A WORKPLACE FOR ALL

A Survey on the Federal Government's Diversity and Inclusion Training

March 2021

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OVERVIEW

PURPOSE

Race relations were placed front and center of U.S. society in 2020 as the country continues to face a reckoning over race, justice, and equity. Many institutions have yet to realize a diverse and inclusive workforce, despite studies showing that ethnically and culturally diverse companies outperform their peers by 33%.[1] As a leading institution, how does the federal government fare in diversity and inclusion? How effective is its execution of diversity and inclusion training as a component of these efforts?

To answer these questions and more, Government Business Council (GBC), in partnership with GovExec, conducted a survey in mid-January of 2021 to analyze sentiment among federal employees.

METHODOLOGY

To build upon a 2015 GBC diversity and inclusion survey report, GBC deployed a survey the week of January 18th, 2021 to a random sample of federal government employees. After screening, 1,139 federal government employees were included in the study. 86% of respondents are federal civilian workers, and 14% are defense civilians or active duty. Of the total sample, 60% of survey participants rank GS-GM-13 and above. 36% of respondents identify as people of color (POC), and 50% of respondents identify as female. 7% of respondents identify as LGBTQ and 29% as U.S. veterans. 19% report having a disability.

In our survey, we define *diversity* as the traits and characteristics of people that make them unique in an organization and *inclusion* as the social norms or behaviors that make those people feel welcome.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ROOTED IN IDENTITY HAVE NEGATIVE WORKPLACE CONSEQUENCES

61% of respondents have felt misunderstood because their identity differs from that of another colleague, which is 10pp lower than when respondents were asked in data captured by a 2015 GBC survey. Nonetheless, a majority of respondents, particularly respondents of color, have experienced feeling misunderstood because of their identity. 75% of respondents of color have felt misunderstood in their workplace, including 86% of Black or African American respondents. Of those that have felt misunderstood, 63% of respondents of color say that it has made it difficult for them to work, likely hindering employee satisfaction and productivity. Only 42% of respondents of color feel supported during these situations.

RESPONDENTS FIND VALUE IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

72% of respondents say that it is very or extremely important that their agency be diverse and inclusive, which includes 79% of respondents of color and 57% of women and respondents who identify as LGBTQ. The largest of all groups, 88% of Black or African American respondents find agency diversity and inclusion to be very or extremely important. When practicing inclusion, respondents who identify with minority backgrounds find acknowledgement of their identity as an important component. Over 50% of respondents who identify as LGBTQ, as people of color, or report having a disability feel that it is important that their identity be acknowledged in creating a comfortable work environment.

HOWEVER, DISCREPANCIES EXIST BETWEEN TRAINING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Nearly 80% of respondents of color —and 66% of respondents in general — think diversity and inclusion training is vital to the success of organizations, both public and private. When it comes to *government* diversity and inclusion training specifically, only 51% of respondents of color —and 49% of all respondents — think that it has brought value to their agency. Respondents who have experienced misunderstandings because of their identity or are people of color are more critical of their agency's training, suggesting room for improvement in the execution of government diversity and inclusion training. For example, respondents note that their training excels at acknowledging racial stereotypes, but falls short of challenging racial stereotypes.
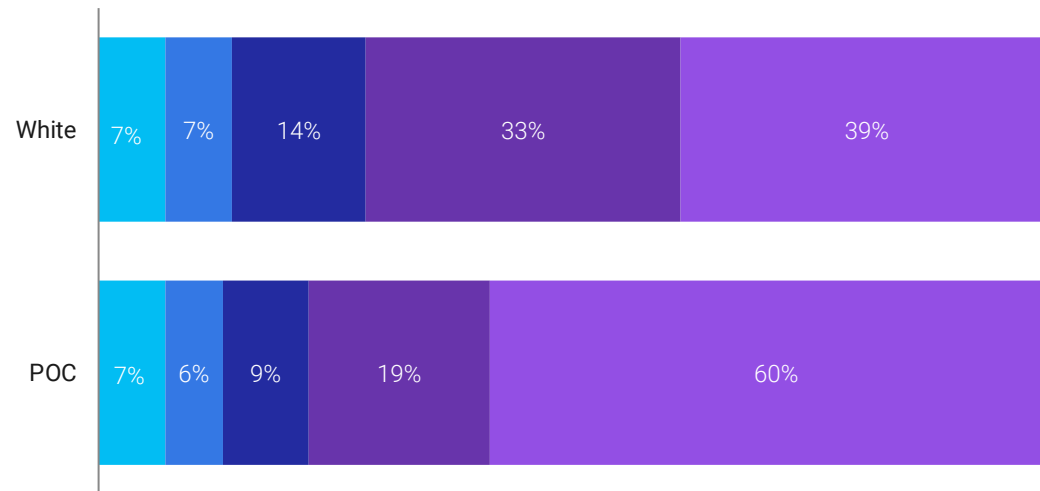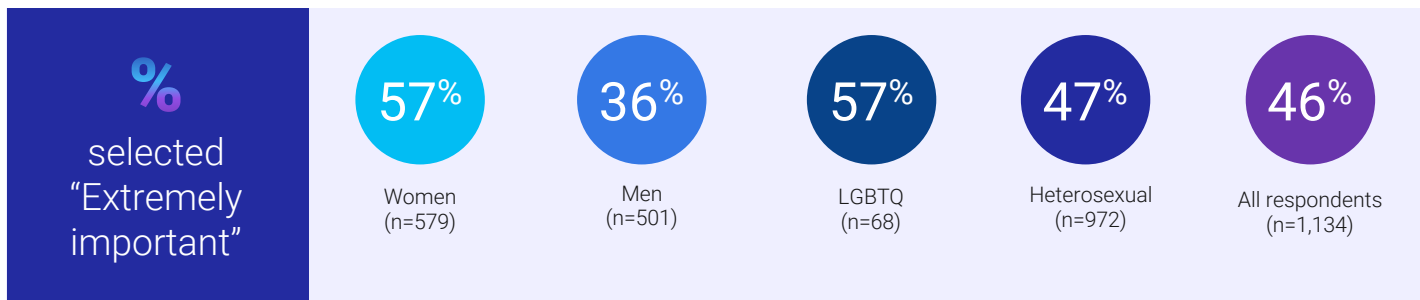
TAKEAWAY

21pp more respondents of color think it is extremely important to be diverse and inclusive than white respondents.

SURVEY QUESTION: How important do you think it is for your agency to be diverse and inclusive?

■ Not at all important ■ Slightly important ■ Moderately important ■ Very important ■ Extremely important
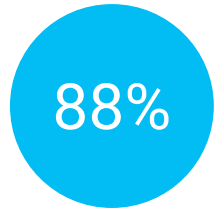
White
| 7% | 7% | 14% | 33% | 39% |

POC
| 7% | 6% | 9% | 19% | 60% |

Percentage of respondents, n=422 (POC), n=620 (White)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

% selected "Extremely important"

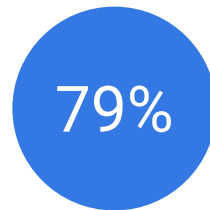| 57%	36%	57%	47%	46%
Women (n=579)	Men (n=501)	LGBTQ (n=68)	Heterosexual (n=972)	All respondents (n=1,134)

79% of respondents of color find it to be very or extremely important that their agency be diverse and inclusive.
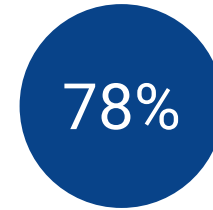
Those that find it to be "very" or "extremely important" include:

88%
of Black or African American respondents
(n=211)

79%
of Asian respondents
(n=28)

78%
of Hispanic/Latino respondents
(n=66)
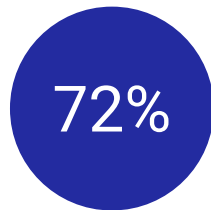
72%
of White, non-Hispanic respondents
(n=620)
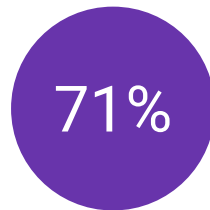
71%
of respondents of two or more races
(n=65)

55%
of American Indian or Alaska Native respondents
(n=20)

" Diversity and inclusion is critical to effective workplace and societal productivity. Without it, divisiveness reigns and tears people, organizations, and society apart. All human beings are endowed with rights as individuals and deserving of respect and dignity. Moving past stereotypes and misperceptions of others helps facilitate a healthier and more functional environment for all.

