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Executive Summary Looking Forward[®] (DEI) 2022

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Letter from the President

Associations continue to struggle with the complex and controversial topic of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Last year, Association Laboratory published the first association sector study on DEI. Our goal was to begin helping associations take a data-driven, not opinion-driven, approach to these discussions.

The study showed that DEI is on the forefront of many leadership discussions. In addition, we discovered that DEI takes many forms. Finally, we learned that associations continue to struggle with what works and does not work in this arena and on how to lead practical, useful change.

The research indicated there was a genuine desire by leaders to improve the association as a platform for members' success, and the consideration of DEI was one aspect of this desire.

DEI issues are often fraught with potential controversy as individuals argue about their different perspectives, the scope of the association's efforts, and their priority given competing calls on association resources.

Finally, DEI topics are often conflated with emerging interpretations that are less fact based and more divisive. They are driven by media or political framing that is often irrelevant or inconsistent with the understanding of many associations.

Without better information to inform DEI discussions, the association profession will continue to get bogged down in subjective, opinion-driven debate. The profession will continue to be driven by academic-driven perceptions of these concepts that make progress more difficult.

Looking Forward® DEI provides the association sector with a continuing look at how association executives perceive the issues of DEI, the challenges they see as being the most substantial barriers to success, and the strategies they hope will allow them to make progress. This is a quickly changing landscape, and our survey edits reflect changes we feel provides better—and more useful—information for the association sector to use. Therefore, you will see some charts from 2021, where we feel the information is still applicable, but you will also see some charts from 2022 that don't have benchmarking data on it. You can find both sets of data on our [Looking Forward Data Dashboard](#) on our website.

My goal since 1999, when I founded Association Laboratory, was to investigate what works and does not work in association leadership and apply these lessons to association strategy and structure. The company is designed to help association leaders make better decisions using information.

Looking Forward® DEI is the third sector study in the Looking Forward® family of association sector research reports that are designed to give association leaders the data necessary for effective leadership. Please use this information to guide discussions within your organization. Association Laboratory is committed to helping you address the issues that are critical to success.

If I or my team can ever be of assistance, never hesitate to contact us. We look forward to working with you.



Dean West, FASAE
President and Founder
Association Laboratory Inc.



Association Laboratory Research Alliance



Association Laboratory is proud to be the founder and leader of the Association Laboratory Research Alliance®.

The Association Laboratory Research Alliance® is a collaboration of more than 20 state, national, specialty and global societies of association executives designed to investigate, lead the discussion of, and provide insight into the future of the association business model.

Since inception, the Association Laboratory Research Alliance® has investigated the forces shaping association members and the implications of these forces on association strategy. Through research reports, customizable dashboards and virtual and in-person seminars, the Alliance provides the most recent, relevant, and useful information for association leaders to learn about the future of associations.

The Association Laboratory Research Alliance® produces three sector studies under the Looking Forward® banner that are critical to association sector thought leadership.

- **Looking Forward® Impact** – This global environmental scan of the association strategy environment identifies the factors with the greatest impact on association members and the challenges these factors create for associations.
- **Looking Forward® Solutions** – This study assesses more than 135 different strategies that association leaders believe are important to success given the influences on their members and the challenges these factors create.
- **Looking Forward® DEI** – This study, the first of its kind in the association sector, investigates sector perceptions of DEI issues, the challenges associations perceive in effective DEI work and the strategies being pursued by associations to address these challenges.

To access the most relevant, recent and useful association sector research, visit the [Looking Forward Dashboard](#).



Thanks to our Partners

Association Laboratory would like to thank three companies that are essential to the continued collection and dissemination of quality association sector research.

Gravitate

Gravitate's Nucleus data analytics platform was built specifically for associations and is designed to meet the unique needs of the member industry.



It aggregates the vast amounts of powerful member data currently stored in different systems across member-based organizations (AMS, email marketing, events, learning management, online community and more) and makes insights into this data available to everyone: staff, leadership, components, the board – and even members.

The [Looking Forward® Dashboard](#) is Nucleus, specially configured to show this important sector research and allow you to explore it.

Gravitate is thrilled to have been selected as the official data analytics solution of the Association Laboratory Research Alliance and hopes you enjoy this new way to benefit from the Looking Forward study.

You are invited to browse the [Analytics for Associations Success Kit](#) to learn more about Nucleus and to contact us to discuss use cases at your organization at analytics@gravitatesolutions.com

CE21

CE21 is a cloud-based technology and services company providing a full service, Learning Management System (LMS) that delivers distance education, online registration, and physical product sales solutions.



The company serves professional education verticals including Legal, Accounting, Health Care, Insurance, Business, Education Content Providers, Professional & Trade Associations, and Non-Profit Organizations.

[Association Laboratory uses CE21's LMS system to give us more capacity and capability to provide leading edge content to association leaders. You can see the system in action on \[Association Laboratory's Knowledge Center\]\(#\).](#)

CE21's award-winning LMS can help your organization deliver a best-in-class e-learning experience designed specifically for your most important customers – your learners.

Built for today but designed with the flexibility to take on tomorrow's changing needs, CE21 provides an elegant, mobile-optimized online learning environment that will transform your organization into a 24/7 on-demand value provider.

For more information visit CE21.com.

Advancing Organizational Excellence

[AOE](#) is specifically designed by association executives to serve the unique needs of associations. With roots dating back to 1990, AOE has decades of experience serving associations and organizations with special expertise in scientific and technical industries and professions. The award-winning company provides a range of services including marketing, public relations, crisis communications and social media consulting.



The [AOE DEI Practice Group](#) provides a data-driven solution to associations seeking to investigate and implement more effective DEI policies and procedures. The AOE proprietary benchmarking assessment tool allows you to pin-point where you are on your DEI journey and create an implementation roadmap that fits your culture and strategic objectives.

AOE is committed to providing best-in-class services and investing all profits earned right back into the industries they serve. When you hire AOE, you invest in yourself, and you invest in your industry.

Because of their model, AOE keeps service fees lower than the standard market rate. Further, because AOE is not owned by private shareholders, any profit earned at the end of the year is reinvested in the marketplace. Few consulting firms can claim that they are keeping rates low and putting their profits back into supporting their clients and the industry they serve.

For more information, contact Kimberly Kayler at Kimberly.Kayler@aoeteam.com.

Current Status of DEI in the Association Sector

Looking Forward® (DEI) 2022 asked respondents to identify the current state of DEI discussions at their association. Response options regarding current perceptions of DEI were grouped into the following domains.

- **Importance** – How important is DEI to the future success of the association and what is its scope within the association?
- **Scope** – What is the scope of association DEI efforts?
- **Leadership** – How is DEI being led at associations?
- **Effectiveness** – Do associations believe they are making progress?
- **Future Activity** – What activities do associations anticipate implementing?
- **Barriers to Success** – What issues are impeding efforts at DEI?
- **Diversity** – What are activities specific to diversity?
- **Equity** – What are activities specific to equity?
- **Inclusion** – What are activities specific to Inclusion?

The Importance of D, E, and I

Looking Forward® DEI 2021 asked respondents to assess the importance of DEI to the success of their association. Preliminary research indicated these three concepts—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion—were often conflated. In 2022, Looking Forward® DEI investigated the importance of these concepts separately. The following shows the response to this question by all respondents.

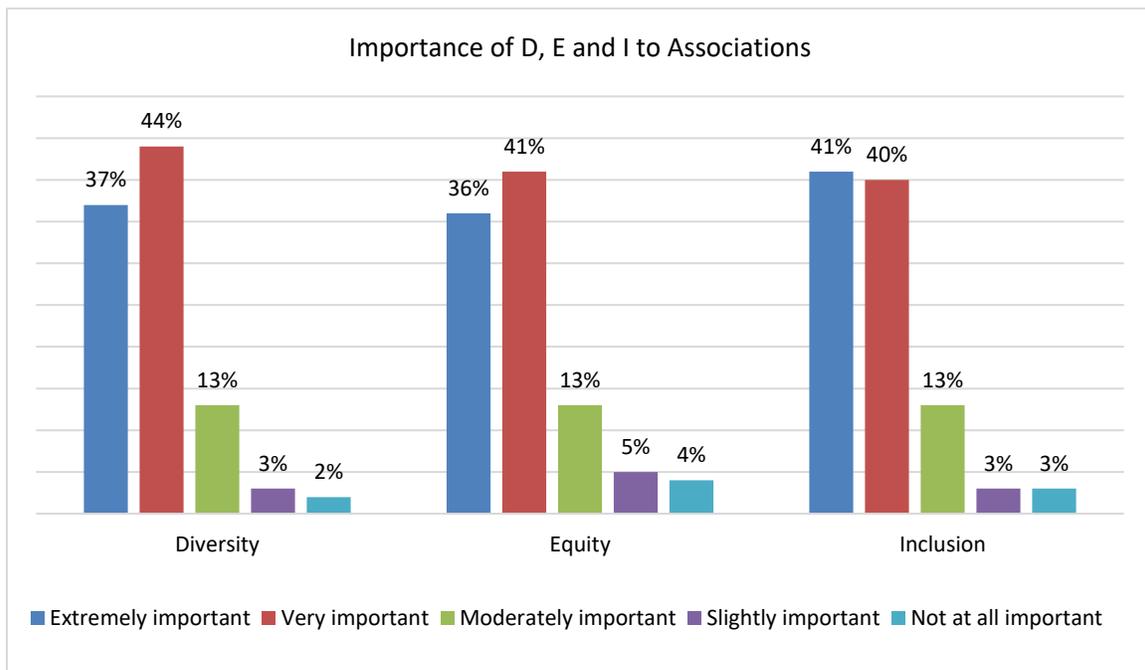


FIGURE 1 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: How important will working on each of the following concepts be to your association over the next year?

