



Minority-owned CMS Corporation has been implementing processes to encourage both staff and supplier diversity for years. The proof of success is in the company's steady growth – and it gives back by mentoring other ascending organizations.

# THE BIG DEAL ABOUT DEI

## Companies, Institutions Work Toward Inclusion

By Matt Ottinger

The workforce is changing. And companies are striving to accommodate not just demographic shifts – but changing mindsets as well.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is a movement being undertaken with vigor recently by businesses and organizations across America.

For instance, the Indy Racial Equity Pledge is a collective effort launched in October 2020 by such esteemed private sector giants as Anthem, Citizens Energy Group, Cummins, Eli Lilly and Company, IU Health, Pacers Sports & Entertainment, Salesforce and others. The pledge is aimed at “taking action for racial justice – and holding everyone accountable in ensuring racial equity in our workplace and in the community.”

Steven Cates of Purdue University Global asserts on the school's web site that businesses implementing DEI must consider multigenerational workforces; unconscious bias in the workplace; gender identity and expression; employee engagement and an opportunity for political expression.

Furthermore, a study by Gartner, a global research and advisory consulting firm, predicts that through 2022, “75% of organizations

with frontline decision-making teams reflecting a diverse and inclusive culture will exceed their financial targets.”

The study also found gender-diverse and inclusive teams on average outperformed gender-homogeneous, less inclusive teams by 50%.

### Honest critiques

Law firm Jackson Lewis, with a location in Indianapolis and 60 others across the nation, makes DEI a part of its DNA.

“We recognize that diversity really strengthens the fabric of our firm and understand when our people are thriving, the firm is thriving as well,” says Brian McDermott, managing principal of the Indianapolis office. “We have several guiding principles in this area and we’ve recently reemphasized our longstanding commitment.”

Jackson Lewis takes part in many DEI initiatives, including the Mansfield Rule Certification Process, which recognizes firms for having job candidate pools that are at least 30% women, attorneys of color, LGBTQ+ and disabled attorneys. DEI REACH (Recruiting Through Engagement, Accountability, Collaboration and Human Connection) is a new program in which the firm participates as well.

On a larger scale, Indiana University (IU) Health boasts an employment roll of 36,000. President and CEO Dennis Murphy explains all employees take a four-part education series on DEI over the course of a year. Yet it's not just about education at IU Health –

although the medical network has added staff specifically dedicated to DEI – but about targeting disparities and making substantive change.

“It’s about how we think about pay,” Murphy quantifies. “Recently we changed our starting wage to \$16 per hour and if you’re an employee in good standing, it increases to \$18 per hour ... When we looked at who made less than \$18 per hour, it was disproportionately people of color.”

IU Health believes racism is a public health crisis. Murphy says one substantive difference is in infant mortality rates among people of color in Indiana.

The organizational makeup is currently 75% female, but IU Health asserts work must still be done to broaden its staff demographics. An honest understanding of the past is key to building an equitable future.

“In an interview, the first question often asked is, ‘How much experience does this person have?’ Murphy says. “But I think going forward, a more common question will be, ‘How much potential does this person have?’

“If you’re trying to change the representation in your organization, you’re not always going to find people with 20 to 30 years of experience because the workforce hasn’t been that diverse from a leadership standpoint,” he adds. “You still need to hire the best people but defining what ‘best’ looks like is going to change.”

### Where things stand

IU Health is up front about its objectives, and it intends to be equally transparent about its outcomes. The current demographic makeup and represented categories of its staff are

shared on its web site.

“Community leaders continue to emphasize this notion of accountability,” Murphy comments. “I feel transparency and accountability go hand in hand. We need to be willing to show our data and where we’re making progress and where we’re not, and what we’re committed to doing to change that.”

Murphy credits his colleagues for being equally transparent about how discriminatory practices have impacted them.

“I’ve been pleasantly surprised by people willing to talk about their life experiences and situations where they felt they weren’t being treated fairly,” he reports. “We have people who are autistic and learn what it means to be neurologically diverse in trying to find a job (as well as racial minorities or being transgender).”

At Jackson Lewis, tracking DEI is part of the strategic plan as well.

“That includes reimagining our mentor program, promoting transparency and consistency in the elevation process when attorneys want to move up to the partner and shareholder principal ranks or in the ownership group as well,” McDermott says. “We’ve also added a DEI Champion (designation) to our elevation process. That measures the hours the attorneys spend on DEI initiatives. We track what we’re doing on an individual basis.”

