# The Science of Influence

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# Meet Your Presenters



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# Approach to C-Suite Influence: Three Inclusion Personas

## The Morally Motivated

*"My C-Suite knows DEI is the **right thing to do** and we are responsible for creating the best workplace for our employees and our clients."*

## The Business Believer

*"My C-Suite knows that inclusion is a core value of our organization and **good for business generally**."*

## The Balance Sheet Strategist

*"My C-Suite knows that inclusion helps **create shareholder value** and contributes to making the organization more money."*

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

# Approach to C-Suite Influence: Three Inclusion Personas



## The Morally Motivated

**20%**

*"My C-Suite knows DEI is the **right thing to do** and we are responsible for creating the best workplace for our employees and our clients."*

## The Business Believer

**65%**

*"My C-Suite knows that inclusion is a core value of our organization and **good for business generally**."*

## The Balance Sheet Strategist

**15%**

*"My C-Suite knows that inclusion helps **create shareholder value** and contributes to making the organization more money."*

# Pulse Check

## Which inclusion persona do you most identify as?

1 **The Morally Motivated**

2 **The Business Believer**

3 **The Balance Sheet Strategist**

72% of inclusion leaders **rated persuading the C-suite with metrics**, reporting, and data transparency as their top-of-mind issue as recently as April 2025.

"Even if I don't have the influence and authority to approve certain things, if **I can have them [C-suite] help us advocate in the boardroom, they can push things over the line**."

 - EVS Participant, November 2024

"If you and your CEO [and C-Suite] are not in lock step working together, the work isn't going anywhere."

 - Inclusion Leader, Global Energy Company, 2024

Nearly 90% of CDOC partners **ranked influencing and motivating stakeholders**[1] to become inclusion change agents as their top priority in 2025.

1) Top three stakeholders listed as key partners for 2025 in the same survey were C-Suite.

## The Prioritization of Time, Resources, and Advocacy is Largely Determined By C-Suite

**Sets the Tone**

"Where [the C-suite] gets involved is if it sets precedent for other units in the business."

**Sustains Change Management**

A lack of C-Suite support and buy-in creates a higher risk for enterprise change because of their positions as key decision-makers

**Increases Project Success**

Active executive engagement increases project success by 35—44%

**" Inclusion Is No Exception**

DEI doesn't get made any differently than any other decision... The accountable parties assemble the recommendation, additional stakeholders are engaged, and ultimately the recommendation is surfaced to the responsible party. For anything with an enterprise impact that's going to be the CEO.
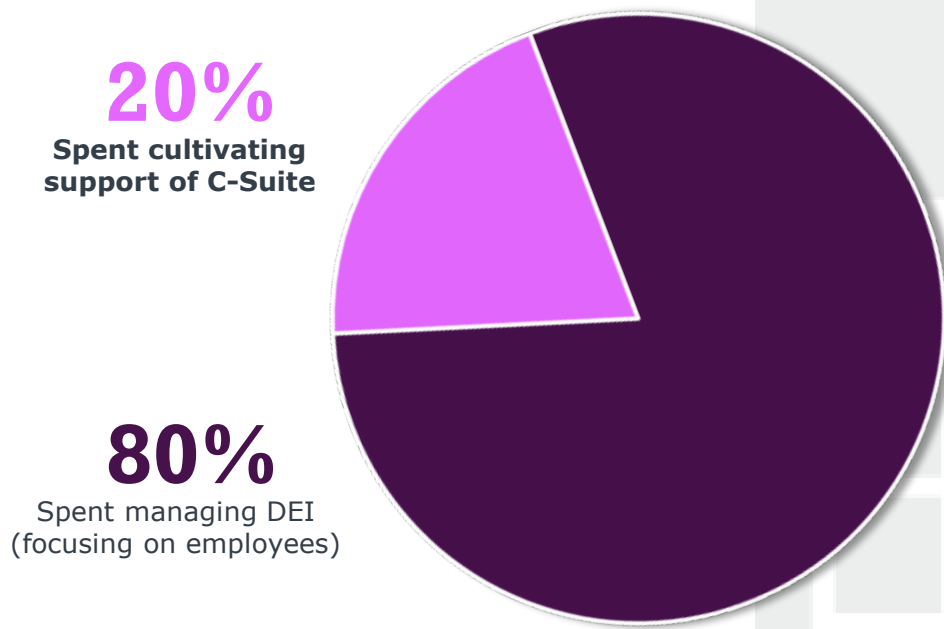
*Inclusion Leader, Science and Technology, 2025* **"**

When inclusion leaders were asked how they spent their time...