A strong majority of respondents believe all three concepts are important to work on at their association.

The Scope of DEI

Respondents were asked to assess the scope of their DEI efforts. The goal was to ascertain if associations were primarily taking an inward-looking approach (ex: staff or Board), an external focus (ex: membership or workforce) or if an “all of the above” or holistic approach was the focus.

Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated their association was taking a holistic approach to DEI.

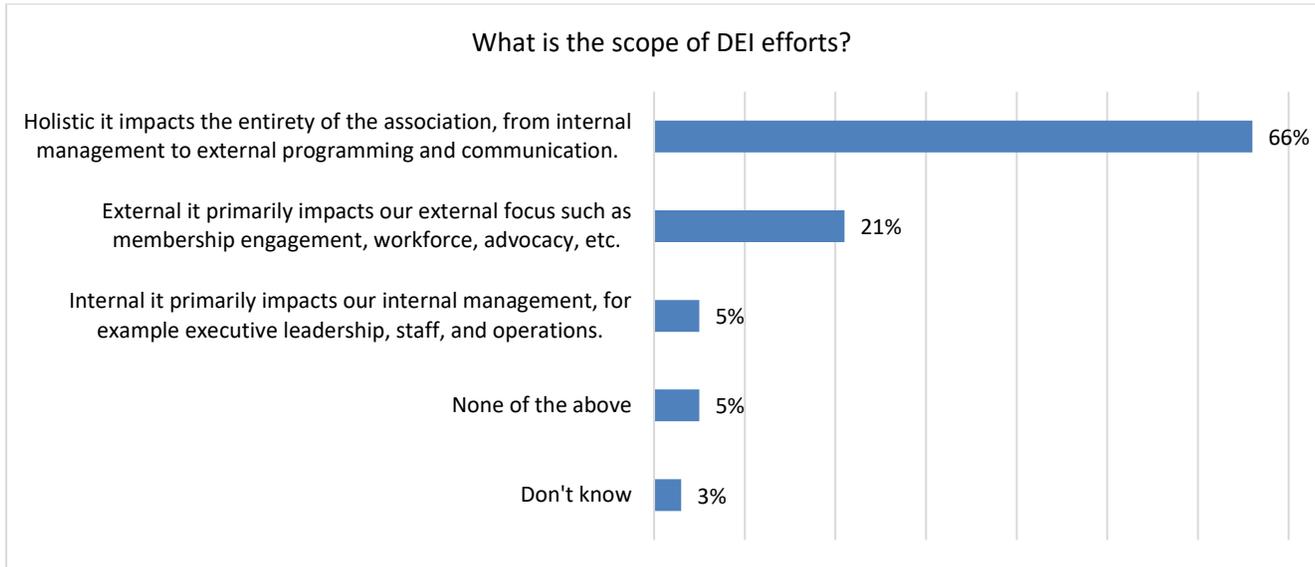


FIGURE 2 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: Which of the following best describes the reach of your activity in DEI or related concepts? Select only one.

DEI Leadership

Responsibility for DEI

In 2021, Association Laboratory’s research concluded that DEI was a “top down” effort led by association senior leaders. In 2022, Looking Forward® DEI investigated who specifically was being charged with ensuring that DEI efforts were successful.

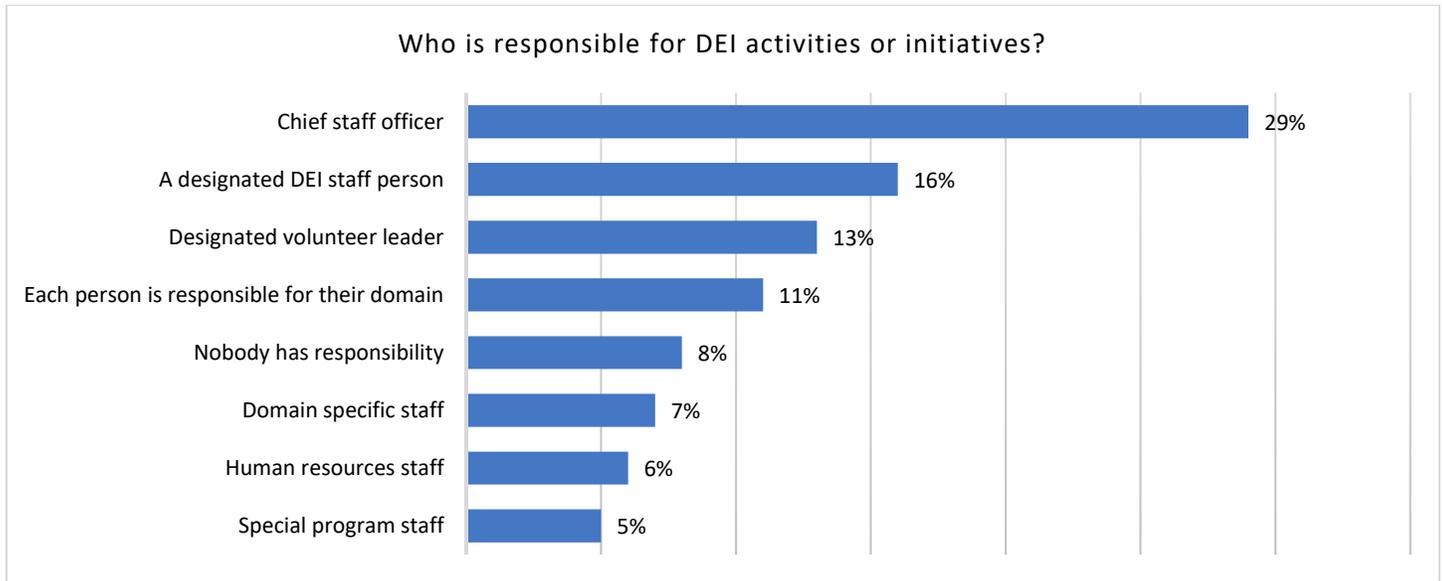


FIGURE 3 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2021

Question text: Who is most responsible for leading DEI activities or initiatives at the association? Select only one.

While the plurality of respondents say the chief staff officer is in charge, the diversity of individuals responsible demonstrates that the association sector is taking a wide range of approaches to ensuring someone has responsibility for DEI initiatives.

Association Laboratory concludes that there is no agreement on the “home” for DEI and that each association, based on its Mission and resources assigns leadership where DEI is most relevant.

Leadership Strategies

Last year, respondents to Looking Forward® DEI 2021 were asked to identify which leadership-oriented strategies they are implementing to address DEI concepts at their association. The following chart shows the percentage of respondents who identified each strategy.

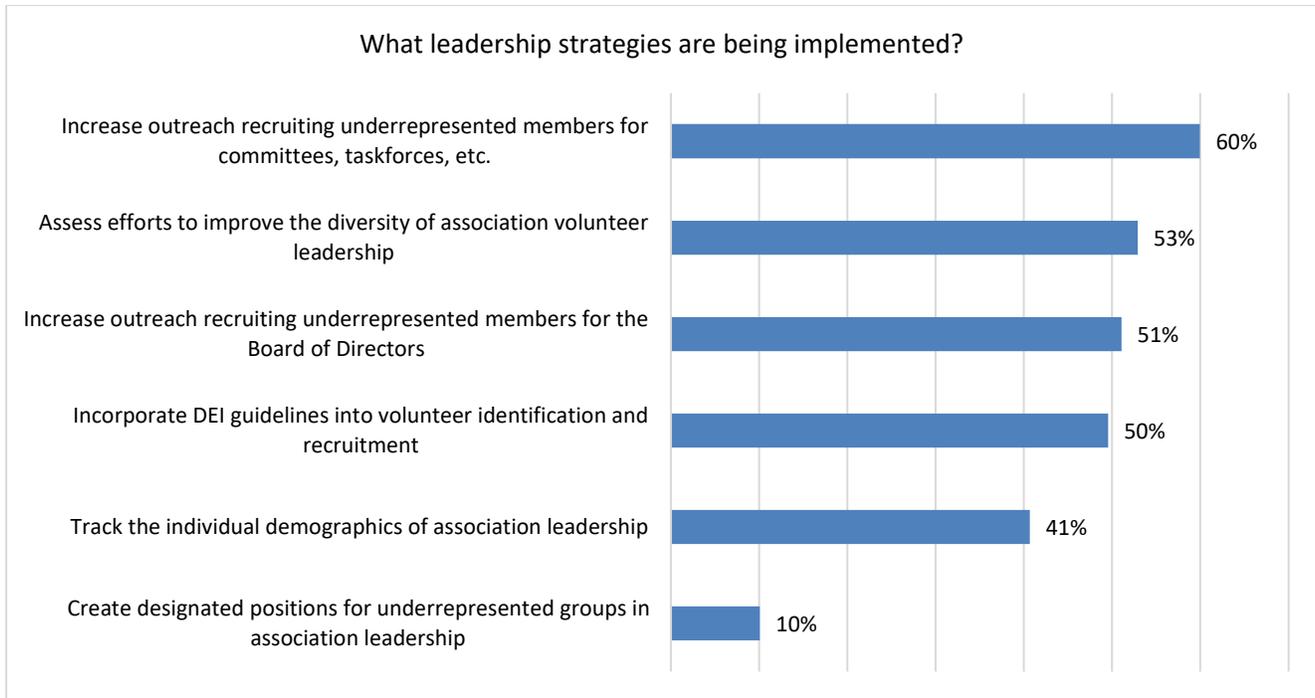


FIGURE 4 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2021

Question text: Over the next year, which of the following leadership strategies does your organization plan on implementing? Select all that apply.

