong story, it’s also possible that the bar with which we measure progress, the number of voices that are willing to share, and our expectations of leadership today are higher than they were prior to 2020. However, if that is a factor, it tells us that we as an industry must now push further into new DEI&B practices and goals.

The BrandLab is here to support you and your organization — SOTI@thebrandlab.org.
RECOMMENDATIONS/REFLECTIONS

The BrandLab aims to elevate the voices of people who don’t always feel safe sharing their truths. We ask that you listen, reflect, and believe the experiences shared in this report. We encourage individuals and organizations to reflect, discuss, live in discomfort, and plan forward with optimism.
Our team is here to provide next-step direction and support through this research by facilitating courageous conversations within our Fearless workshops and our annual Fearless Conference, but we cannot provide all the answers or do the work for you or your organization. Instead, we are here to partner with you, wherever you are on the journey. Keep in mind that a DEI&B journey involves traveling from one place to another without a final destination.

The following calls to action are recommendations to consider based on key insights. We recognize that these recommendations are not a one-size-fits-all answer, but we are hopeful that all readers find inspiration and action through them. We encourage you to consider what building from a place of equity could look like and the benefits of doing so.

Across all of these recommendations, keep in mind that transparency, accountability, and authenticity are critical to success. The three must work in tandem to ensure that intent meets true impact.
There is still a gap between the positive intent of the organization and the real impact on all employees, with a focus on BIPOC employees.

The marketing and advertising industry is not nearly as diverse as the general population. While the U.S. as a whole is becoming increasingly more diverse, the industry has largely stagnated.

THOUGHT STARTERS
• What processes does your organization have in place for tracking how your DEI&B efforts are making a difference?
• What are your recruitment strategies for attracting diverse talent?
• Does your organization have any measurable goals in place for hiring diverse talent?

CALLS TO ACTION
• Consider crafting a DEI&B strategic framework for your organization where all DEI&B goals are recorded. Include responsible parties, timelines, measurable metrics for success, resources required, etc.
• Ensure that all DEI&B efforts are shared with staff on a regular basis for greater transparency, accountability, and idea sharing.

• Create and track goals toward hiring and retaining BIPOC talent, and don’t forget to share progress (good and bad) regularly with staff to ensure transparency and accountability.
• Evaluate your hiring process with a DEI&B lens to ensure job that descriptions, interview questions, and where you are looking for candidates set you up to find and hire diverse talent.

Did you know? The BrandLab has a free self-service job board and a list of diverse job posting resources.

Representation is what is most important to inspire the participation and engagement of all communities in our sector. For true diversity, equity, and inclusion to come to life and for our unique life experiences to be part of the stories we tell, we need true authentic representation.”

—Lorenz Esguerra, The BrandLab board member, fractional C-level leader
BIPOC and White employees have very different lived experiences in the workplace. Workplaces have much room to grow in becoming truly inclusive environments.

THOUGHT STARTERS

- What is the day-to-day lived experience of BIPOC employees in your workplace? What are the commonalities and opportunities to create a better experience?
- To our BIPOC readers: How do you go about identifying better workplace fit to help protect against future trauma?
- To our BIPOC readers: Is there room for you to voice your perspective at work, even if it doesn’t fit in with that of your team or leadership?

CALLS TO ACTION

- Provide space for people to share their experiences without retribution.
- Assess how your workplace or team has been successful or unsuccessful at creating a sense of belonging.
- Offer DEI&B trainings for employees and leadership.
- To our BIPOC readers: Identify the places and spaces where you can share how things both good and bad are impacting you. And remember, it is not your job to speak for all BIPOC cultures.

Did you know? The BrandLab offers a series of Fearless workshops to help foster DEI&B within organizations.

The lack of BIPOC representation in leadership has a drastic impact on workplace culture. This perpetuates the difference in lived experiences at work.

THOUGHT STARTERS

- What is the experience of BIPOC leaders? How do they rise within your organization? Are there fallout points to reaching leadership levels?
- How does your succession planning process reflect your values and commitment to DEI&B?

CALLS TO ACTION

- To leaders: Be intentional in visibly living out your mission and values in a way your employees can observe.
- Create a strategic goal and/or task force with dedicated resources for increasing diversity in leadership positions.
- Ensure your organization is measuring and tracking BIPOC employee retention and promotion rates.
- Conduct pay equity studies to reduce any salary disparities among employees based on race, gender, and other factors.
The difference in lived experiences of BIPOC employees and the slow growth in diversity in the workforce weaken the industry’s ability to create work that represents the consumer population.

THOUGHT STARTERS
- What does your current employee population reflect?

CALL TO ACTION
- Understand and share with your team and clients the impact and importance of having diverse perspectives not only on the team but also on the work.

In reading this report, I feel both urgency for change and hope for the future. While I’m disappointed by how slowly we are moving the needle in terms of increasing the percentage of BIPOC talent in our workforce, I realize we are playing a long game and that changing an industry that has been White dominated for 100 years takes time. The urgency I feel is in creating equitable cultures where BIPOC talent feels a true sense of belonging. To me that means, now more than ever, we need to double our efforts in DEI&B training so that the burden does not fall to BIPOC employees.”
—Sara Buck, EVP, partner experience, Barkley

PLEASE JOIN US IN THIS WORK — WE CAN DO IT TOGETHER BY TAKING THREE STEPS.

STEP ONE:
Dive into the report to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of our industry.

STEP TWO:
Reflect on the actions you, your organization, or your team can take to drive meaningful change.