**20%**

**Spent cultivating support of C-Suite**

**80%**

Spent managing DEI (focusing on employees)

> "The bulk of my time is spent advising department leaders on inclusion related projects, managing ERG work, and overseeing the random tasks that come across my desk."
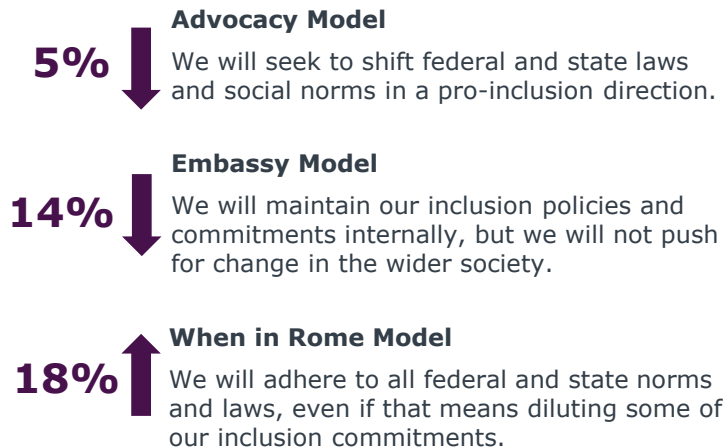>
> Inclusion Leader, Utilities and Construction, 2025

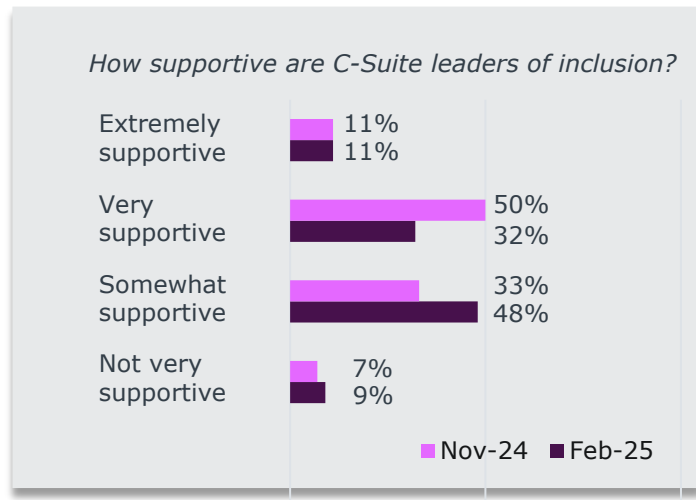Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## While Many Say They Remain Committed to Inclusion, Actions Tell a Different Story

**Organization Support for Inclusion Has Declined Since November 2024…**

**5%** ↓ **Advocacy Model**
We will seek to shift federal and state laws and social norms in a pro-inclusion direction.

**14%** ↓ **Embassy Model**
We will maintain our inclusion policies and commitments internally, but we will not push for change in the wider society.

**18%** ↑ **When in Rome Model**
We will adhere to all federal and state norms and laws, even if that means diluting some of our inclusion commitments.

**… And So Has the C-Suite's Support**

*How supportive are C-Suite leaders of inclusion?*

| | Nov-24 | Feb-25 |
|---|---|---|
| Extremely supportive | 11% | 11% |
| Very supportive | 50% | 32% |
| Somewhat supportive | 33% | 48% |
| Not very supportive | 7% | 9% |

■ Nov-24  ■ Feb-25

**55%** of C-suite leaders say they are worried about the **risk of DEI-related lawsuits**, government enforcement, and shareholder proposals

**53%** of C-suite leaders say anti-DEI policies and/or rhetoric under the Trump administration will likely lead to organizations **decreasing their commitments** in the next year

1) Note: This concept of these three models is based on Kenji Yoshino, David Glasgow, and Christina Joseph's article from HBR in November 2024.

Sources: Seramount interviews and analysis, Littler (2025), Seramount EVS Data (2024), Seramount EVS Data (2025).

# Pulse Check

**What approach most aligns with your company's current inclusion strategy?**

1 **Advocacy Model:** We will seek to shift federal and state laws and social norms in a pro-inclusion direction.

2 **Embassy Model:** We will maintain our inclusion policies and commitments internally, but we will not push for change in the wider society.

3 **When in Rome Model:** We will adhere to all federal and state norms and laws, even if that means diluting some of our inclusion commitments.