Associations are attempting to identify, recruit and engage volunteer leaders as a visible representation of their commitment to DEI and to provide for more diverse perspectives in leadership. In addition, associations are creating business process, through DEI guidelines, that build these efforts into the ongoing operations of the association.

DEI Effectiveness

Gauging the effectiveness of efforts is important to understanding what works and does not work. Association Laboratory hypothesized that DEI efforts might be focused on distinct areas of the association and as a result, exhibit different levels of effectiveness.

In 2022, the overall success of DEI efforts was evaluated. Respondents were asked to assess their level of success on the separate concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

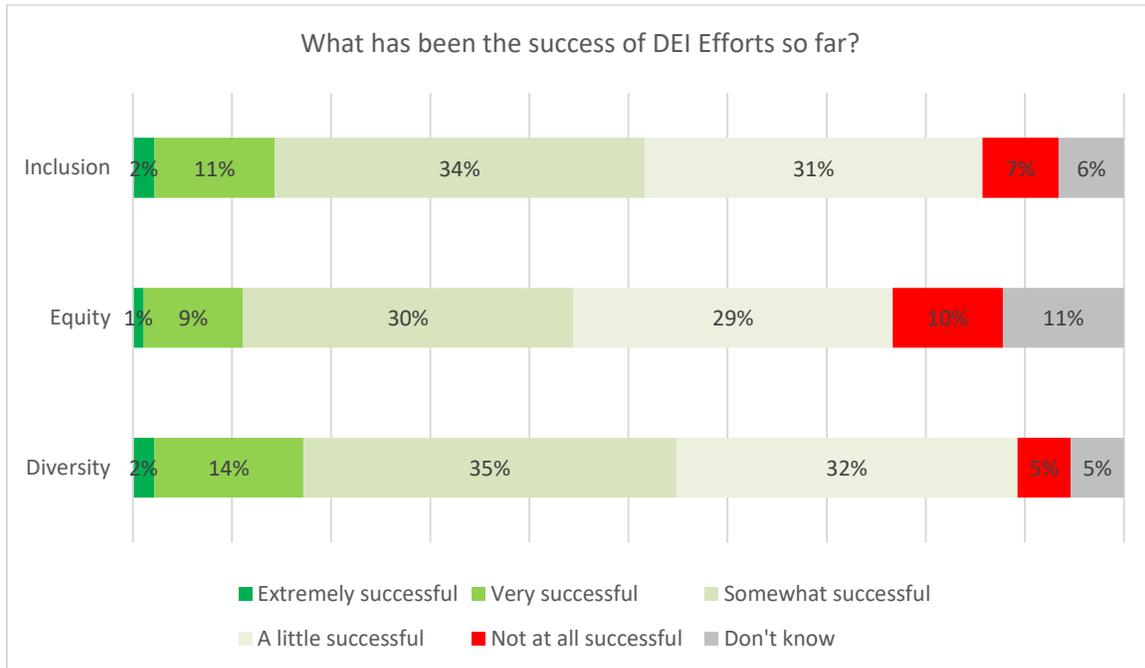


FIGURE 5 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: To date, how successful do you believe your organization's strategies related to DEI have been?

Overall, a respondents indicated the highest levels of success with diversity and for inclusion.

- 51% for diversity
- 47% for inclusion

The area in which associations perceived they were the least successful was in the area of equity where 40% indicated some level of success and where 10% of respondents indicated they were "not at all successful".

In 2021, respondents were asked to assess the impact of their DEI efforts on distinct stakeholder groups. The graph below depicts how effective the DEI efforts were in certain areas according to the respondents.



FIGURE 6 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: We've asked about your DEI efforts in a number of areas. Please rate the success of your DEI efforts in each of the following areas.

The data demonstrates that the more control an association has over an area of influence (ex: staff, Board) the more successful their DEI efforts have been.

Future DEI Activities

Identifying future strategic direction provides evidence of the strategies association leaders believe will be successful.

DEI Strategic Direction

Respondents were asked to identify anticipated future DEI policy changes throughout the association. Notable is the focus on visible leadership with 47% identifying the *selection of subject matter experts* and 46% identifying *volunteer recruitment, retention, or onboarding*.

Not only do these strategies provide for visible leaders they also act as a solution to associations who are challenged to identify sufficient numbers of individuals who match their DEI goals within their industry, profession, or membership.

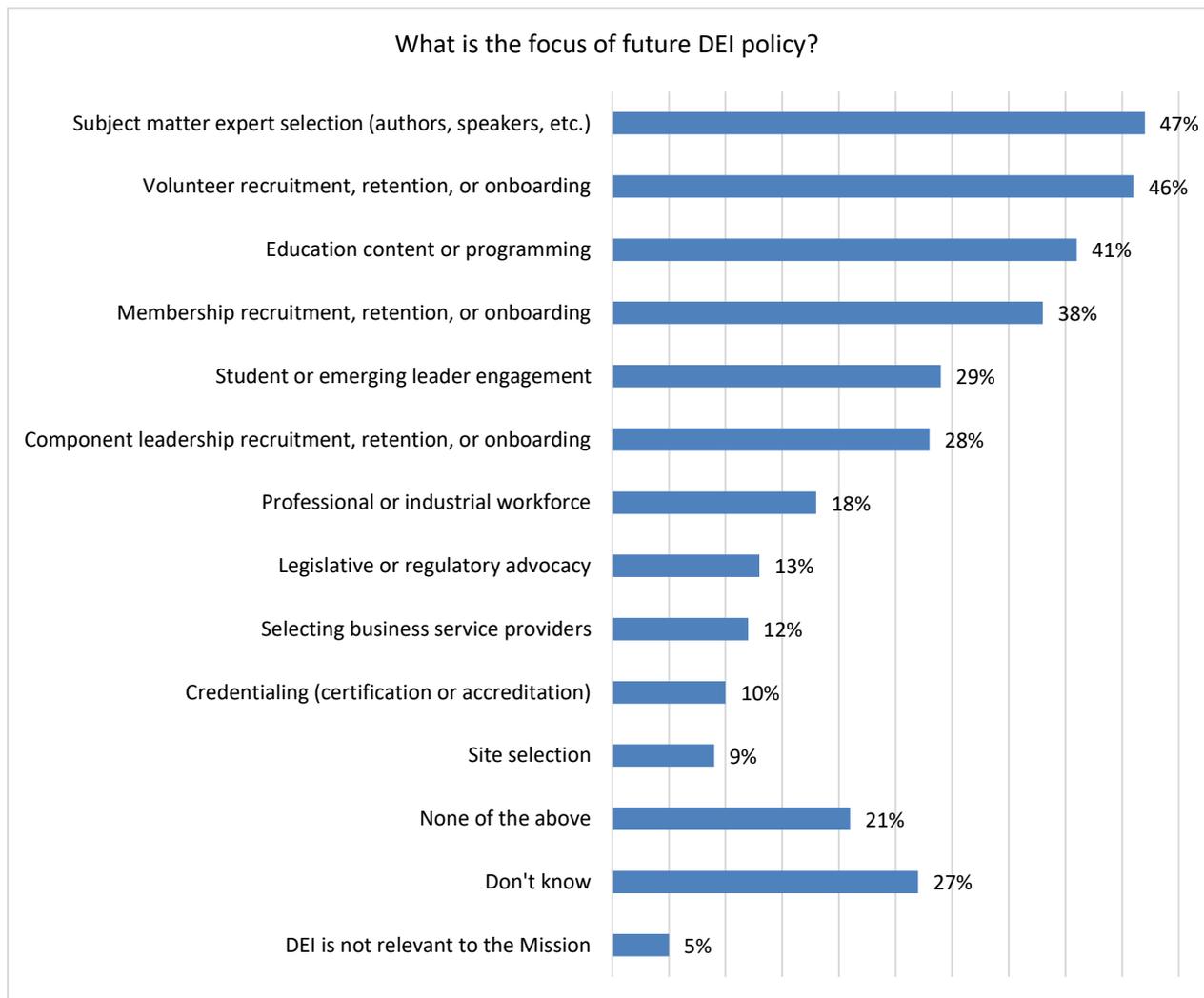


FIGURE 7 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: In which of the following areas will your association implement a DEI policy within the next year? Select all that apply.