Survey Respondent

TAKEAWAY

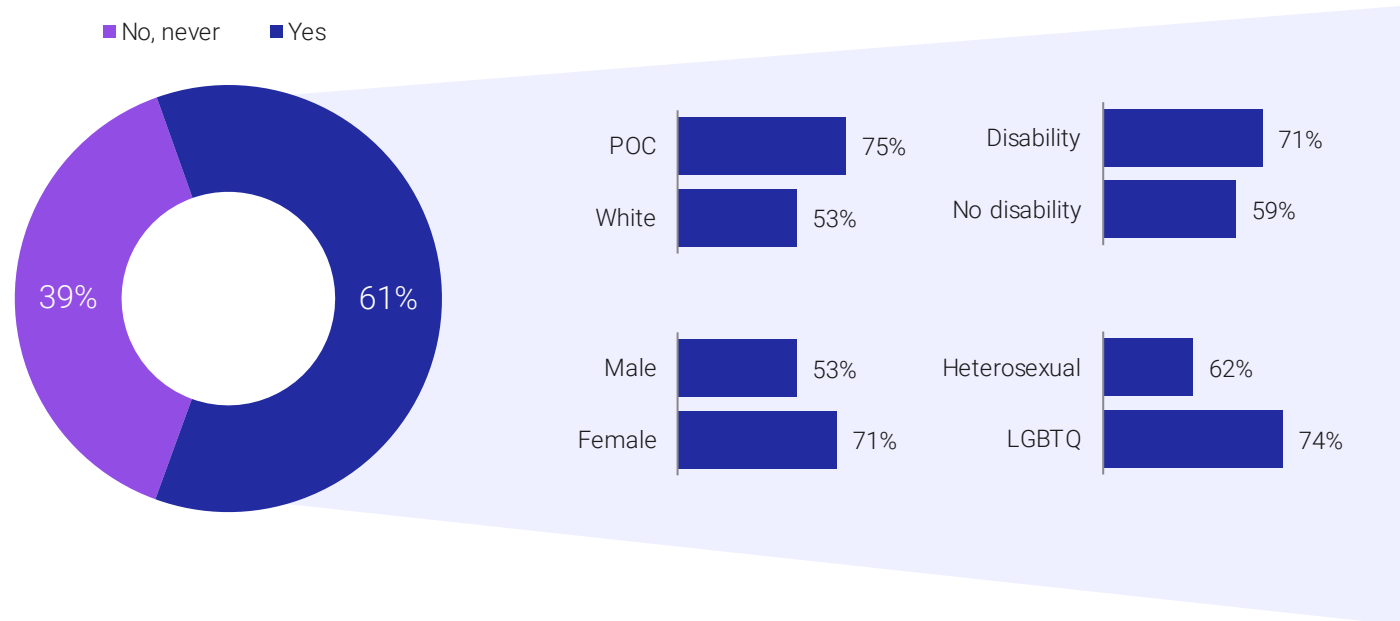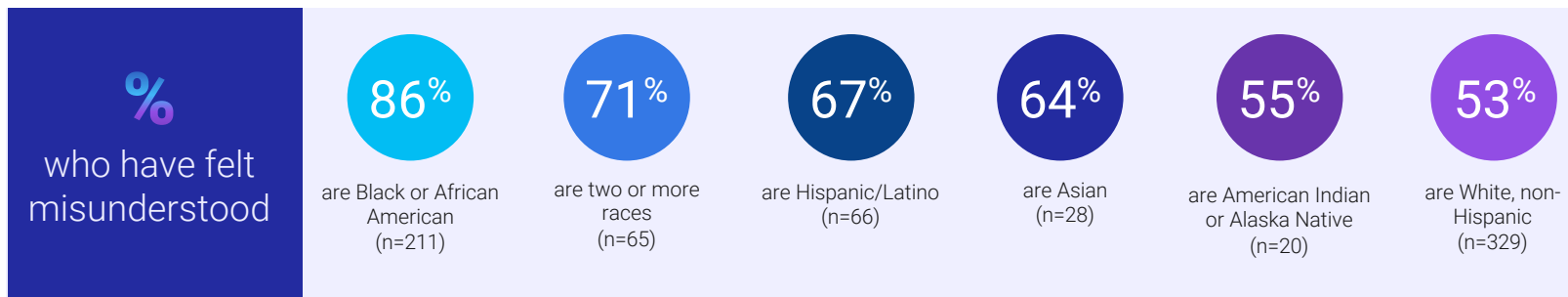**71%** of respondents felt misunderstood because of their identity in a 2015 GBC diversity and inclusion study compared to 61% in 2021.

SURVEY QUESTION: In your current workplace, have you ever felt misunderstood because a part of your identity differs from that of another colleague?

■ No, never ■ Yes

39% | 61%

POC	75%
White	53%

Disability	71%
No disability	59%

Male	53%
Female	71%

Heterosexual	62%
LGBTQ	74%

Percentage of respondents, n=619 (White), n=422 (POC), n=501 (Male), n=578 (Female), n=219 (Reported disability), n=842 (No reported disability), n=68 (LGBTQ), n=972 (Heterosexual)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

% who have felt misunderstood

86% are Black or African American (n=211)

71% are two or more races (n=65)

67% are Hispanic/Latino (n=66)

64% are Asian (n=28)

55% are American Indian or Alaska Native (n=20)

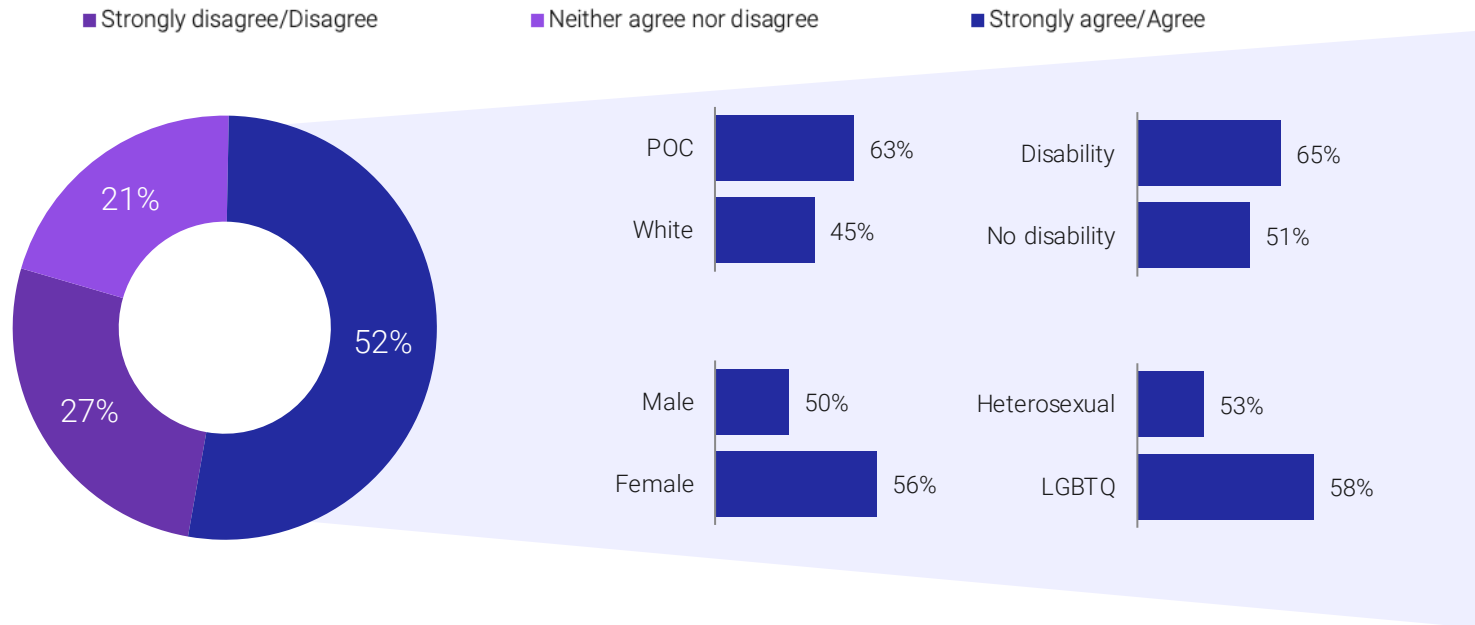**53%** are White, non-Hispanic (n=329)

TAKEAWAY

52% of respondents say that being misunderstood has made it difficult for them to work in the past.