### Thinking externally

While the internal impact is a constant focus, the ramifications outside the company also can be profound.

“Seeing how committed clients are to

this area is very important to us,” McDermott responds when asked about surprises in implementing DEI. “I wouldn’t say it’s surprising but it’s eye-opening. It’s a great thing because if they have the commitment as we do, it’s an opportunity for a great partnership.

“It requires us to think about DEI on a consistent basis,” he adds. “You always have to be thinking about it rather than waiting for events to happen and then reacting.”

Ultimately, Murphy sees a direct route between a more diverse decision-making team and better health care outcomes.

“It’s important because you need to think about what health care access looks like,” he submits. “If you have to take two buses to get to an appointment or maybe if you’re in a rural area, there is no transportation, what does that look like? Being less hierarchical and more focused on who represents a point of view is becoming more important to us.”

### Supply and demand equity

CMS Corporation, a minority-owned construction contractor with locations in Bargsville and Bloomington, has long incorporated an inclusive philosophy.

“You find people want to work for people who look like them, so we have a large international population,” says President Mercedes Enrique, who was born in Venezuela.

“Inclusion is like inviting the person to dance; we call that engagement,” Enrique relays. “The way we measure inclusion is if the people we’re bringing on board are staying with us. We have a pretty high



Staff from the Indianapolis Jackson Lewis office show support for the LGBTQ+ community at Indy Pride events.



retention rate.”

With more than 100 employees, the company’s diverse makeup is not just driven by its ownership, but the fact that most of its business comes from the U.S. Department of Defense and it must comply with supplier diversity protocols.

The company, however, endeavors to go above and beyond. CMS has been honored by the Mid-States Minority Supplier Development Council for its dedication to supplier diversity. Enrique also touts involvement in the U.S. Small Business Administration’s All-Small Mentor-Protégé Program, which allows small businesses to formally learn from experienced government contractors.

Enrique explains CMS has been a mentor to three small businesses in locations including: Alamogordo, New Mexico; Kansas City, Missouri; and Lexington, Kentucky.

She credits federal programs for being more robust than state efforts in helping companies truly grow to become prime contractors.

“And guess what, we’re creating competitors,” she remarks. “Those proteges are competing for contracts that we’ll compete for. But we know that if we (joint venture) together, we can pursue that contract and win that contract. That’s how you move the needle.”

### New school

Incorporating higher education in DEI efforts is a critical component, which is why Marian University launched the Diversity in Leadership Program. Created by Leon Jackson, who was overseeing strategic initiatives and is now the chancellor of Marian University’s St. Joseph’s College, the program aims to combat a dearth of C-Suite

opportunities for those in underrepresented demographics.

Students take courses at partnering business schools (Butler University, Indiana University, University of Notre Dame and Purdue University) for three-day, on-campus stints for six months to gain immersion in business analytics, leadership communication, accounting and finance, organizational strategy and leading organizations.

“Typically, what you see for ethnic minorities and women and the challenge of becoming C-Suite executives is that those analytical, strategy development skills and financial skills – that’s where we end up not getting promotions and opportunities,” Jackson explains. “Those would be the three areas where we need robust development.”

Beyond the in-class training, students also receive an executive coach, peer mentoring and the opportunity to attend executive summits.

“They also take on a project within the organization – something they’re currently working on – but applying the course’s objectives to the project and telling us about the outcome.”

The program also focuses on helping each student build a body of networking contacts.

“Once they complete the program, they earn a certification in executive mindset, which is endorsed by all the partner universities,” Jackson says. “They can leverage that to get significant discounts – and I do mean significant – on tuition at our partner institutions.”

Applications for the January 2022 cohort had soared above 330 at the time of this writing, which Jackson asserts is a pleasant surprise as most of the promotion thus far has been word of mouth.

He credits OneAmerica and First Internet Bank for providing support by adding and sponsoring talent in the program.

Jackson Lewis also makes a strong effort to connect with college students.

“Each office has the ability to offer a diversity scholarship to law students,” McDermott relays. “I want to make sure we’re connected to underrepresented individuals in law school.”

IU Health is able to leverage its partnership with its namesake to implement goals into the recruitment process as the school has the largest medical school in the country and one of the most prominent nursing schools.