Values-based or Organizational Planning Strategies

Last summer, respondents to Looking Forward® (DEI) 2021 were asked to identify how they were incorporating DEI concepts into their values or organizational strategy. The following chart shows the percentage of respondents who identified each strategy.

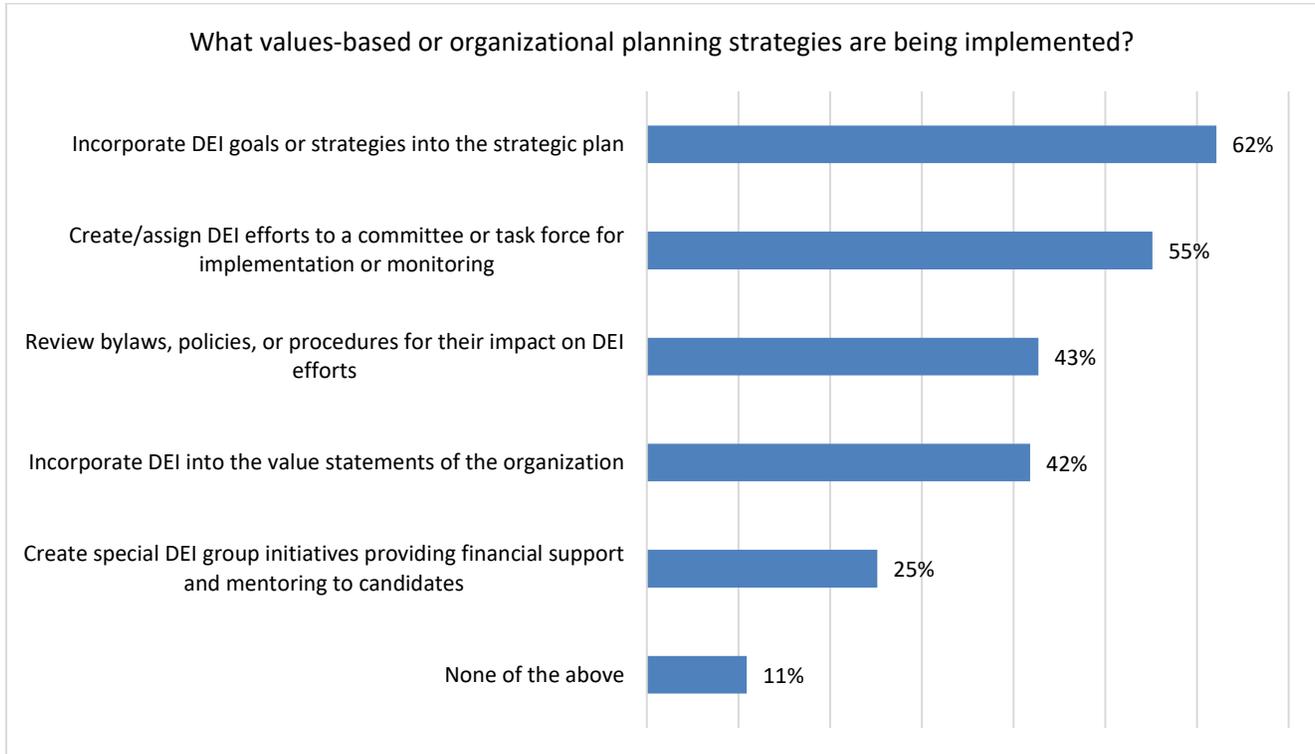


FIGURE 8 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2021

Question text: Over the next year, which of the following strategies does your organization plan on implementing? Select all that apply.

Barriers to DEI Success

DEI is a complex topic that can be viewed through a variety of lenses. In addition, making any strategic change is inherently difficult. This difficulty increases as more stakeholder groups are brought into the discussion.

Looking Forward® DEI 2022 assessed the primary barriers respondents believed were most challenging.

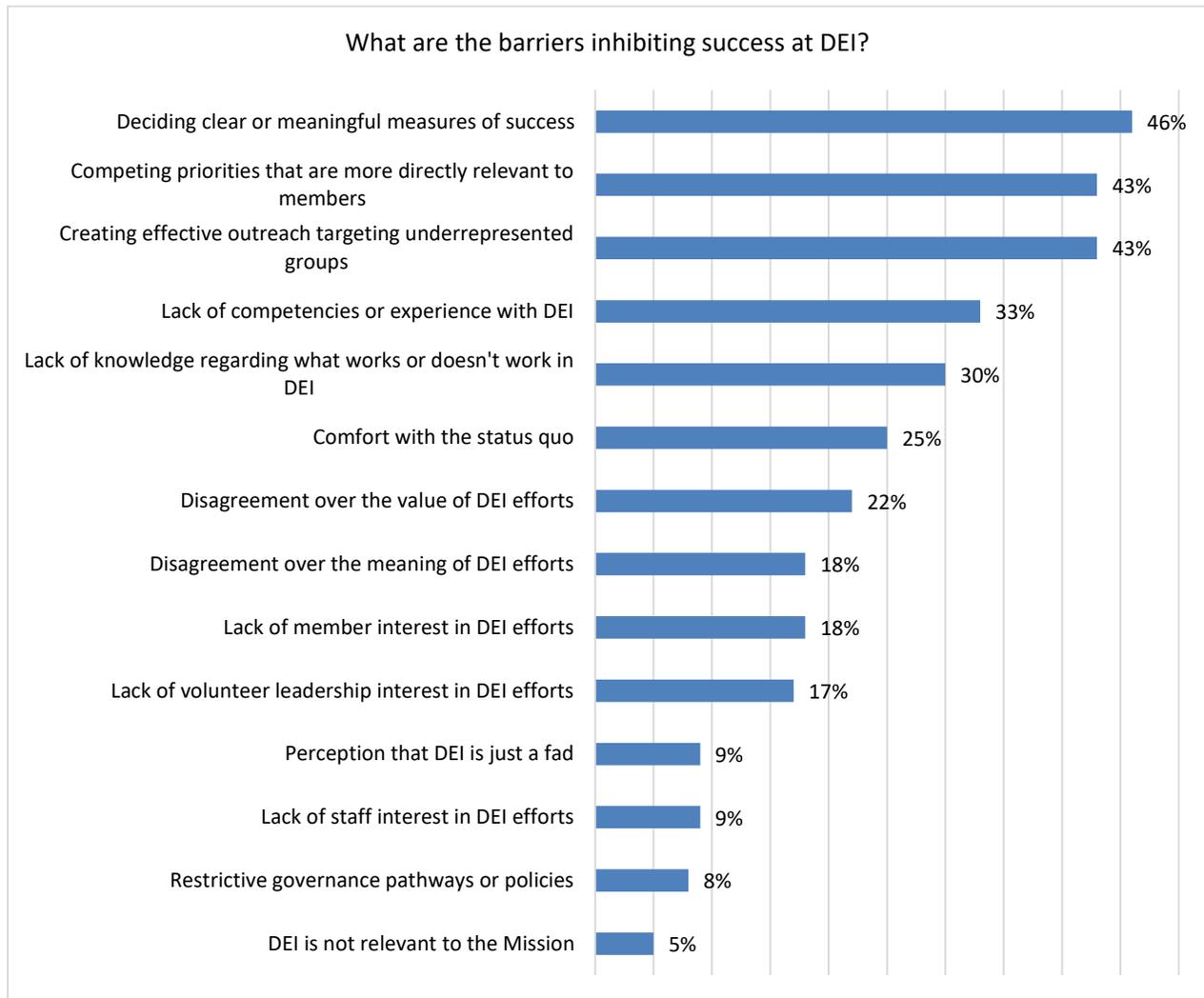


FIGURE 9 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: Which of the following barriers, if any, are inhibiting your association's DEI efforts? Select all that apply.

In summary, three challenges top the list.

1. How do we measure success?
2. How do we balance DEI efforts (and corresponding resources) relative to other priorities?
3. How do we effectively reach out to people we are attempting to engage with the association?

Resource Challenges

Respondents are struggling to identify and sustain staff and financial resources necessary for success.