SURVEY QUESTION: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A colleague's misunderstanding of my identity or perspective has made it difficult for me to work in the past."

■ Strongly disagree/Disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Strongly agree/Agree

- 21%
- 27%
- 52%

POC	63%
White	45%

Disability	65%
No disability	51%

Male	50%
Female	56%

Heterosexual	53%
LGBTQ	58%

Percentage of respondents, n=329 (White), n=318 (POC), n=264 (Male), n=408 (Female), n=156 (Reported disability), n=495 (No reported disability), n=50 (LGBTQ), n=598 (Heterosexual)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

% who say being misunderstood has made working difficult

- **66%** are Black or African American (n=181)
- **66%** are Asian (n=18)
- **59%** are two or more races (n=46)
- **57%** are Hispanic and Latino (n=44)

THIS RAISES THE QUESTION:

Are agencies providing sufficient resources to their staff to help them work through, resolve, and prevent these workplace challenges?

" In a "listening session," I heard two Black women say that they are invisible in meetings. I didn't know that talented people who work for me felt that way. We have to do better.
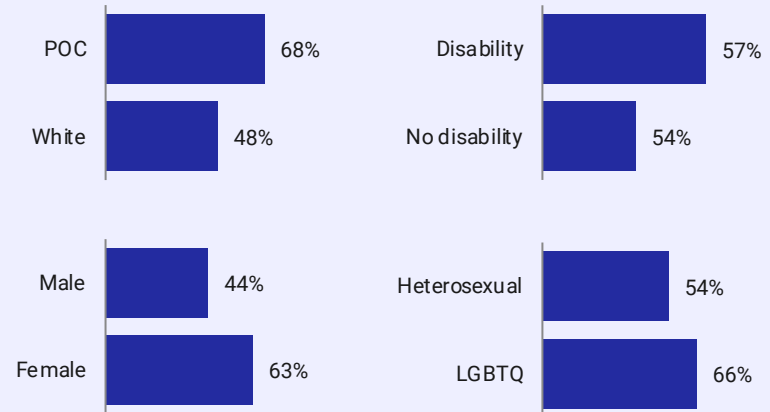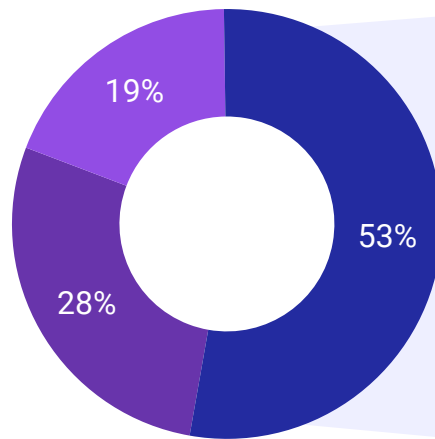
Survey Respondent
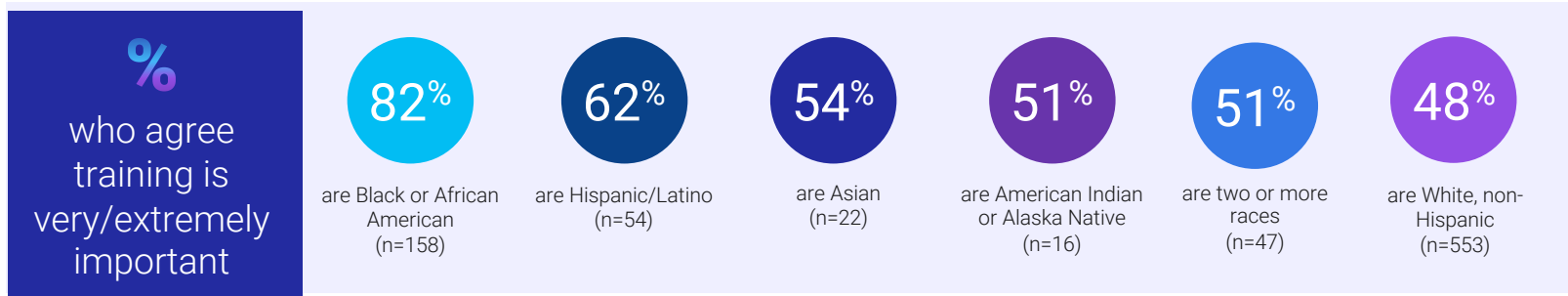
TAKEAWAY

53% of respondents agree that diversity and inclusion training is important to cultivating understanding.

SURVEY QUESTION: How important do you think diversity and inclusion training is in creating understanding between you and your colleagues?

- ■ Not at all important/Slightly important
- ■ Moderately important
- ■ Very important/Extremely important

53%

19%

28%

POC	68%
White	48%

Disability	57%
No disability	54%

Male	44%
Female	63%

Heterosexual	54%
LGBTQ	66%

Percentage of respondents, n=553 (White), n=320 (POC), n=425 (Male), n=478 (Female), n=118 (Reported disability), n=715 (No reported disability), n=59 (LGBTQ), n=812 (Heterosexual)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

% who agree training is very/extremely important

- **82%** are Black or African American (n=158)
- **62%** are Hispanic/Latino (n=54)
- **54%** are Asian (n=22)
- **51%** are American Indian or Alaska Native (n=16)
- **51%** are two or more races (n=47)
- **48%** are White, non-Hispanic (n=553)

TAKEAWAY

Respondents of color feel less supported by their agency than respondents in general

SURVEY QUESTION: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I currently feel supported to resolve or report issues arising from diverse identities and perspectives."

■ All respondents ■ POC

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
All respondents	14%	14%	22%	29%	20%
POC	18%	19%	20%	27%	15%
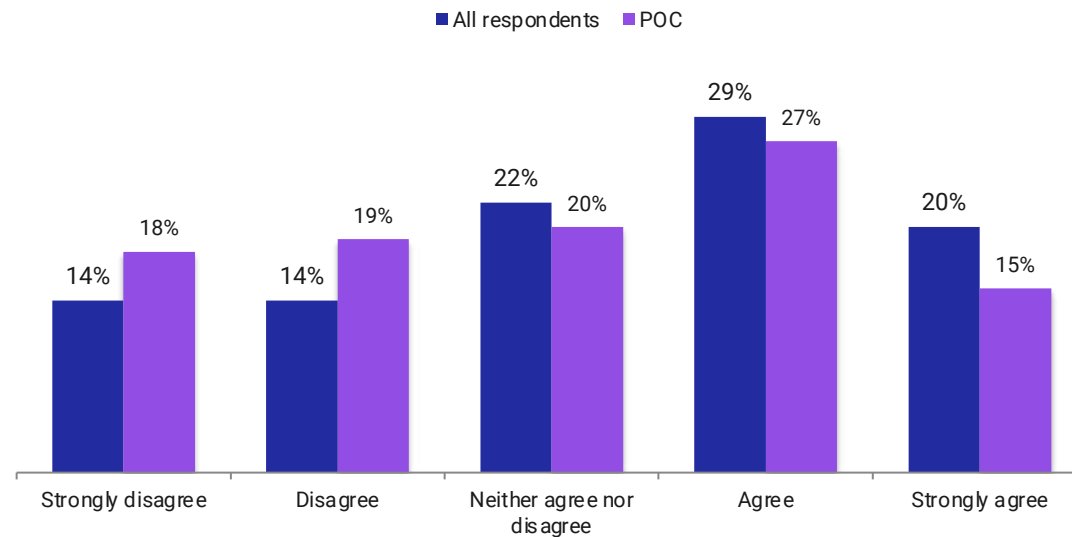
Percentage of respondents, n=422 (POC), n=1,132 (All respondents)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

42% of respondents of color feel supported to resolve or report issues arising from diverse identities and perspectives compared to 49% of respondents in general. All minority groups, except veterans, feel less supported.