# Was C-Suite Ever *Really* Bought In—Or Just Following the Trend?

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**2021** — LA Times

*Amazon Studios Wants Half of Its Creative Teams to be Diverse by 2024*

**2025** — The Hollywood Reporter

*Amazon Studios Quietly Steps Back From Diversity Goals Amid Trump DEI Crackdown*

> "[Corporate executives] are mandating other people attend (diversity trainings), but they see themselves as outside of it, or too busy."
>
> Robin DiAngelo, Sociologist

**Even at the Height of 2021… Commitments Questionable**

**95%** of corporate executives said they are committed to helping their organizations fight racism

*Of those who said they are committed…*

**79%** said they felt the focus and attention of DEI were blown out of proportion

**1 in 3** said they felt forced to support their company to fight racism and injustice

Sources: Seramount Pledge to Progress (2021), Bloomberg (2025), LA Times (2021), Hollywood Reporter (2025), Seramount interviews and analysis.

# Venom for DEI Has Never Been Stronger

**↑ 23%**

Rise in the volume of anti-DEI shareholder proposals from 2020 to 2024 with the trend continuing upward in 2025

**128**

Number of anti-DEI legislative initiatives introduced, passed, or tabled in the US as of May 2025

## Violent Rhetoric Threatens DEI Practitioners

**DieDEI.co**
Exposing Anti-White Harassment + Discrimination in US Media Companies

*"Any general, admiral, whatever that was **involved in any of the DEI 'woke' sh\*t has gotta go**."*

*"We've **killed DEI**… We're bringing meritocracy—the American way—back."*

NEWS
IN WASHINGTON D.C.
ANTI DEI WEBSITE PUBLISHES "TARGET" WATCH LIST OF FEDERAL HEATH WORKERS

*"[The DOJ is] **arresting violent terrorists,** dismantling cartel networks, and **rooting DEI out of American institutions**."*

*"**Illegal DEI policies** not only violate the text and spirit of our longstanding Federal civil-rights laws; they also undermine our national unity."*

Sources: Pew (2024), Harvard Law (2025), Vox (2024), The White House (2025), Fox News (2025), The Hill (2025), Seramount (2025), Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Frequent Changes in Leadership Undermine Sustained Influence

2024 saw the highest CEO turnover in more than six years

**56%** of C-Suite leaders said they are likely or extremely likely to leave within the next two years

> "The C-Suite is always hard because the **change over in C-Suite is happening more rapidly now** than it did 5 or 10 years ago…
>
> So just when I got this group aligned and bought in on what I'm trying to do, I lose a few and I have to start all over again."
>
> *CDO, Energy, 2025*

## A Cross-Industry Pattern of Leadership Volatility

**yahoo! finance** — *CEO Turnover Reaches Record Levels in 2024 as 'Increasing Complexity' Drives Execs to the Exits*

**Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.** — *CEO Turnover Nearly Matches Monthly Record; 247 CEO Exits in Feb. 2025*

**FT** — *US Chief Executives Are Leaving the Corner Office in Record Numbers*

**FORTUNE** — *Turnover for S&P 500 CFOs tops 17% this Year as the C-Suite Job 'Really Just Takes a Toll'*

**Gartner** — *More than Half of C-Suite Leaders Are Likely to Leave Over the Next Two Years; 27% Likely to Leave Within Six Months*

Only 1 in 5 inclusion leaders strongly agrees with the statement
*"I am able to influence my C-Suite to support DEI"*

## Our Rigorous Research Methodology

### Robust Research Interview Campaign

**Scoped partner problem and solution with ~20% CDOC Membership**
Conducted in-depth interviews with CDOs identifying problems, testing theories, and building solutions

**Consulted with C-Suites on implementation and operationalizing solutions**
Captured C-Suite voice to inform our approach

**Leveraged collective wisdom of internal Seramount talent**
Former CDOs, inclusion practitioners, and HR/consulting experts

### Field-Tested Survey Analysis

**Real-time pulse survey of 150+ inclusion leaders**
Compiled responses to rapid-response pulse survey questions across differing organizations, industries, and geographies

**Aggregated data from Employee Voice Sessions**
Gathered qualitative and quantitative data from nearly 400 EVS participants in anonymized guided, targeted questioning

### Strategic External Research Synthesis

**Analyzed leading academic studies and briefs**
Identified existing patterns, gaps, and themes of current research approaches