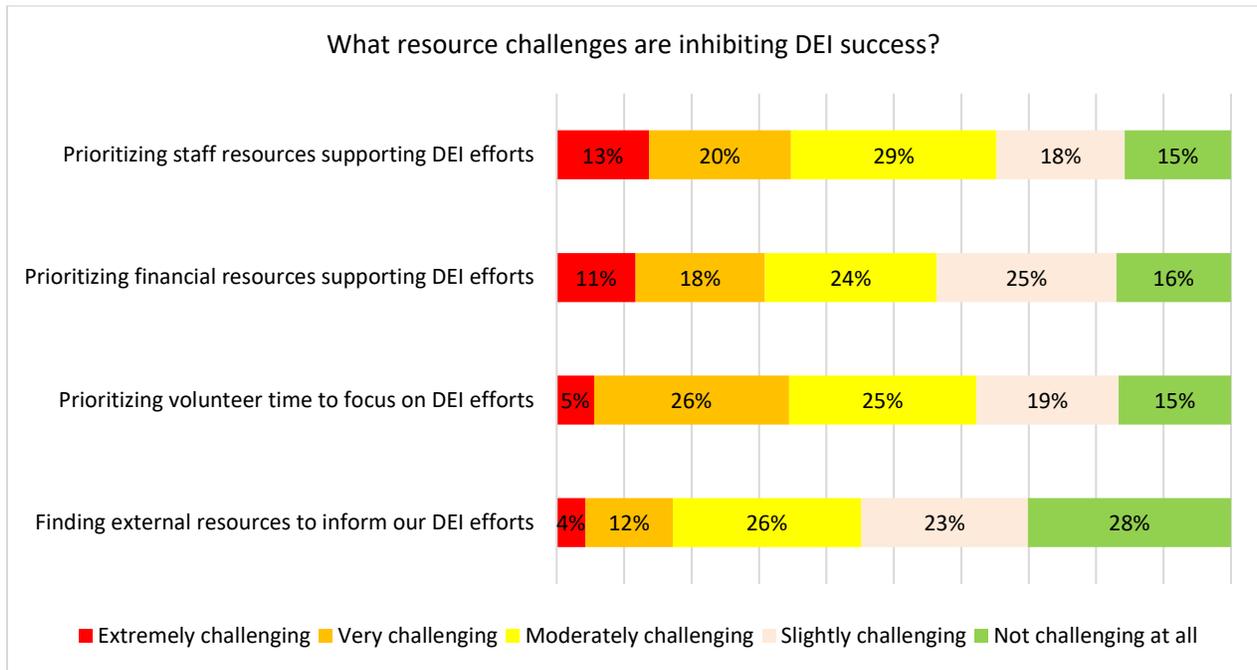


FIGURE 10 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: How challenging will each of the following to be to your organization's DEI efforts over the next year?

Diversity

Looking Forward® DEI 2021 researched primarily individual diversity, not organizational or other types of diversity, for example type of member or member company. The study asked respondents to identify which kind of *individual diversity* they considered most critical to address in the coming year.

Looking Forward® DEI 2022 continued this effort and separated diversity concepts from equity and inclusion concepts to bring more clarity to each individual idea.

The following highlights key findings specific to diversity and compares the results where appropriate.

Definition of Personal Diversity

The primary focus of respondents continues to be on racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. There is an increasing focus on professional role or title, too, as associations are presumed to be interested in expanding their market reach within their profession or industry.

The following shows the response to this question by all respondents.

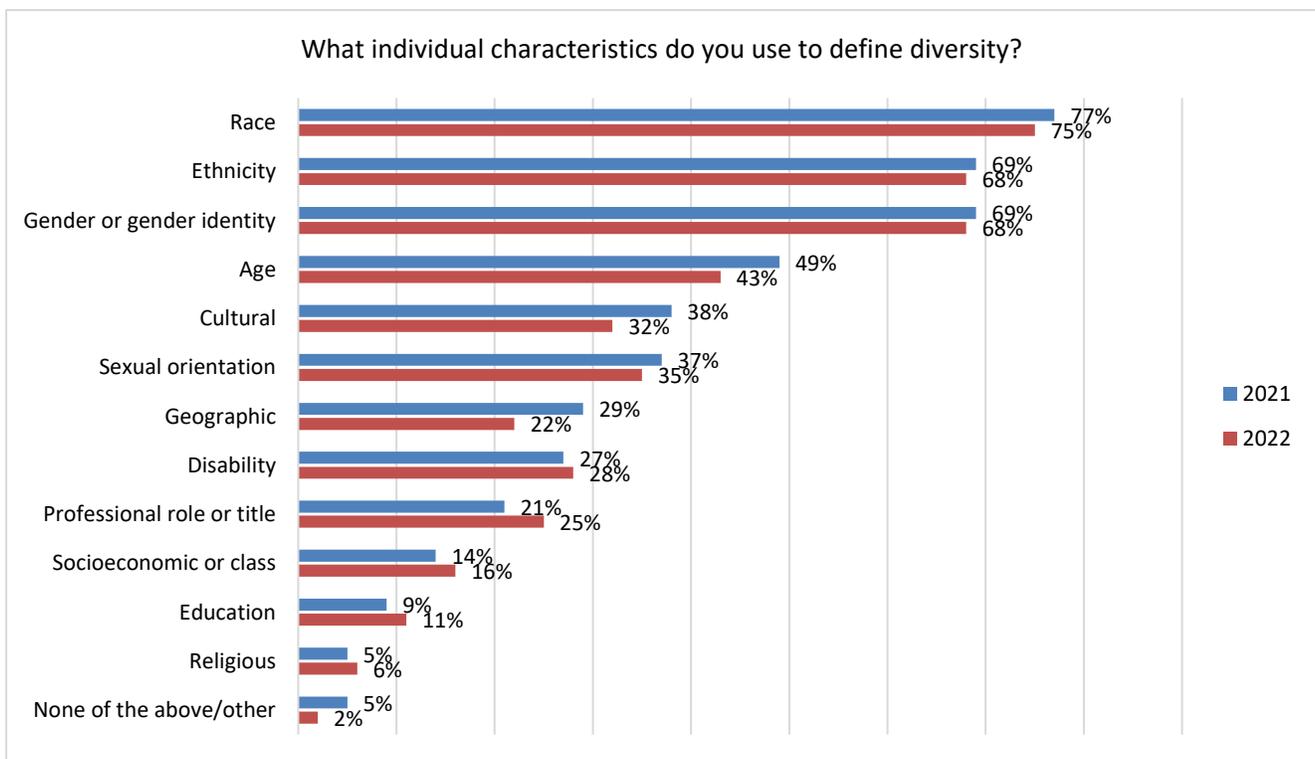


FIGURE 12 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2021/22 TREND ANALYSIS

Question text: Individual or personal diversity can have many meanings to different people. When your association considers “individual diversity” which of the following areas are most critical over the next year? Select up to five.

Concerns About Association Stakeholder Diversity

Associations are often concerned about the diversity of the association’s volunteer or staff leadership. Looking Forward® DEI 2021 assessed the level of concern regarding the diversity of different stakeholder or leadership groups.

The following chart identifies the level of concern by respondents with their association’s diversity within different areas of association leadership.

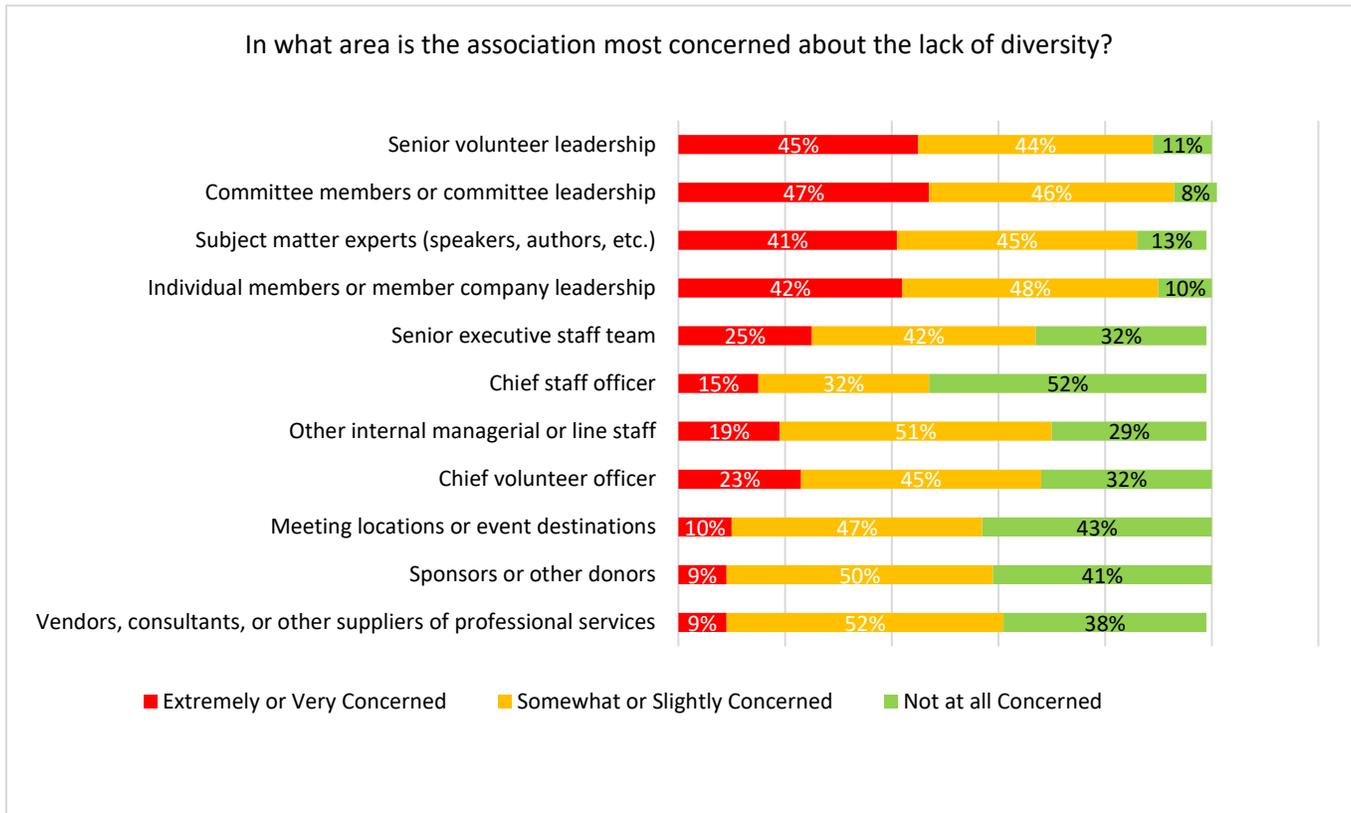


FIGURE 13 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2021

Question text: How concerned is your association’s leadership about a lack of diversity in each of the following?