16pp more respondents who feel misunderstood regularly (35%) feel that diversity and inclusion training is extremely important in creating understanding between them and their colleagues compared to those who never or rarely feel misunderstood (19%). Effective diversity and inclusion training can help provide support for employees who often find themselves being misunderstood by their colleagues.
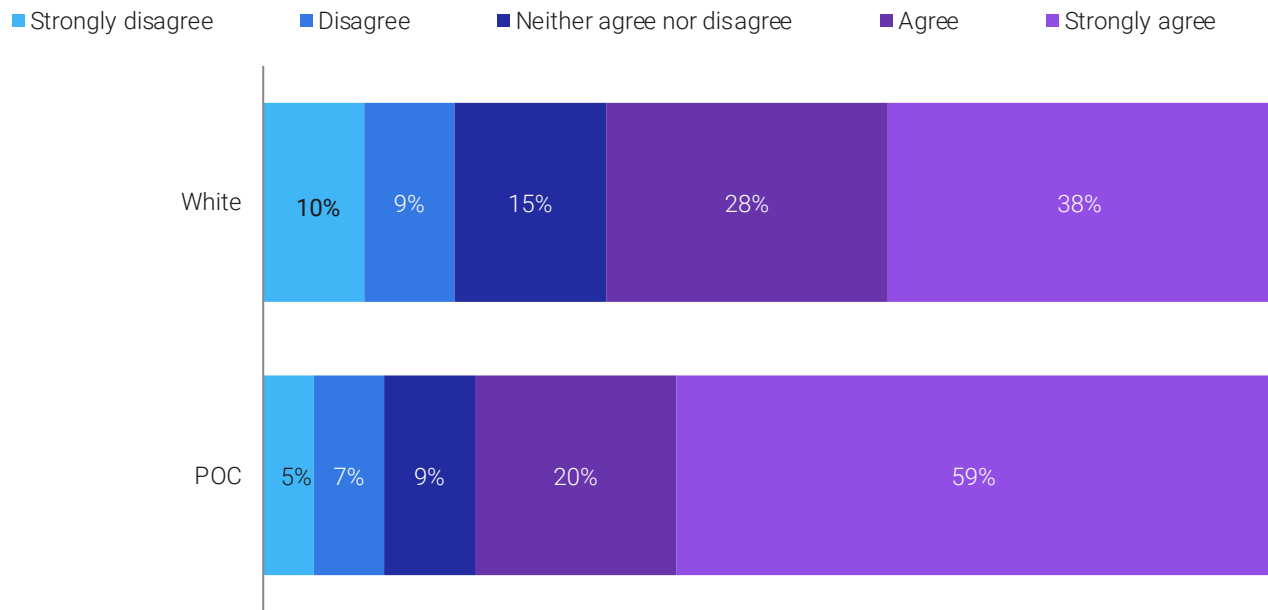
"

Diversity training cannot be a 'one and done' program. It is something that should be on-going, and something that should be celebrated. A single, DIY computer-based video, in the privacy of your own cubicle, so the box can be checked, is insufficient. Even in the times of COVID, small Teams-type meetings to discuss as a group should be completed.

Survey Respondent

TAKEAWAY

A majority of respondents agree that diversity and inclusion training is important to all organizations

SURVEY QUESTION: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Diversity and inclusion training is vital to the success of any organization, whether public or private."

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

White

| 10% | 9% | 15% | 28% | 38% |

POC

| 5% | 7% | 9% | 20% | 59% |

Percentage of respondents, n=422 (POC), n=619 (White)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

13pp more respondents of color feel that diversity and inclusion training is vital to the success of organizations, both public and private.

"

Diversity and inclusion training has **brought highly talented, diverse personnel into my agency.** These employees have brought experiences and perspectives from a wide variety of backgrounds which they have used to add value to the organization. They have served as mentors and role models for other people from diverse backgrounds and have encouraged diverse candidates to apply for positions.
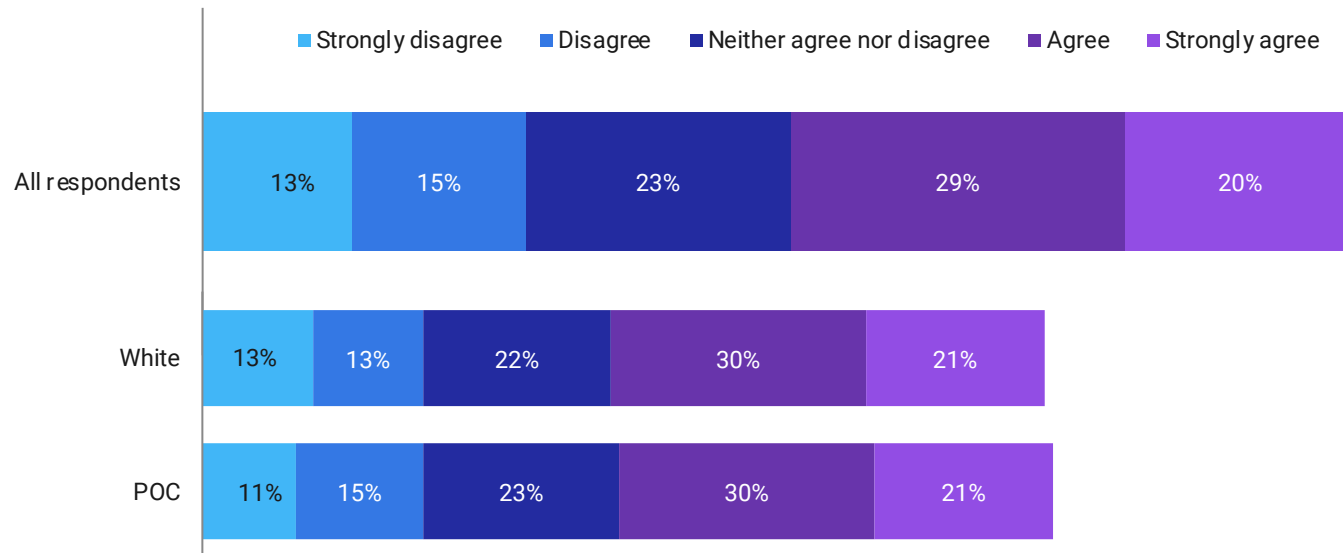
Survey Respondent

TAKEAWAY

51% of respondents of color and white respondents agree that government diversity and inclusion training has brought value to their agency.

SURVEY QUESTION: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Government diversity and inclusion training has brought value to my agency."

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
All respondents	13%	15%	23%	29%	20%
White	13%	13%	22%	30%	21%
POC	11%	15%	23%	30%	21%

Percentage of respondents, n=320 (POC), n=553 (White), n=948 (All respondents)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

While 51% of white respondents and respondents of color agree that government diversity and inclusion training has brought value to their agency, 13pp more respondents of color (79%) find value in diversity and inclusion training in general compared to white respondents (66%). Respondents of color suggest that there is a perceived smaller value of *government* diversity and inclusion training compared to diversity and inclusion training in general.

" It is far too little, outdated, and simplistic. Training is not kept current and the same flawed training is repeated year after year.
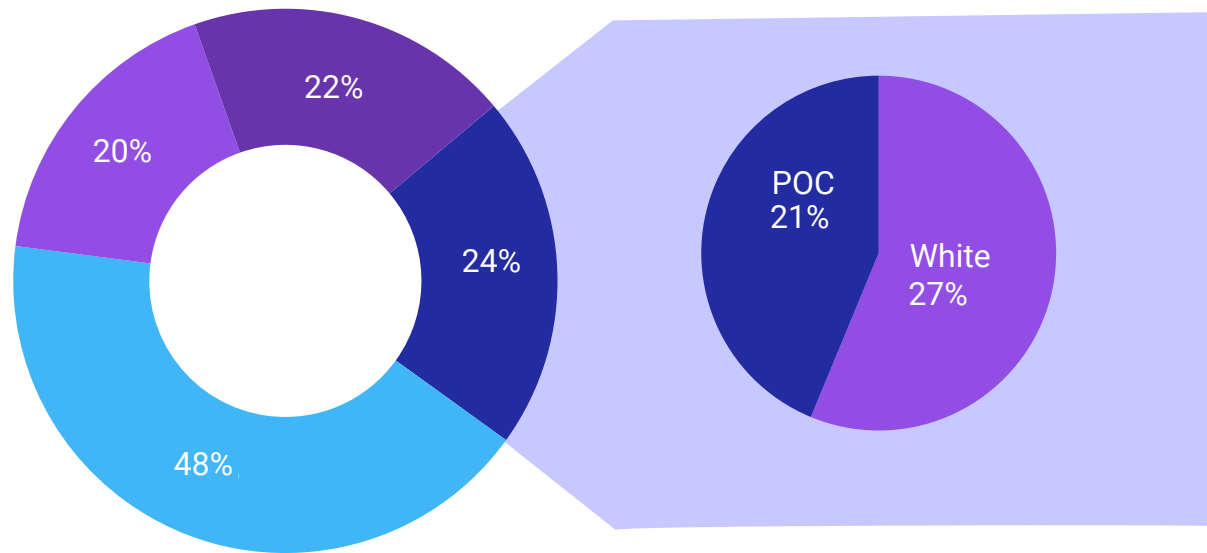
Survey Respondent

TAKEAWAY

Respondents of color are more critical of government diversity and inclusion training's current ability to challenge racial stereotypes.

