

Chattanooga Makes Strides in Workplace Culture: Sixty Chattanooga-Area Employers Take Part in First Local Assessment of Inclusion and Diversity Practices

Employers in Chattanooga are committed to advancing inclusion and diversity, yet many still struggle to make progress.

Chattanooga, Tenn. - (May 4, 2023) - Wade Hinton, founder and CEO of **Hinton & Company**, and **Candy Johnson**, President and CEO of the **Urban League of Greater Chattanooga**, today released the results of the inaugural **Community Culture Index** – the region’s first highly-localized, data-driven assessment tool meant to measure how well employers are incorporating inclusive practices into their workplaces in a quantifiable and objective way. Inclusive practices refer to policies, behaviors, and actions that help create a culture of belonging and fairness for all and can contribute to an organization’s ability to attract and retain high-performing employees, develop new products, and reach new market segments.

The Community Culture Index (CCI) surveyed small businesses, government agencies, nonprofits, and major employers from throughout the Chattanooga region on a range of topics. The survey aimed to determine whether these organizations are adopting leading inclusive practices in areas such as recruiting, hiring, strategic plans, and partnerships. Over the course of several months, more than 100 representatives from Chattanooga-based organizations signed up to participate in the inaugural CCI, garnering responses from 60 employers representing every industry sector in the metropolitan economy.

The CCI is unique because while there have been national or industry-related surveys on the state of DEI, this tool provides a localized assessment that is specific and tailored to the employers in a metropolitan area. Based on the survey results, the tool generates a score indicating how effective the community's efforts are in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Hinton & Company intends to expand the CCI to other markets interested in advancing inclusion in their community.

“Gone are the days when a fair and supportive workplace was considered a ‘nice-to-have,’” said Wade Hinton, “Valuing employees and treating them fairly is a requirement for a sustainable workforce. The sixty organizations that participated in the CCI understand this, and we’re incredibly grateful for their participation and candor. By measuring the inclusivity of workplaces in the region, we believe CCI can help communities build actionable insights and practical steps toward progress. It’s a major step in helping communities begin to identify some potential areas for improvement and remain competitive as a region.

The CCI generated insights across four main categories: **Leadership and Workforce; Culture and Retention; Recruiting and Hiring;** and **Partnerships**. Specific findings contained in the CCI report include:

Continued.

Leadership and Workforce

1. Over 70% of participating CHA organizations indicated they have an enterprise-wide DEI strategy in place. Still, many of these organizations lack the resources, capacity, or commitment from leadership to implement the strategy.
2. Fewer than 40% of organizations have a workforce as diverse as the Chattanooga area.
3. Nearly half of respondents (42%) noted their executive/senior leadership team continued to lack diversity.

Recruiting and Hiring

1. Almost half of the respondents reported recruitment efforts included hiring goals seeking talent from underrepresented groups - yet more than 65% identify BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) talent as the most challenging group to recruit.
2. 80% of organizations had not completed an audit of their hiring process for potential bias.

Culture and Retention

1. More than half of respondents reported that their organizations have employee resource groups, inclusion councils, or task forces focused on improving inclusionary practices.
2. More than 50% of respondents do not provide DEI training.
3. Only 17% of organizations offer professional development programs specifically for underrepresented groups (*e.g., executive leadership for women*)

Partnerships

1. The majority of respondents had specific and clear diversity commitments related to their purchasing protocols and philanthropic/corporate social responsibility efforts.
2. However, only a quarter of respondents note record keeping as part of the vendor diversity process.

“We know anecdotally that many employers have a sincere interest in building more diverse, inclusive, and representative workforces, but they may not always know what actions will lead to the kind of progress they want,” says Johnson. “The CCI creates some transparency into operational trends that exist throughout our region, which allows all organizations to learn from each other. When we grow together, our entire regional economy becomes more attractive to workers and employers alike.”

The CCI is funded in part by the **Urban League of Greater Chattanooga**, the **Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga**, the **Benwood Foundation**, and the **Footprint Foundation**.

To learn more about the Community Culture Index and read the full report, please visit hintonandco.com/cci-report-cha.

###