Diversity Initiation Point

Top-down change is often used to make changes quickly, for example during an association turnaround situation. Since people are naturally resistant to change, a top-down approach often creates or increases resistance.

The biggest problem in changing any organization is resistance to change. The more complex, controversial, or personal the topic, the more challenging change becomes.

As a result, Association Laboratory believed it was important to identify the source or initiation point of these discussions. Are these bottom-up demands of members or top-down initiatives of volunteer leadership or staff?

By understanding the direction of change, the association can select strategies that improve the likelihood of success.

Looking Forward® DEI 2021 shows that discussions centered around diversity typically start internally with relatively weak influence from external sources. 70% of discussions of DEI began at the Board of Directors or staff level. The following shows the response to this question by all respondents.

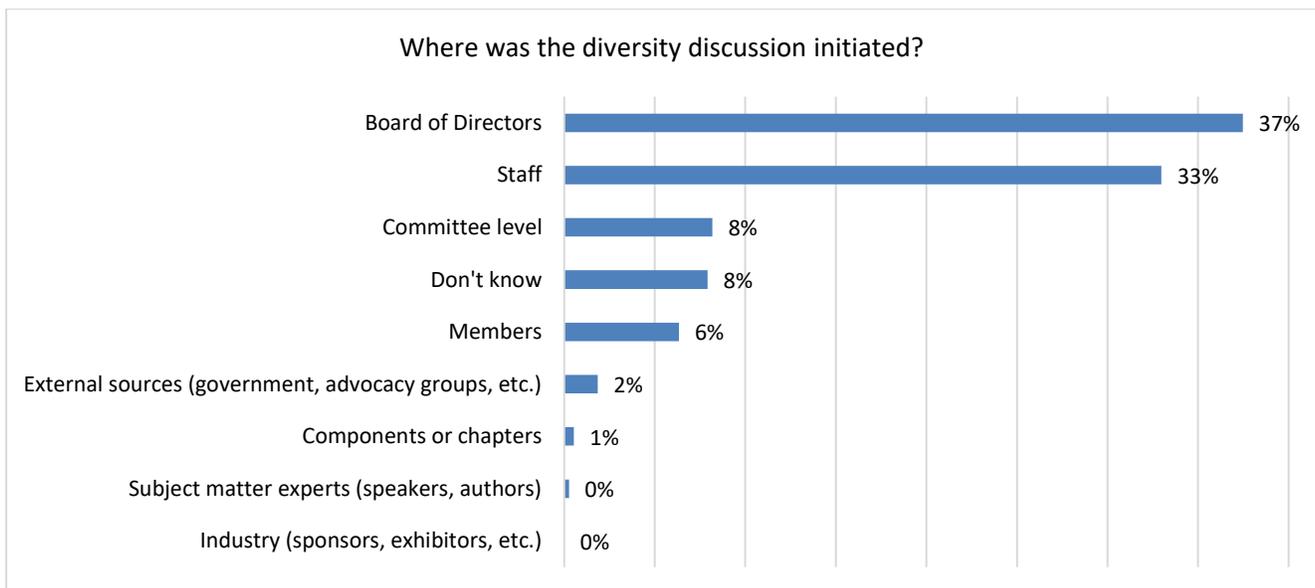


FIGURE 14 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2021

Question text: Where was the discussion of diversity first conceived or initiated at the association? Select only one.

Association Diversity Initiatives

Respondents from Looking Forward® DEI 2022 were asked to identify what specific strategies they were implementing to improve diversity within their association.

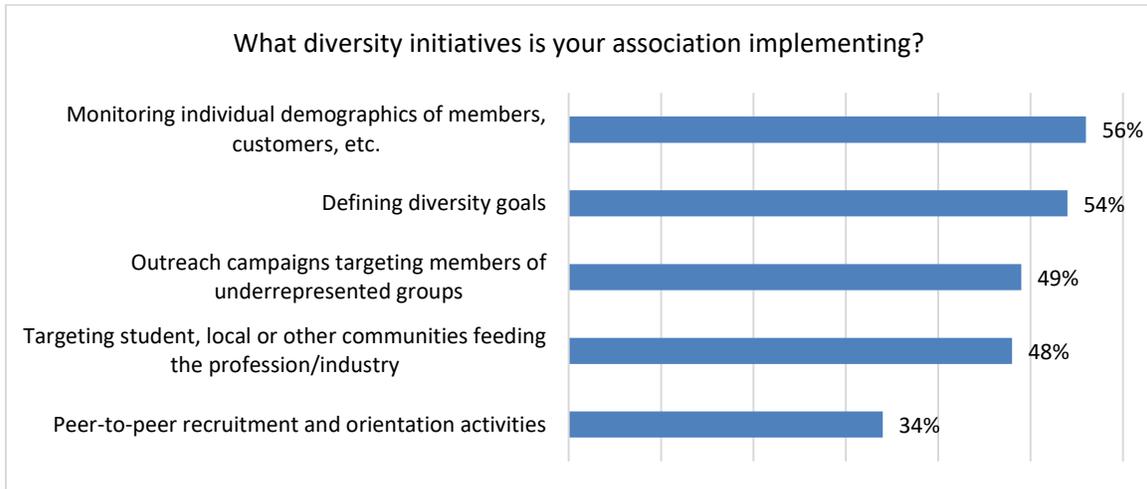


FIGURE 15 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: Which of the following **diversity** initiatives is your association sustaining or implementing over the next year? Select all that apply.

Anticipated Impact of Improved Diversity

Respondents from Looking Forward® DEI 2022 were asked to identify the intended impact or outcome resulting from improved diversity within their association or its membership. The following shows the anticipated results of diversity initiatives.

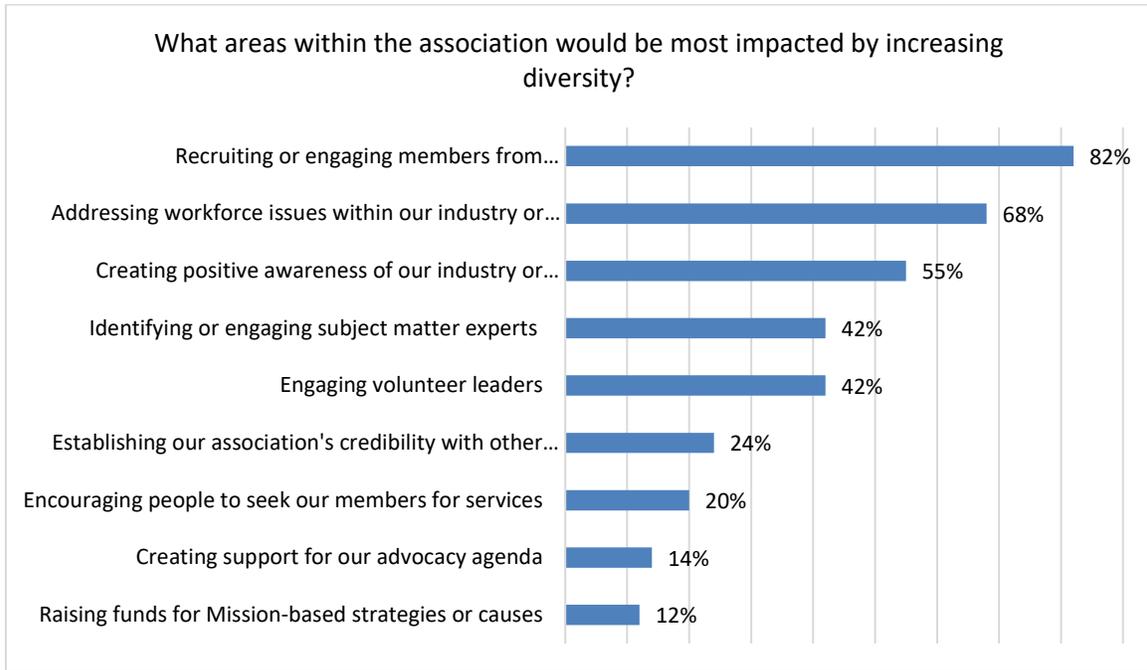


FIGURE 16 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: *In which of the following areas would increasing diversity in your association or its membership create the most impact? Select all that apply.*

Equity

In 2021, Association Laboratory concluded from the research that the issue of “equity” was not as well understood or as important to associations.