STEP THREE:
Put those reflections into purposeful action.

Looking for guidance and support on next steps? The BrandLab is here to assist you every step of the journey. Get in touch — SOTI@thebrandlab.org.
METHODOLOGY

The research design for this State of the Industry report consisted of an online survey with a mix of closed-ended and open-ended demographic and attitudinal questions. The survey was sent by The BrandLab to industry partners and individuals who engage with the organization. The survey was open May 4–June 2, 2023.
For this report, we sought participation from professionals and stakeholders across the industry. While more than 1,000 people responded, we have included data from only those who completed the entire survey.

- **730 COMPLETE RESPONSES**
- **677 Non-HR respondents**
- **53 HR respondents who completed a set of additional firmographic questions**

**State of the Industry**

- Minnesota: 394
- Kansas/Missouri: 189
- Wisconsin: 59
- Other locations: 88
SURVEY PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS*

As part of the overall analysis, in addition to race, ethnicity, and leadership level, we also captured gender and sexual orientation demographic information. We did not use these demographic categories within the report analysis but share the categorization results, as these are essential self-identification factors.

Race/Ethnicity

- **BIPOC**: 168**
- **White**: 511
- 3 Native American/Indigenous
- 29 Hispanic/Latinx
- 44 Multi-racial***
- 52 African/Black
- 40 Asian/Pacific Islander

Leadership level

- Intern: 18
- Entry level: 78
- Mid-level: 197
- Senior level: 127
- Director level: 166
- Executive level/C-suite: 93
- Owner/founder: 32

*Because some respondents chose not to answer these questions, the numbers shown do not total 730.
**Respondents who selected any category other than or in addition to “White.”
***Respondents who selected “Multi-racial,” or multiple categories, including “White” plus another category.
Limitations:
While this study aimed to provide a comprehensive State of the Industry report, it has some limitations. The reliance on self-reported data might be subject to response bias.
A NOTE ON DEMOGRAPHICS

Prior to 2020, the survey polled only HR representatives, so we can only anecdotally compare the 2023 BIPOC representation to pre-2020 surveys. However, the trend of increasing BIPOC representation does appear to be speeding up.
The BrandLab’s 2023 survey population was actually more racially diverse than both the advertising industry and the total employment base.

We hypothesize this could be a self-selection bias on two fronts:

1. Companies that prioritize DEI&B may be more likely to work with The BrandLab.
2. BIPOC employees may be more likely to complete a survey about DEI&B.

THE BRANDLAB PILLARS

The following visual shows how our pillars and the corresponding programming work together to achieve our mission. When we are successful, we can fulfill our vision of people of color launching and sustaining careers in workplaces of inclusivity and belonging.
ADDITIONAL QUOTES

“We created a monthly newsletter that included tidbits of info regarding timely topics such as reproductive rights, LGBTQ issues, turmoil in other countries, etc. The newsletter was widely accepted and read by agency employees, but we were discouraged from sharing this newsletter with clients to avoid any conflict.”
—BIPOC participant (Entry level)

“We have made several public commitments to DEI: we have strengthened our community involvement strategy; we have created a DEI task force; we have created widespread learning programs centered on allyship; [and] we have adopted new healthcare benefits around covered transportation for gender-affirming care and to receive abortions.”
—White participant (Entry level)

“Overall, I think my organization is taking great steps in creating a safe DEI environment where people with all perspectives can communicate freely.”
—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

“We had a number of programs and practices to support DEI in place, which were maturing. The murder of George Floyd accelerated the work that was in progress.”
—White participant (Executive level/C-suite)

“We feature [DEI&B] talks regularly in our weekly company-wide meeting, which I love. But I wish we did more action-based activities now and then.”
—BIPOC participant (Entry level)

“We experienced the introduction of [a scholarship] in partnership with The BrandLab, women (and specifically diverse women) entering into creative director roles, transparency in DEI efforts and results, more educational programming, etc.”
—BIPOC participant (Senior level)
I feel much more content with our DEI efforts/policies, [am] excited about the talented staff we’ve procured, and am enjoying the programming frequency. I know we need to continue to address the microaggressions that our Black employees face and work toward creating a culture that truly accepts and celebrates our differences.”
—White participant (Senior level)

I would love to see better performance management and accountability; establishing clear performance expectations, providing meaningful feedback, and holding employees accountable for their work can be challenging for organizations. Ensuring fairness and objectivity in performance evaluations, aligning individual goals with organizational objectives, and providing appropriate training and development opportunities can pose difficulties.”
—BIPOC participant (Owner/founder)

Executive leaders do seem to care a lot, but that doesn’t seem to make its way to mid-upper management. Bad behavior seems rewarded — problematic managers have been promoted/moved to different businesses instead of course correcting.”
—BIPOC participant (Mid-level)

We have a DEI committee that I am involved with that is committed to leading and making steps towards a more inclusive environment, but I do feel that our organization could be more committed to backing the committee to not just talk the talk, but walk the walk.”
—White participant (Senior level)
ABOUT FUSION HILL

Fusion Hill is a women-owned research, strategy, and creative agency located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with expertise in healthcare, financial services, consumer packaged goods, and technology.

Fusion Hill has been a longtime participant in and advocate for The BrandLab’s student programming and Fearless Conference, and a financial supporter of their mission to diversify the marketing and advertising agency. Partnering on the State of the Industry report has been a unique and inspiring process and has continued to fuel their passion for furthering their internal DEI&B progress and impact the larger industry.
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