**News, industry, and market research review**
Contextualized findings within broader inclusion and organizational leadership landscape to ensure currently relevant, differentiated, and elevated findings

### Best-Practice Framework Evaluation

**Synthesized Successful Frameworks**
Highlighted common success factors, structural elements, and implementation barriers that inform current strategies

**Tested new steps and variables with practitioners**
Validated new approaches with current CDOs, C-Suite leaders, and inclusion practitioners to test initial success

**Best-Practice Research Output**

Specific, scalable, and prescriptive advice regardless of the ask, the stakeholder, or the industry, designed to help you achieve outcomes at your organization

## Four Steps to Turn Your Vision into C-Suite Commitment

### ① Identify a Current Business Priority

**Step 1 Components:**

- **Current relevance:** Something articulated by a C-Suite leader most recently

- **Organizational priority:** Directly aligned with the financial health and/or operating principle ("we are a client first organization")

### ② Build Your Singular and Precise Ask

**Step 2 Components:**

- **Output:** The "thing" (time and/or resource) you are requesting

- **Result:** The specific and measurable projected impact of the output

### ③ Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence

**Step 3 Components:**

- **Quantitative internal data:** Document the current state with employee engagement surveys, workforce demographics, etc.

- **Benchmarking data:** Contextualize the gap and show clear sense of urgency by comparing against historical data or peer/industry data
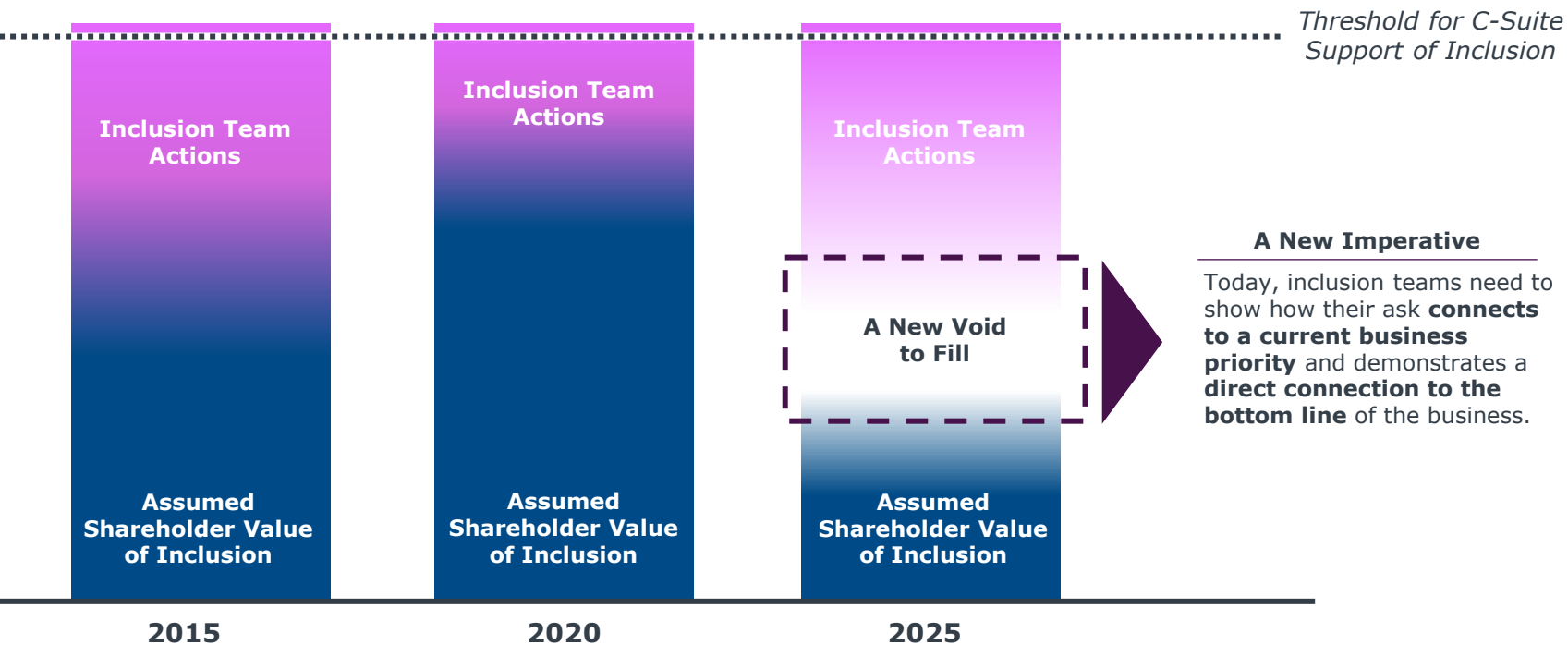
### ④ Show the Impact on the Balance Sheet