“Equity is newer, less well defined or understood, and there is less consensus on its importance or meaning across professions and industries.”

Looking Forward® DEI 2021

As a result, in Looking Forward® DEI 2022, a research goal was to collect more specific insight into perceptions of equity by association executives.

Perceptions of Equity

The following chart highlights the level of agreement with statements about equity devised from a review of qualitative data.

While respondents were in favor of improving member or stakeholder equity (66% agree) they struggled with measuring it (48% disagree) and incorporating it into goals and strategies (33% disagree).

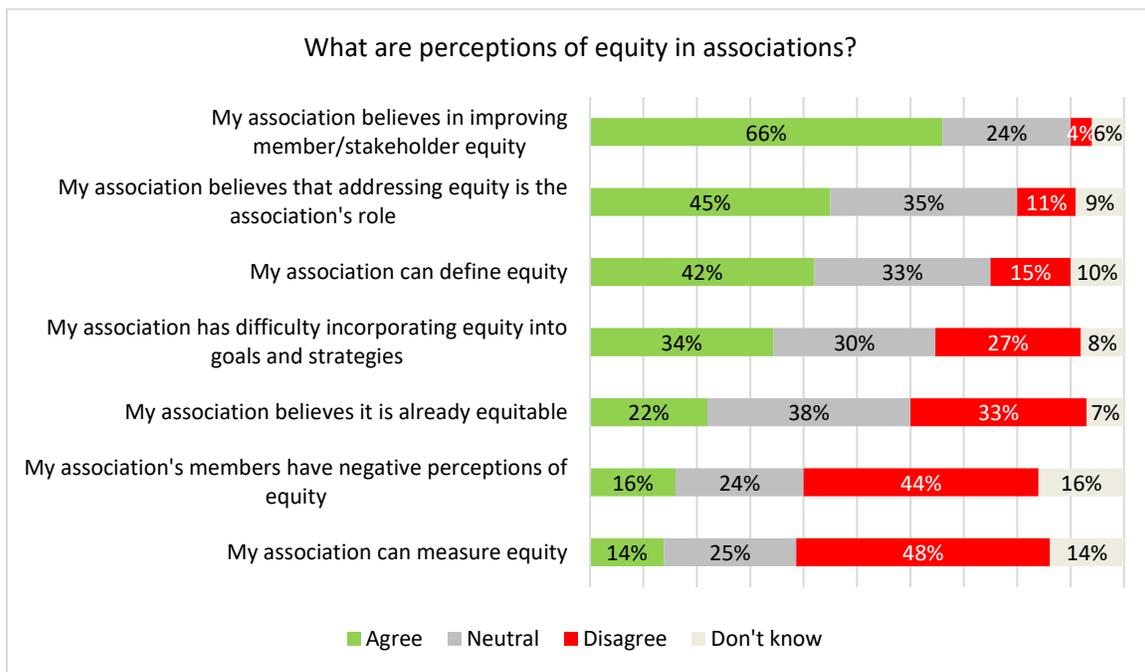


FIGURE 17 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: How much do you agree with each of the following statements regarding equity at your association?

Equity Initiatives

Following an investigation of perceptions, the study sought to identify initiatives specifically addressing equity. The following identifies the programs respondents are implementing during the course of the next year.



FIGURE 18 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

*Question text Which of the following **equity** initiatives is your association sustaining or implementing over the next year? Select all that apply.*

“Equity” can have different meanings for different people. **Association Laboratory concludes** that associations are viewing equity through the lens of expanded or easier access to the programs, services, or initiatives of the association.

Inclusion

In 2021, Association Laboratory’s research did not effectively isolate and test concepts specific to inclusion. In 2022, Looking Forward® DEI examined inclusion separately to assess perceptions and potential inclusion initiatives.

Perceptions of Inclusion

The following chart highlights the level of agreement with statements about inclusion devised from a review of qualitative data.

Respondents were strongly in favor of improving member or stakeholder inclusion (81% agree) and supported their association’s role (61% agree). In addition, there was overwhelming disagreement that members may not want to include people who are different within the association (70% disagree).

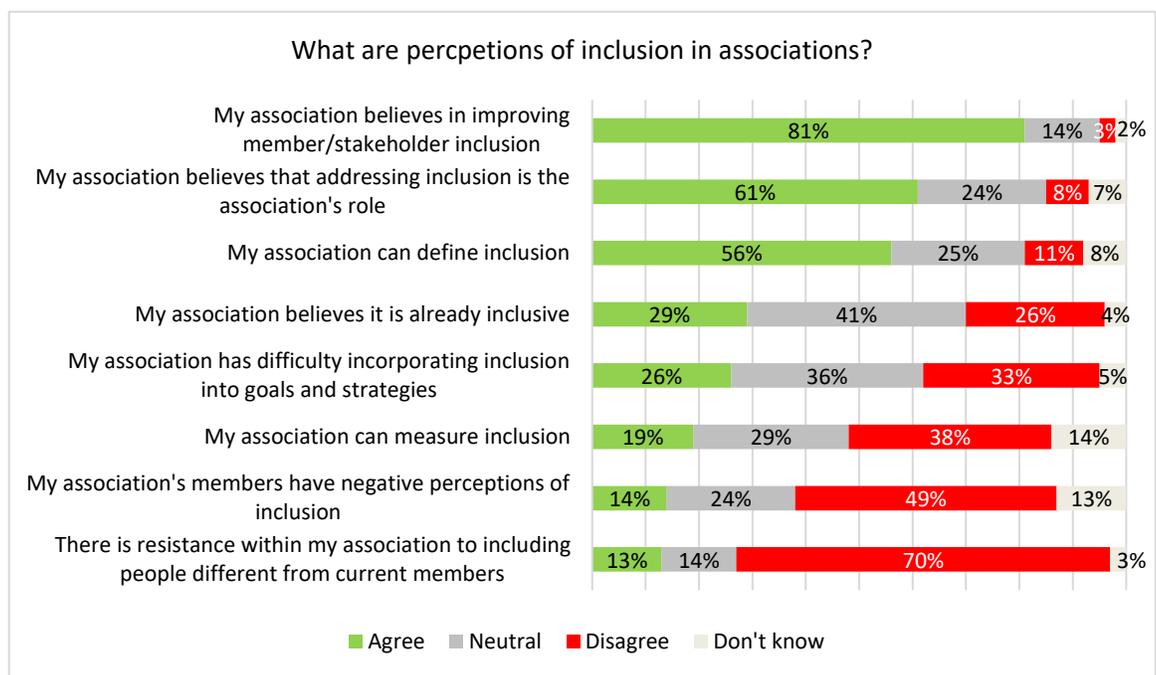


FIGURE 19 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text: How much do you agree with each of the following statements regarding **inclusion** at your association?

Inclusion Initiatives

The following highlights initiatives identified as inclusionary. **Association Laboratory suspects** that most associations look at “inclusion” as a means of making the door to participation with the association and its use as a platform for members’ success “wider and easier to open” for more people. Examples range from dietary options designed to include individuals with a range of dietary requirements to a review of content to ensure language is of the appropriate tone, context, and meaning.