SURVEY QUESTION: Please complete the following: "I feel that my agency's diversity and inclusion training has _____ racial stereotypes."

■ Challenged   ■ Acknowledged   ■ Perpetuated   ■ None of the above

22%
20%
24%
48%

POC 21%
White 27%

Percentage of respondents, n=372
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

24% of respondents feel that their diversity and inclusion training has challenged racial stereotypes. Of that percent, only 21% of respondents of color agree compared to 27% of white respondents, suggesting that respondents of color are more critical of the effectiveness of training alone.

Diversity and inclusion training provides a strong message regarding the agency's priorities. However, the training itself is not particularly effective.

- Survey Respondent

TAKEAWAY

Respondents that have sometimes or often felt misunderstood because their identity differs from that of their colleagues are more critical of training creating understanding and unity.

SURVEY QUESTION: Please complete the following statement: "Diversity and inclusion training has created ___ in my agency." Select all that apply.
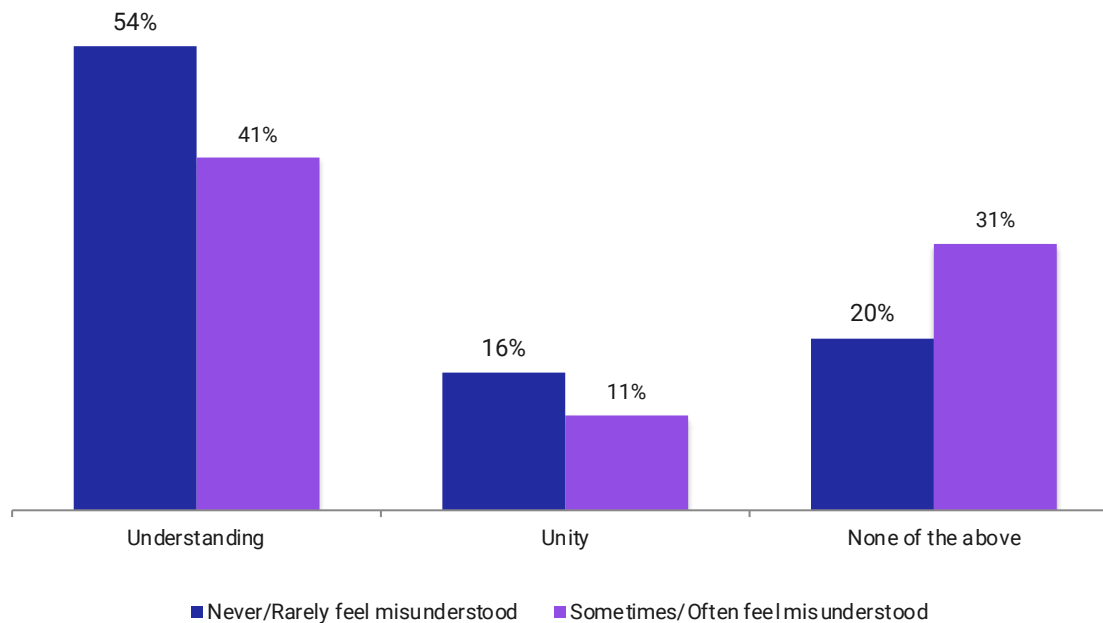
Percentage of respondents, n=941
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

■ Never/Rarely feel misunderstood   ■ Sometimes/Often feel misunderstood

While respondents of color tend to value diversity and inclusion significantly more than white respondents, they rate government diversity and inclusion training the same in effectiveness as their counterpart. For example, while 51% of white respondents say training has created understanding in their agency, a nearly equivalent 50% of respondents of color agree.

VOICES BEHIND THE STATS

When asked to explain why diversity and inclusion training has brought value to their agency, respondents said:

"D&I training has brought value through making the full workforce feel welcome. When people are comfortable at work, and they see that their opinions are welcome and they see where they bring value, people work harder and are more dedicated to the agency mission."

" Situations in which people become aware of their unconscious assumptions (positive and negative) improve the ability of people to communicate with each other & that improves the operations of teams & the quality of the work. It also lets people have a chance to perform and grow--- high-quality staff is key to our work."

"All education brings value to employees working in agency, thus impacting the effectiveness of the organization."

"All should be treated equitably and fairly. This training should focus on treating all people with dignity and respect. Everyone benefits from different perspectives and diversity of thought."

"Cultural and ethnic differences could be detrimental to a business, whenever misunderstood."

VOICES BEHIND THE STATS

When asked to explain why diversity and inclusion training may not have brought value to their agency, respondents said:

"At times, in my personal experience, the training and discussions around these issues and topic actually create more division. They work against those it is intended to help."

"As a minority in my field, especially when I hired on in 1985 with very few females, the training takes away my value as a member of a team and isolates me as being different. And every time more training is forced it causes bigger divides and labels. I don't want to be labeled. I just want to do my job with merit and value."

"Because the focus is on race and not community, educational and cultural experiences."

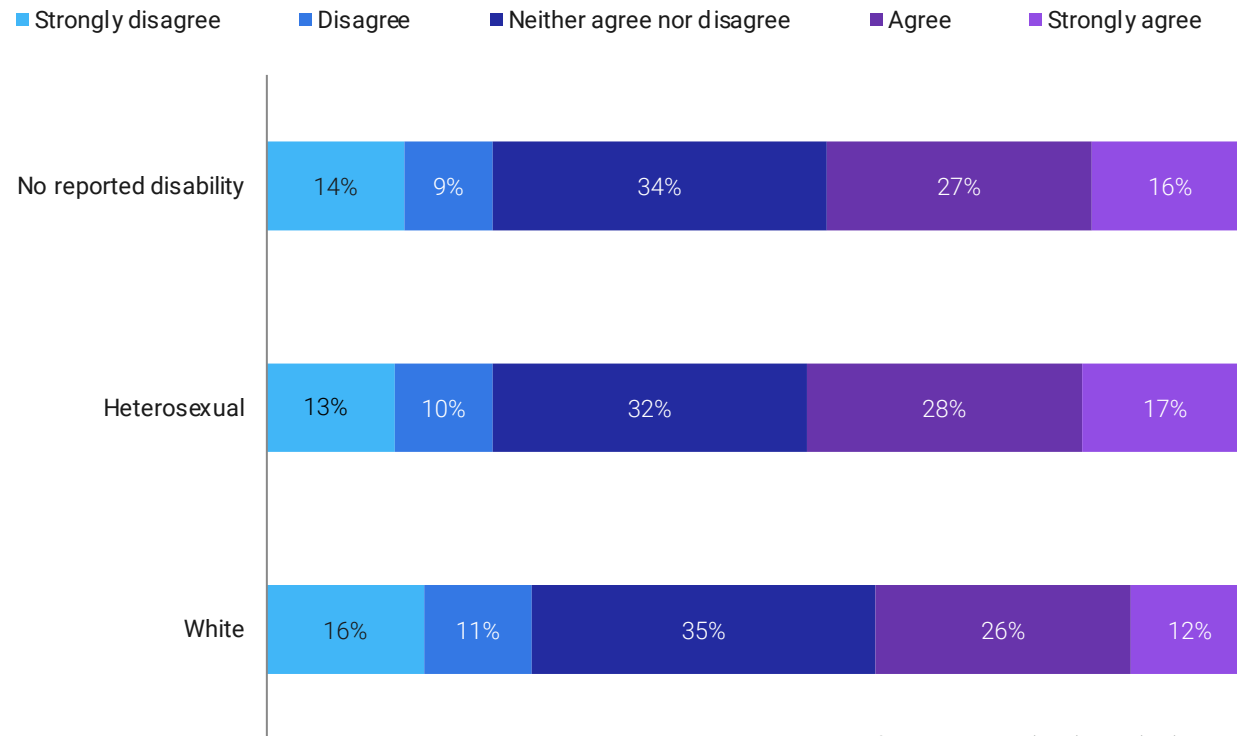"Any training adds value when it is effectively and truly embraced with the right mindset and intent. Otherwise, it is ineffective based on the level engagement or the lack thereof. It is a matter of having the right attitude and perspective."