“That gives us access to great talent,” Murphy reports. “We also tap into Purdue, Notre Dame, Ivy Tech. But that core relationship with IU gives us a huge leg up.”

Jobs programs are also a focus for IU Health. As an example, Murphy lists its

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## Allegion: Unlocking the Doorway to Equity

A new statewide honor, the Jackson Lewis Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Champion Award, was presented to Allegion on October 14 as part of the Elevate Indiana: DEI Best Practices for Business and Industry event from the Indiana Chamber.

Allegion, a security company based in Ireland with American headquarters in Carmel, earned the honor for making ardent strides to become a more equitable workplace.

“We want to be a company where all people feel welcomed and valued – a company with a strong culture of belonging,” says Shelley Meador, chief human resources officer. “We also believe that equity, inclusion and diversity strengthen our teams, build employee engagement, deliver customer excellence and produce superior business results.”

Judges evaluated how nominees developed, promoted and executed DEI – and how it has made a difference for their organizations and beyond.

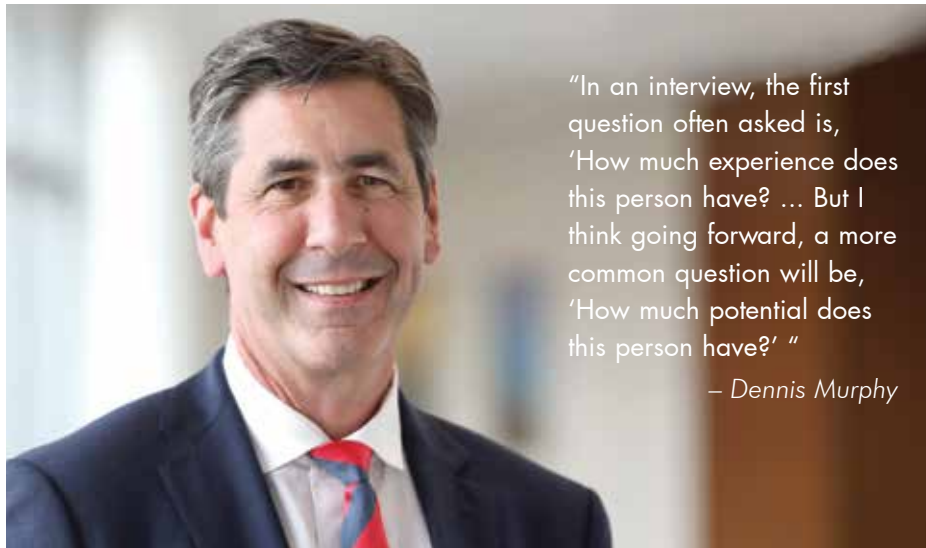
“We’re thrilled to showcase Indiana companies and professionals that demonstrate excellence in this important area,” says Brian McDermott, managing principal of Jackson Lewis’ Indianapolis office. “The principles of DEI are cornerstones of our firm because we know an inclusive culture makes us stronger and better.”



Security company Allegion has led the way on DEI measures and can now call itself a “champion” for its efforts in light of its recent statewide honor.

## Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)

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– Dennis Murphy

partnership with Crispus Attucks High School in the Indianapolis Public Schools system.

"We're training high school students to

either become medical assistants or nursing assistants," he notes. "They'll come away with that certification when they graduate, but

they'll also get a guarantee of a job offer from IU Health. Creating these pipeline programs to increase the diversity of the workforce is important."

Enrique adds that internships are an ideal way to integrate future staff. She relays the company hopes to continue to diversify its workforce through its intern program.

Jackson asserts that the business community should understand that more diversity in the private sector "makes the pie bigger, not smaller." And a seat in the corner office shouldn't just be a pipedream for underrepresented employees.

"Many DEI efforts are just about getting people in the door," he concludes. "But if you don't have those individuals at the top also, you won't see the return you'd like to see."

"And when you have individuals who are diverse on your leadership team, you're much more readily able to identify new markets, which means more market share."

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**RESOURCES:** Mercedes Enrique, CMS Corporation, at [www.cms-corporation.com](http://www.cms-corporation.com) | Leon Jackson, Marian University, at [www.marian.edu](http://www.marian.edu) | Brian McDermott, Jackson Lewis, at [www.jacksonlewis.com](http://www.jacksonlewis.com) | Dennis Murphy, Indiana University Health, at [www.iuhealth.org](http://www.iuhealth.org)