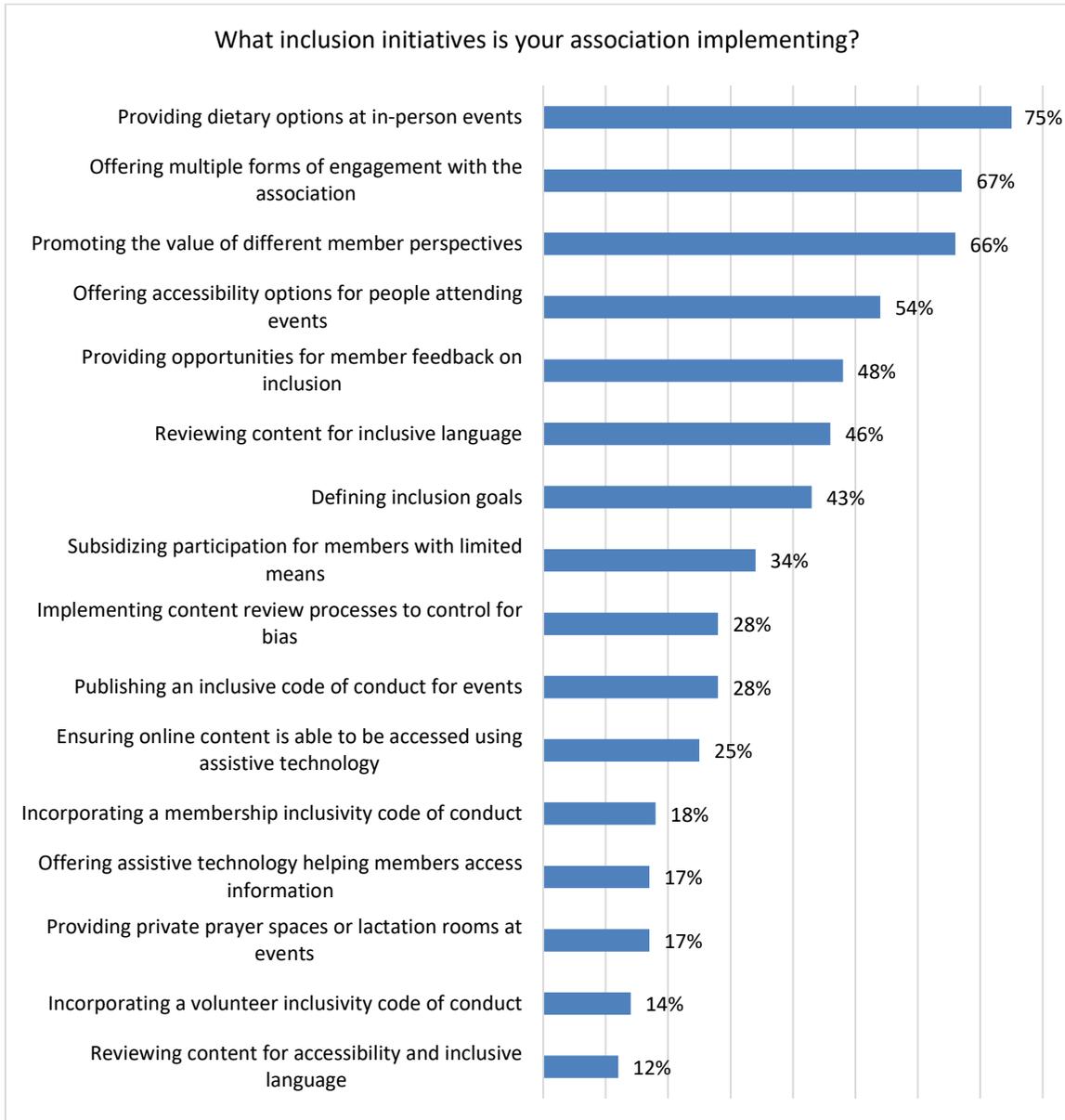


FIGURE 20 LOOKING FORWARD® DEI 2022

Question text Which of the following **inclusion** initiatives is your association sustaining or implementing over the next year? Select all that apply.

Closing

Since 2021, Association Laboratory has become the industry leader investigating DEI within the association sector. Despite this experience, grappling with these concepts continues to be challenging to research, discuss and decide on how best to incorporate these concepts into a modern association.

At Association Laboratory we've been working with a wide variety of organizations on DEI and other complex issues. Given our research in this area, here are some lessons we've learned.

First, the investigation and discussion of DEI can be incredibly controversial. This is a complicated issue without common definitions, which makes discussion very difficult. In addition, key concepts are sometimes inadvertently and/or maliciously interpreted by individuals for personal or organizational gain.

Second, the question isn't between a positive concept like DEI and some negative alternative. It is often between alternative positive viewpoints.

For example, the discussion of DEI by a surgical association was controversial because some leaders believed it conflicted with the traditional "colorblind" philosophy of medicine, that all patients regardless of race, ethnicity, etc. deserved the same care. Once race (or other attributes) was introduced, it challenged this philosophy of a colorblind treatment by introducing a qualifier.

Third, the devil is in the details of implementation. DEI policy statements are relatively benign and often generic. There are only so many ways to say it. The implementation of DEI is another matter. Do you change how you evaluate volunteer leaders based on their adherence to a subjective DEI assessment? Do you support segmenting the membership community by gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.? It is possible to disagree with these specific tactics while still being supportive of a diverse and inclusive community.

Fourth, many topics are becoming conflated. DEI "Woke," "Systemic Racism," "Privilege," Implicit Bias, CRT, etc. are all very different concepts, but it is becoming nearly impossible to discuss one without others being introduced. This conflation of topics creates a challenging leadership environment.

Fifth, while DEI has been around a long time, it has become more controversial as some proponents of DEI have started to incorporate unrelated, more controversial components into the mix and to accuse anyone who disagrees as being hostile to diversity or implying bigotry (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). This effectively destroys discussion within your association.

At Association Laboratory, we have taken an agnostic viewpoint as researchers. Our job is to inform and facilitate the conversation, not take sides. We don't presume something exists or does not, we simply answer the questions posed as objectively as possible.

Appendix 1: Accessing the Looking Forward® Dashboard.

The Looking Forward® Dashboard is the leading source of research on the association sector. It contains the most recent, relevant, and customizable data to inform the decisions you need to make in a dynamic and uncertain environment.

Looking Forward® sector data is provided via a customizable dashboard, allowing you to focus on the segment of the association sector most critical to you, your staff and Board. See what issues are impacting members and identify the most likely challenges you'll face. Then download the custom report to guide discussions with your team and volunteer leaders.

[Click here for the Looking Forward® Dashboard](#)

How to use the dashboard

The Looking Forward® Dashboard provides you with an overview of the sector studies conducted by Association Laboratory. It is a simplified representation of the data. It does not, for example, provide unique N counts (respondents/individual question) for each question.

It is expected that as you select an individual report and drill down into the data and customize your report to your needs, only the most relevant data per question will be included. As a result of the different counting methodologies and the natural limitations of a published document requiring data counts at a particular time, there may be minor differences between published documents and the Looking Forward® Dashboard.

Association Laboratory produces three sector studies under the Looking Forward® banner that are critical to association sector thought leadership.

- **Looking Forward® (Impact)** – This global environmental scan of the association strategy environment identifies the factors with the greatest impact on association members and the challenges these factors create for associations.
- **Looking Forward® (Solutions)** – This study assesses more than 135 different strategies that association leaders believe are important to success given the influences on their members and the challenges these factors create.
- **Looking Forward® (DEI)** – This study, the first of its kind in the association sector, investigates sector perceptions of DEI issues, the challenges associations perceive in effective DEI work and the strategies being pursued by associations to address these challenges.

The homepage of the data dashboard identifies the different sector data sets you can access from these three studies. Simply select the study of interest and the dashboard will display top-level results. Clicking “Explore” in each chart will allow you to dig deeper into that topic area.

Each chart has a book icon in the bottom right corner, which allows you to see the question asked of respondents.

In addition, once you clicked “Explore,” you will see a list of filters along the right side of the page. These filters allow you to adjust the data set by annual budget, member size, organization type, location, profession, and organization type (meaning professional or trade). At the bottom of each page, the printer graphic allows you to print a PDF of the page to use in conversations with your Board.

Appendix 2: Methodology

Looking Forward® DEI 2022 provides a picture of the current state of DEI in the association sector with a focus on diversity and the challenges and strategies considered most critical to trade and professional associations.

Association Laboratory developed and deployed an online survey to collect data from association leaders.

Response options for *Looking Forward® DEI 2022* were informed by an examination of secondary research and client DEI studies incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data.

Example: *“In which of the following stakeholder perception areas does your organization believe a lack of diversity creates the most challenges? Select up to three.”*

A total of 317 individuals completed all or most of the survey. The response includes:

- 42% of respondents were classified as association Chief Staff Officers
- 2% of respondents were Volunteer Leaders.
- 6% of respondents were Assistant Executive Director/COO
- 18% of respondents were Senior Domain Executive (CFO, CMO, etc.)
- 28% of respondents were Association Staff Working in a Specific Domain Area
- 4% of respondents held a different job title

Ninety-nine percent of respondents are located within the United States.

Appendix 3: About Association Laboratory

Association Laboratory helps association leaders make better decisions through research and strategy consulting services, dissemination of association sector research insights and the education of association leaders.

The award-winning company is a national leader in developing sustainable, successful strategy for associations and has been advising associations since 1999 from offices in Washington, DC and Chicago, IL. You can learn more about us at www.associationlaboratory.com.

Research and Strategy Consulting Services

Association Laboratory is a full-service research and strategy firm. We lead evidence-based, collaborative engagements addressing the spectrum of association challenges. From strategic planning and membership model design to online education and global expansion, the company helps you identify and implement successful business strategy.

Common engagements include the following.

Strategic Planning	Membership Value Proposition and Modeling Strategy
Environmental Scanning	Online Education Strategy
Content Strategy	Component Value Proposition Strategy
Credentialing Strategy	Global Strategy
DEI Strategy	Emerging Leader Strategy

Association Sector Research and Insights

Association Laboratory collects and disseminates association sector research aggregating information collected from hundreds of association leaders; providing you with the most recent, relevant, and useful information you need to guide conversations at your association.

Association Leader Education and Competency Development

Association Laboratory produces strategic educational content designed to help association leaders develop the competencies necessary for success. Research-based and peer driven this content provides you with an engaging, effective means of improving the success of your leadership and decision-making.