"Anytime you are 'forced' to attend 'mandatory training', there are negative results and doesn't really benefit anyone."

TAKEAWAY

Some respondents do not feel that it is important that their identity be acknowledged in their workplace.

SURVEY QUESTION: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Acknowledgement of my identity by my coworkers is important to me feeling comfortable in my work environment."

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

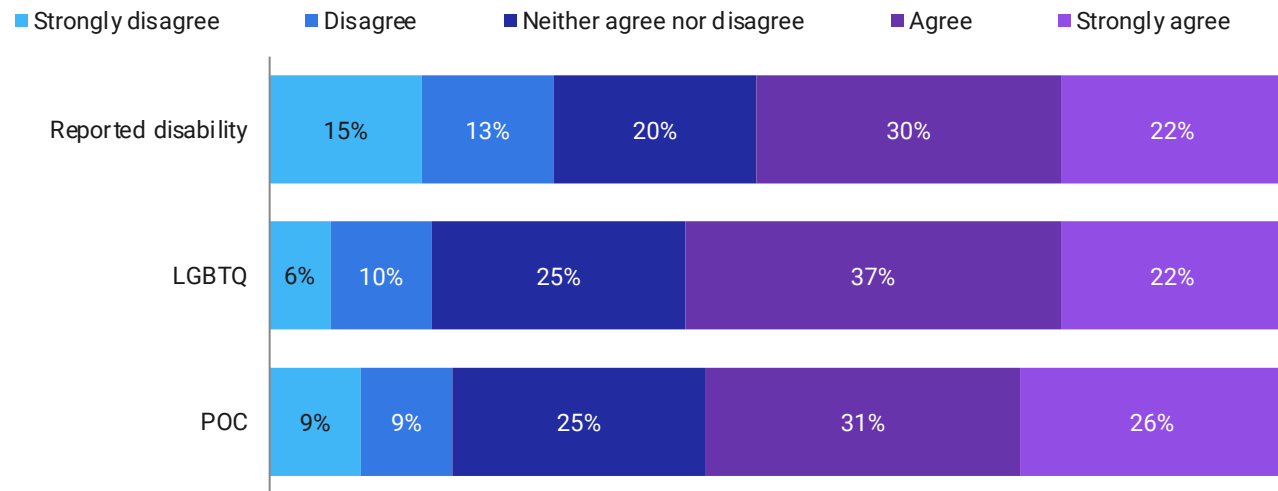|	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
No reported disability	14%	9%	34%	27%	16%
Heterosexual	13%	10%	32%	28%	17%
White	16%	11%	35%	26%	12%

Percentage of respondents, n=619 (White), n=422 (POC), n=219 (Reported disability), n=842 (No reported disability), n=68 (LGBTQ), n=972 (Heterosexual)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TAKEAWAY

However, a majority of respondents with minority backgrounds report that acknowledgement of their identity is important in the workplace.

SURVEY QUESTION: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Acknowledgement of my identity by my coworkers is important to me feeling comfortable in my work environment."

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Reported disability	15%	13%	20%	30%	22%
LGBTQ	6%	10%	25%	37%	22%
POC	9%	9%	25%	31%	26%

Percentage of respondents, n=619 (White), n=422 (POC), n=219 (Reported disability), n=842 (No reported disability), n=68 (LGBTQ), n=972 (Heterosexual)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

59% of respondents who identify as LGBTQ feel that acknowledgement of their identity is important to a comfortable work environment. 57% of respondents of color agree, suggesting that identity-blind policies are not effective to employee inclusivity.

Diversity and inclusion training is valuable in providing awareness about the differences among us. Many people don't think about, understand, or acknowledge differences and don't realize how important they are and how they can be leveraged for the greater good.

- Survey Respondent

"

I work extensively with our LGBTQ+ employee resource group. I have heard many, many stories of the difference this group and diversity/inclusion training has made to their lives and to their willingness to bring their best selves to work now, compared to 10 years ago before the organization focused on D&I.
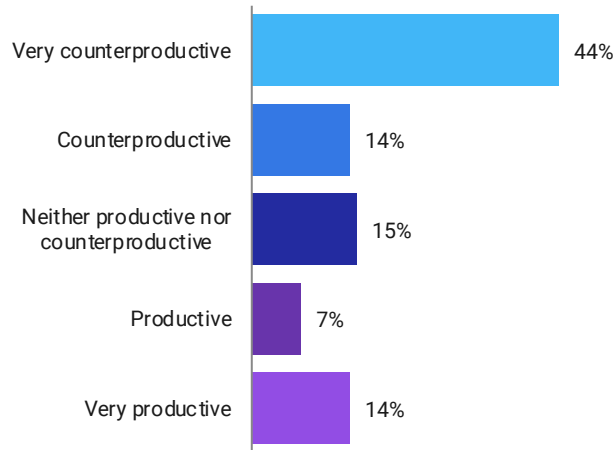
Survey Respondent

TAKEAWAY

The Trump Administration signed an Executive Order in September 2020 that froze certain diversity and inclusion training used by federal agencies, contractors, grant recipients, and the military.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Do you think that the Executive Order is productive or counterproductive in creating unity in your work environment?

Response	%
Very counterproductive	44%
Counterproductive	14%
Neither productive nor counterproductive	15%
Productive	7%
Very productive	14%

Percentage of respondents, n=1,132
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

SURVEY QUESTION:

Relative to other organizational priorities, how much would you say your organization focused on creating a diverse and inclusive work environment prior to the Trump Administration's hold on training?

Response	%
Far too little	7%
Too little	23%
Just the right amount	41%
Too much	10%
Far too much	11%
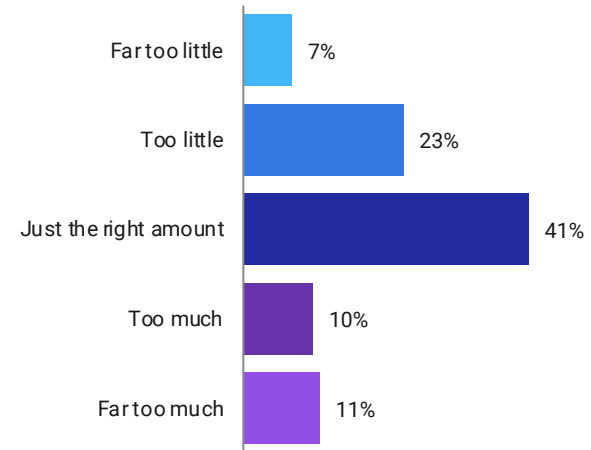
Percentage of respondents, n=946
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

58% of respondents found the executive order to be counterproductive in creating unity.

30% of respondents feel that their organization does not focus enough on creating a diverse and inclusive work environment compared to 44% of respondents from a 2015 GBC survey.

TAKEAWAY

SURVEY QUESTION:

How much would you say your organization focused on creating a diverse and inclusive work environment prior to the Trump Administration's hold on training?