**Step 4 Components:**

- **Bottom-line metrics**: Indicators used to assess financial health, efficiency, and organizational success

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Change Leaves Inclusion Leaders to Fill the Gap

*Threshold for C-Suite Support of Inclusion*

**2015**

Inclusion Team Actions

Assumed Shareholder Value of Inclusion

**2020**

Inclusion Team Actions

Assumed Shareholder Value of Inclusion

**2025**

Inclusion Team Actions

A New Void to Fill

Assumed Shareholder Value of Inclusion

### A New Imperative

Today, inclusion teams need to show how their ask **connects to a current business priority** and demonstrates a **direct connection to the bottom line** of the business.

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Four Steps to Turn Your Vision into C-Suite Commitment

| ① **Identify a Current Business Priority** | ② **Build Your Singular and Precise Ask** | ③ **Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence** | ④ **Show the Impact on the Balance Sheet** |
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## Four Steps to Turn Your Vision into C-Suite Commitment

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Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Step 1: Identify a Current Business Priority

### Description

Inclusion leaders should tie their ask to a clearly stated, high-priority goal **recently emphasized by the C-Suite**—drawing from current sources such as earnings calls or board meetings—to ensure alignment with leadership's **immediate focus** and investment.

### Components

***Current Relevance***

Articulated by a C-Suite leader in the most recent quarterly earnings call, business review, board meeting, or investor update

***Organizational Priority***

Directly aligned with the financial health and/or operating principle

- "We are a client first organization"
- "Our current strategic priority in 2025 is growing in the Asian-Pacific region"

### Key Considerations When Aligning to Business Priorities

**Show Cost of Inaction**

- ▶ Frame the risk of not delivering the output of your ask
- ▶ Demonstrate the immediate value add of inclusion

**Identify Current Priorities**

- ▶ At the last company-wide meeting, what were the first three things said by your CEO?
- ▶ What was the tone of the last earning call or quarterly business review?

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

Step 1: Identify a Current Business Priority

**Description**

CDOs should tie their ask to a clearly stated, high-priority goal **recently emphasized by the C-Suite**—drawing from current sources such as earnings calls or board meetings—to ensure ~~immediate focus~~

**Com...**

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*Organizational Priority*

Directly aligned with the financial health and/or operating principle

• "We are a client first organization"

• "Our current strategic priority in 2025 is growing in the APAC region"

**Key Considerations When Aligning to Business Priorities**

**Show Cost of Inaction**

▸ Frame the risk of not delivering the output of your ask ...te the immediate value ...ion

...ities

▸ At the ...wide meeting what were the first three things said by your CEO?

▸ What was the tone of the last earning call or quarterly business review?

> "The current work of DEI is too often dependent on long term demographic trajectory-type arguments. **This isn't urgent enough**. Nobody cares what shareholder value is in 2050. They care about what it is in 2025 and 2026. You have to be more short term focused.
>
> *Chief Operating Officer, April 2025*

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Step 1: Identify a Current Business Priority

### 1.0 Version

"The future workforce is increasingly diverse, which means our talent attraction strategies should reflect this diversity in order to capture top talent and ensure we remain a competitive employer of choice."

⚠ **What's Missing**
- No clear current relevance
- Vague priority

❓ **Key Inquiries**
- What demographics are lacking representation?
- What is the available workforce population?
- How does this compare with peers/industry averages?

### 2.0 Version

"Our FY26 vision involves expanding current operations in South America. To effectively scale our business, we need to invest in recruitment and talent development strategies informed by cultural competence and inclusive leadership. If talent attraction fails during this expansion, our projected growth could be negatively impacted."

## Four Steps to Turn Your Vision into C-Suite Commitment

### ① Identify a Current Business Priority

### ② Build Your Singular and Precise Ask

### ③ Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence

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*Step 4 Components:*

- **Bottom-line metrics:** Indicators used to assess financial health, efficiency and organizational success

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Step 2: Build Your Singular and Precise Ask

### Description
Define and articulate the request in a concise statement that clearly defines the output and the result of the ask

### Components

**Output**
The "thing" you are requesting (i.e., time or resource)

**Result**
The specific and measurable projected impact of the output

### Key Considerations When Building an Ask

**Stakeholders**
- Who are the key stakeholders impacted by this ask?
- How have you involved them/gotten their buy-in?

**Organization Health**
- What are the current priorities of your business units?
- How does your ask initiative impact/support the goals each business unit is reporting this quarter/half?

