

DEIB | What's Next? A Peek into the Future

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As a member of CMAA and the National Board, I have had the privilege of serving on the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Committee, as well as its predecessor, the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CODE). My time on the committee has been invaluable in broadening my understanding and commitment to these principles. Over the past three years, the committee has focused on the business case for DEIB, with CMAA emphasizing actions that firms, CMAA chapters, and individuals can take to achieve their goals.

The next phase of DEIB efforts involves workshops, panels, and networking events centered on practical application. The focus is shifting from why DEIB is important to how to create an environment where everyone can grow and thrive. These initiatives aim to provide a variety of solutions to real-world problems, helping participants navigate the principles of DEIB in tangible ways.

While there are societal efforts to diminish DEI, the program and construction management industry continues to face a pressing need for talent to oversee critical projects across the country. To meet this demand, we must expand our recruiting efforts beyond traditional pools and communities. As an industry, we have made significant strides, but there is still work to be done.

Once we have brought in new talent, the challenge becomes retention. This is where “Belonging” comes into play. We must create environments where employees feel valued, included, and capable of reaching their goals. Unfortunately, exit



interviews still include comments like “I didn’t fit in,” “I was pushed aside,” or “No one heard me.” This sense of exclusion affects employees at all levels and across all demographics.

Employers already measure belonging through indicators like employee engagement score, turnover rates, absenteeism, and internal promotions. These metrics help companies understand the importance of retention, as keeping a stable workforce is far more effective than constant recruitment. Given the clear link between belonging and employee retention, the question becomes: How can we foster a more inclusive, engaged, and productive workplace?

To improve the sense of belonging, companies can adopt strategies that promote inclusion, connection, and recognition.

Key practices include:

- » Create opportunities for open communication across all levels
- » Foster empathetic leaders
- » Encourage and reward collaboration and team building
- » Recognize individual and team contributions publicly
- » Support Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- » Provide growth and development opportunities as part of performance plans

By integrating these practices, companies can cultivate an environment where all employees feel a genuine sense of belonging, leading to higher engagement, loyalty, and productivity.

This is where CMAA comes back into focus. If we want to see a workforce that is diverse, engaged, and competent, we need only look at CMAA's example. From the staff to the volunteers working on SOPs, we see engagement, loyalty, recognition, and mission accomplishment. Through CMAA's commitment to DEIB, we see how fostering belonging can lead to a thriving, dynamic workforce. The path forward is clear – continue building on these foundations to create a more inclusive and successful future. 🖋️



About the Author

Dennis J. Milsten, CCM, is the director of federal programs at [Siris](#). He is an experienced professional with a diverse background in capital program management, construction quality management, construction procurement, and business development in both the public and private sectors.

With over 40 years of experience, he has held various key roles in government departments such as the Army (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), Veterans Affairs (Office of Construction and Facilities Management), and Treasury (Office of Procurement).

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