ALL RESPONDENTS
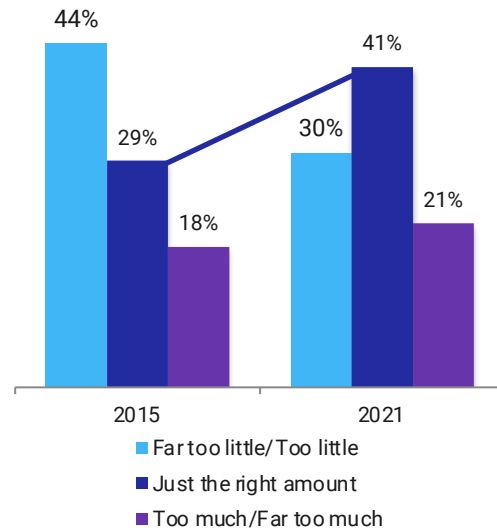
Percentage of respondents, n=739 (2015), n=1,136 (2021)
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

- Far too little/Too little
- Just the right amount
- Too much/Far too much

RESPONDENTS OF COLOR
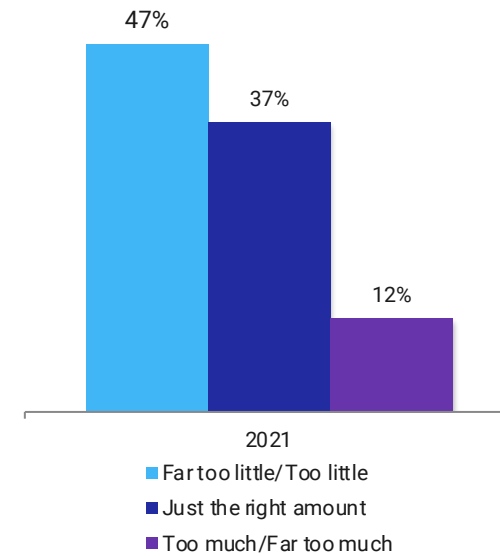
Percentage of respondents, n=319
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

- Far too little/Too little
- Just the right amount
- Too much/Far too much

12ᴾᴾ more respondents in 2021 feel that their agency is focusing just the right amount on creating a diverse and inclusive work environment than in 2015.

47% of respondents of color still feel that their agency focuses far too little or too little on creating a diverse and inclusive work environment compared to 44% of respondents in general in 2015.
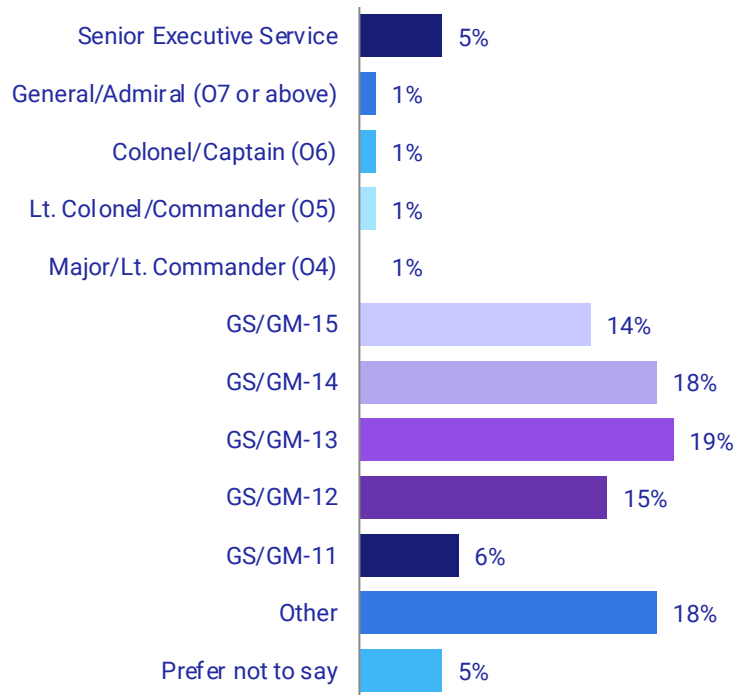
RESPONDENT PROFILE

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

86%

14%

■ Defense civilian/Active duty

■ Federal civilian
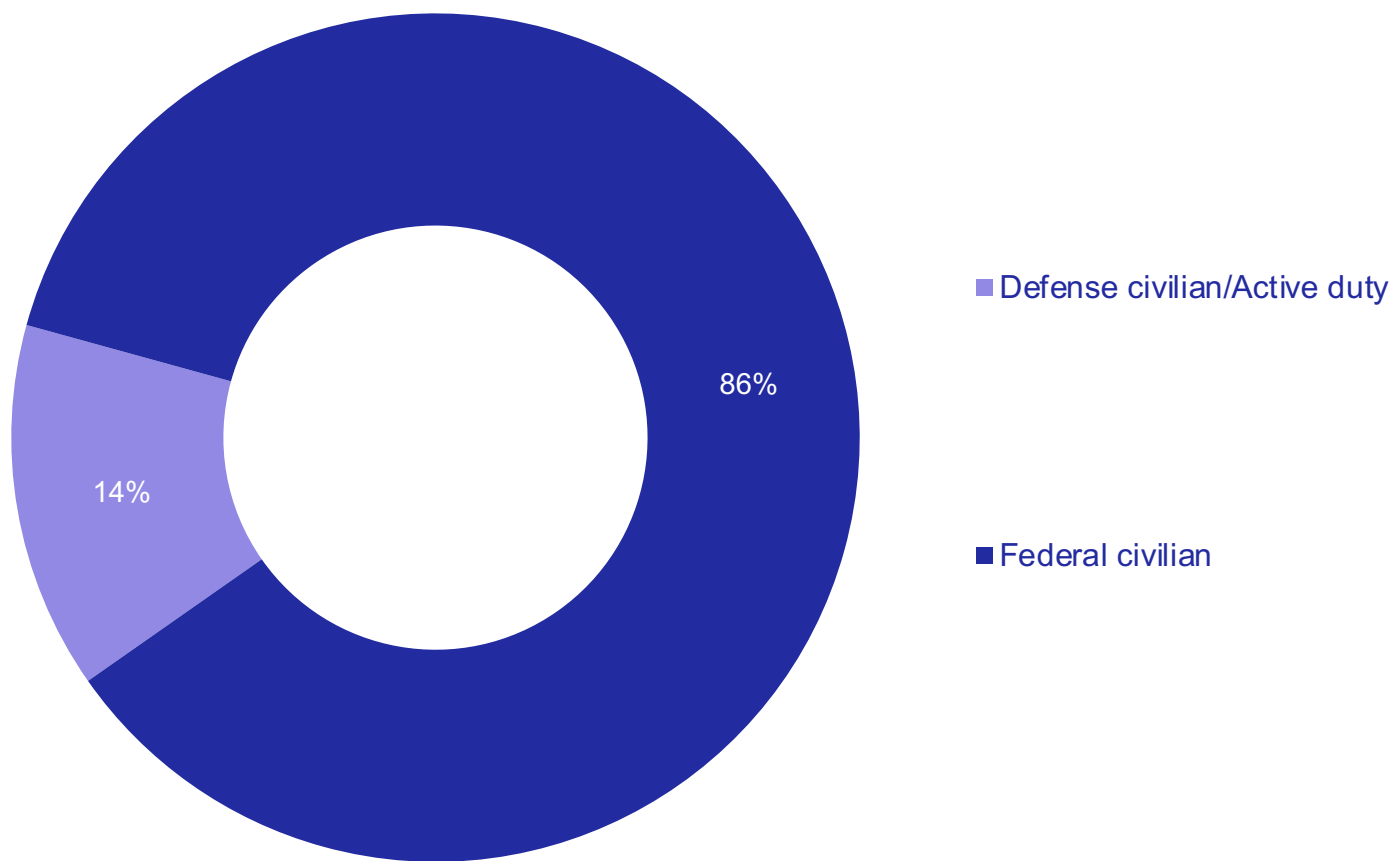
Percentage of respondents, n=1,139
Note: Less than 1% of active duty military respondents

RESPONDENT PROFILE

JOB GRADE/RANK

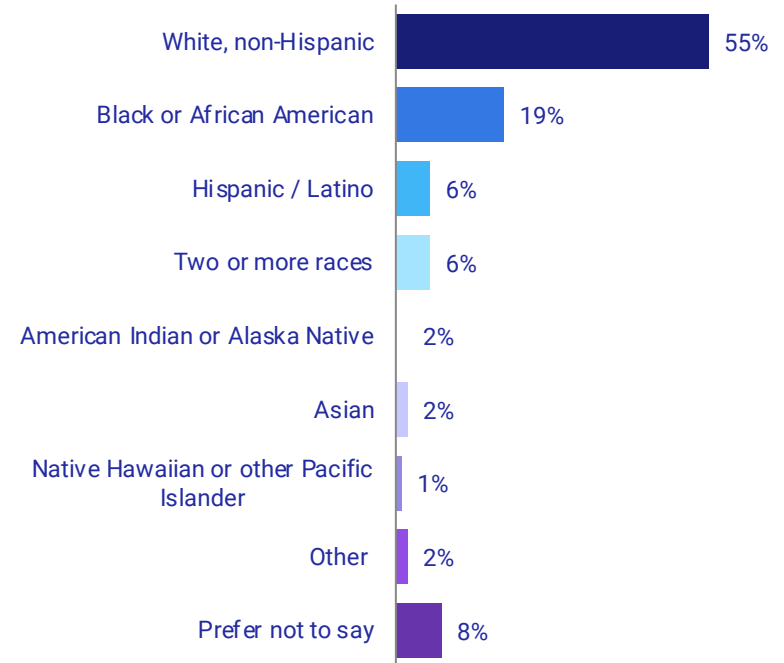| Grade/Rank	%
Senior Executive Service	5%
General/Admiral (O7 or above)	1%
Colonel/Captain (O6)	1%
Lt. Colonel/Commander (O5)	1%
Major/Lt. Commander (O4)	1%
GS/GM-15	14%
GS/GM-14	18%
GS/GM-13	19%
GS/GM-12	15%
GS/GM-11	6%
Other	18%
Prefer not to say	5%

Percentage of respondents, n=1,140
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

60%

of respondents have a ranking of GS/GM-13 and above.