**Current Climate**
- What is the current state of your organization's financial health?

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Step 2: Build Your Singular and Precise Ask

### 1.0 Version

"We need to launch an awareness campaign to increase the knowledge about our ERGs."

**What's Missing**
- No clear result identified from ask

**Key Inquiries**
- What do you hope to achieve with an increase in ERG knowledge?
- How does more ERG awareness clearly benefit the key stakeholder(s)?
- What tangible result will ERG knowledge achieve beyond increased ERG engagement?

### 2.0 Version

"We need to launch a 3-month ERG visibility campaign across all manufacturing sites **in order to address retention and engagement issues with early-career employees** and reduce current replacement costs."

## Four Steps to Turn Your Vision into C-Suite Commitment

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Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Step 3: Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence

### Description

Inclusion leaders must show their specific ask is grounded in credible data. This data should come in two forms: **quantitative internal data and benchmarking data**. A successful evidence-based argument contains both.

### Components

**Quantitative Internal Data**

Document the current state with employee engagement surveys, workforce demographics, etc.

**Benchmarking Data**

Contextualize the gap and show clear urgency by comparing against historical data or peer/industry data

### Key Considerations When Selecting Data

**Establish Urgency and Credibility**

▸ Why should addressing this gap take priority over everything else?

**Remove Reliance on Shared Values or Priorities**

▸ C-Suite leaders are less likely to take action based solely on representation gaps.

▸ Without a clear and direct business impact, such issues often fall lower on their list of priorities—even if they support the need for improvement.

## Step 3: Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence

### 1.0 Version

"Our current workforce does not reflect the populations and communities of our offices/stores/plants."

**⚠ What's Missing**

- Lacks specificity and contextual data

**❓ Key Inquiries**

- What demographics are lacking representation?

- What is the available workforce population?

- How does this compare with peers/industry averages?

### 2.0 Version

"Our most recent employee engagement survey shows our entry-level hires are more diverse, but less engaged than the previous two hiring classes. Compared with industry average, our engagement numbers are lower, and compared to peer organizations, our first-year-after-hire attrition rate is higher."

## Four Steps to Turn Your Vision into C-Suite Commitment

① **Identify a Current Business Priority**

② **Build Your Singular and Precise Ask**

③ **Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence**

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*Step 4 Components:*

- **Bottom-line metrics:** Indicators used to assess financial health, efficiency and organizational success

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Step 4: Show the Impact on the Balance Sheet

### Description

Inclusion leaders must state how their ask **directly impacts the balance sheet**—core financial statements that provide a snapshot of a company's financial position at a specific point in time—of their organization

### Component

**Bottom-Line Business Metric**

An indicator that is used to assess an organization's financial health, efficiency, and success

### Key Considerations When Using Financial Metrics

**Demonstrate Financial Understanding**

▶ What measurable data point will show that this inclusion initiative positively affects the organization's bottom line?

**Bottom-Line Metrics**

▶ Revenue (growth/loss)

▶ Client Renewal Rate

▶ Risk Mitigation

▶ Operating Margin

## Step 4: Show the Impact on the Balance Sheet

**Description**

**Key Considerations When Using Financial Metrics**

> "The corporate world works to increase shareholder value. For Inclusion to work you have to **tie it to something that creates shareholder value**. This is what it has always been about. It was never about a social movement in corporate America and some people missed that."

> "You should do DEI because it's the right thing—sure I agree with that but that's never going to get funded in today's state. You have to tie it back to something that I care about and **what I care about is shareholder value** and that value has to be immediate."

Chief Operating Officer,
April 2025

Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

## Four Steps to Turn Your Vision into C-Suite Commitment

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Source: Seramount interviews and analysis.

# Interested in Speaking to Our Experts?

Let us know if what you'd like to talk to one of our experts about.

## What Next Step Will You Be Taking to Address Inclusion?

**1** **Applying the *Science of Influence* framework** to my strategy

**2** **Pivoting my inclusion strategy** in light of recent political and legal changes

**3** **Learning more about resources, solutions, and events** available to Seramount partners

**4** **I'd like to schedule a call to talk to Seramount experts.** Choose this option and we will follow up.

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