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR RACE

| Race	%
White, non-Hispanic	55%
Black or African American	19%
Hispanic / Latino	6%
Two or more races	6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Asian	2%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1%
Other	2%
Prefer not to say	8%

Percentage of respondents, n=1,140
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

36%

of respondents are people of color, which includes respondents that do not identity as White, non-Hispanic. Due to a statistically low respondent count, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander data cuts are not included in the report.
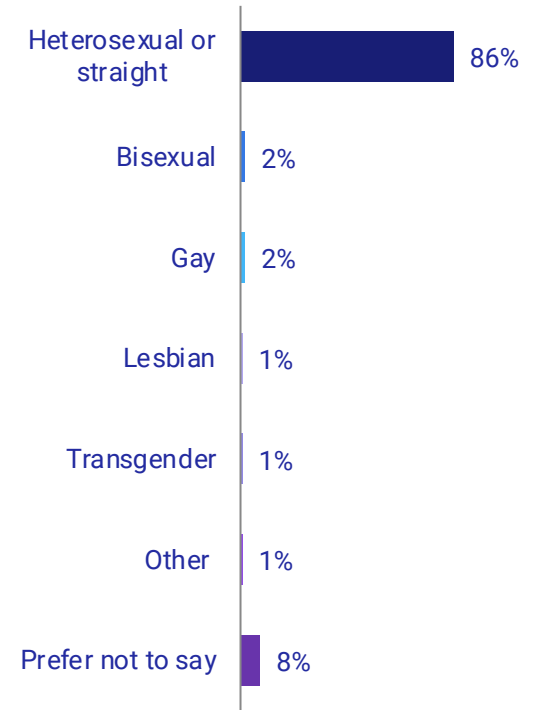
RESPONDENT PROFILE

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR GENDER.
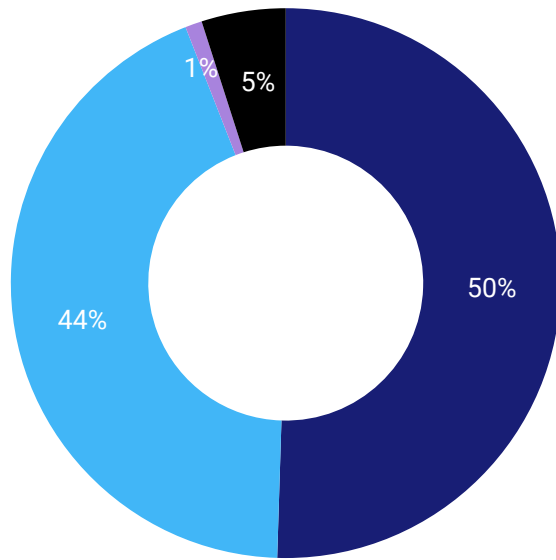
- ■ Female
- ■ Male
- ■ Other
- ■ Prefer not to say

Percentage of respondents, n=1,140
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Female 50%
Male 44%
Other 1%
Prefer not to say 5%

50% of respondents are female.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE:

Heterosexual or straight	86%
Bisexual	2%
Gay	2%
Lesbian	1%
Transgender	1%
Other	1%
Prefer not to say	8%

Percentage of respondents, n=1,140
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

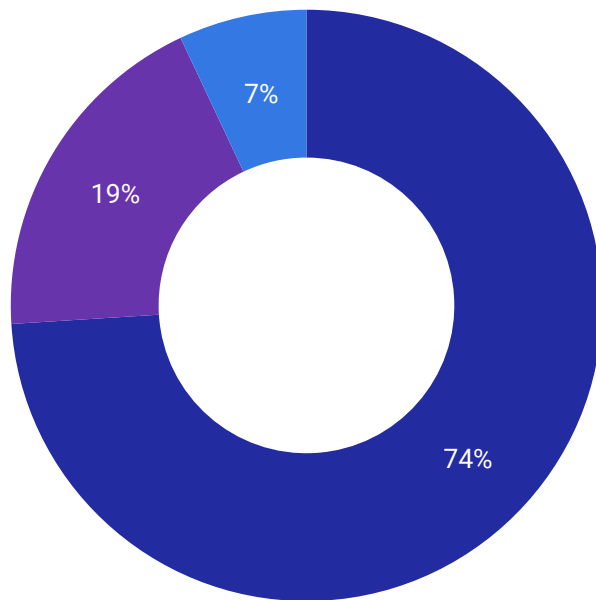**7%** of respondents identify as LGBTQ.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO HAVE A DISABILITY?

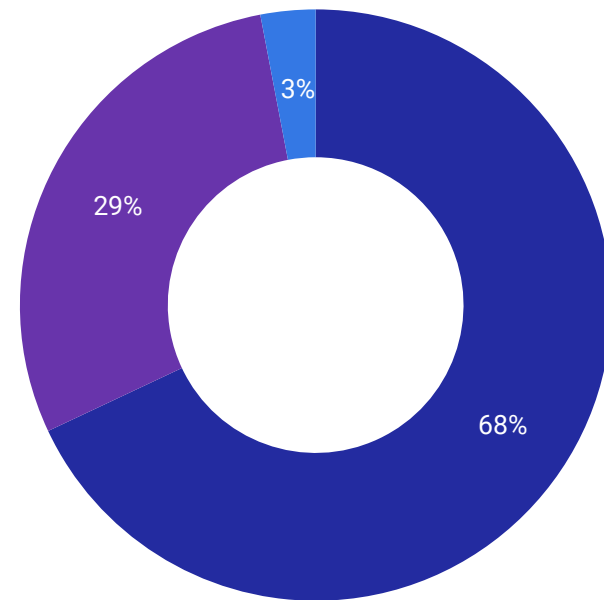■ No ■ Yes ■ Prefer not to say

- 7%
- 19%
- 74%

Percentage of respondents, n=1,140
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

19%

of respondents report having a disability.

ARE YOU A U.S. VETERAN?

■ No ■ Yes ■ Prefer not to say

- 3%
- 29%
- 68%

Percentage of respondents, n=1,140
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

29%

of respondents report being a U.S. veteran.

AGENCIES REPRESENTED

MOST TO LESS FREQUENT

one Department of Agriculture	**two** Department of Homeland Security	**three** Department of Veterans Affairs	**four** Department of the Interior	**five** Department of Treasury	**six** DoD: Air Force
seven DoD: Army	**eight** Department of Health and Human Services	**nine** Social Security Administration	**ten** Department of Transportation	**eleven** General Services Administration	**twelve** Department of Housing and Urban Development
thirteen Department of Justice	**fourteen** Department of Labor	**fifteen** Department of State	**sixteen** United States Postal Service	**seventeen** DoD: Office of the Secretary of Defense	**eighteen** Department of Commerce
nineteen Agency for International Development	**twenty** Congress/Legislative Branch	**twenty-one** Department of Energy	**twenty-two** Environmental Protection Agency	**twenty-three** NASA	**twenty-four** Nuclear Regulatory Commission

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CONTACT:

Daniel Thomas

Director, Research & Strategic Insights
Government Business Council

Tel: 202.266.7905
Email: dthomas@govexec.com

REPORT AUTHOR:

Josh Okada

FOOTNOTES

[1] https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-_insights/delivering-through-diversity#