

Race in the boardroom

Survey shows how far firms still have to go

The Associated Press

Amid the push to get U.S. boardrooms to look more like companies' customers and employees, advocates are finally seeing just how steep the task will be.

Boards of directors at publicly traded U.S. companies are much more white and much less diverse than the overall population, often starkly so. Just 2.7% of directors at the start of the year were Hispanic, for example. That would need to soar to 18.5% to mirror the U.S. population.

Equilar survey

Outside of looking at a photograph of each director, it hasn't always been easy to measure racial diversity on corporate boards. On Thursday, executive data firm Equilar released its first racial breakdown of boards for companies in the Russell 3000 index, which covers about 97% of all investable U.S. stocks.

The survey found only 6.2% of directors are Black, versus 13.4% of the country. And the 5% of directors who are of Asian or Pacific islander de-



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scend also fell short of the 6.1% for the entire U.S. population.

Equilar pulled the numbers from a range of sources, including disclosures from companies, data from affiliate networks and lists of influential executives from racial and ethnic minorities.

Its results are similar to the disproportionate representation found in other surveys of more limited groups.

Executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles earlier this week released its roundup of boards at a smaller group of companies, those in the Fortune 500.

It found that Black directors hold 26% of board seats, while Asian or Asian American directors had 9% and Hispanic directors held 6%.

Where there's more diversity

Bigger companies tend to have more diverse boards than smaller companies. But more across the board are being transparent about the racial breakdown for their board of directors. A big reason for that is because they're being forced to, with pressure coming from stock exchanges, regulators and investors.

At the Nasdaq, for example,

U.S. securities regulators approved a rule last summer requiring companies listed on its U.S. exchange to file an annual document detailing racial and ethnic backgrounds of its directors, among other demographic data. Nasdaq even has a fillable PDF form available to make it easier for companies, which have to submit the data by Aug. 8 or whenever they file their 2022 proxy statement, whichever comes later.

By Aug. 7, 2023, Nasdaq will require a listed company to either have at least one director considered "diverse" or explain why it doesn't.

LOOKING AT 'OUTSIDE THE BOX' HIRING

BY VICTOR OCASIO

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A West Babylon nonprofit plans to make the case to employers that hiring more adults with autism is not only good for the community, but good for business amid a tightening labor market.

The Winters Center for Autism, in conjunction with the Suffolk County Labor Department, will host a virtual workshop Wednesday. Christine Ponzio, the Center's executive director, will discuss how companies can work with the nonprofit — which trains neurodiverse job seekers — to find workers willing and able to join their workforce.

The tight labor market has "actually helped employers think outside the box, be more willing, more open, and think about their workforce differently and really embrace neurodiversity," Ponzio said.

The free online workshop will be held on Wednesday, from 10 to 11 a.m. To register, visit bit.ly/3MKJek4.

U.S. employers posted a record 11.5 million openings in March, meaning the country had two job openings for every one unemployed American last month, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The workshop is meant to be a resource for business owners who are willing to look beyond the traditional talent pool, Ponzio said.

In 2021, only 19.1% of Americans with a disability had a job, compared to 63.7% of those without a disability, according to federal data.

"It's good for adults who really want to share their talents, have a sense of purpose, and have a sense of belonging," Ponzio said. "It's also very good for business. Helping businesses understand the benefits is really what I see this presentation focusing on."

The Winters Center for Autism is affiliated with the Winters Family Foundations, created by the late Joe Winters and his wife, Michele, in 2020. Joe Winters had helped build Winter Bros. Waste Systems into Long Island's largest garbage collection business.

Unused phones cost VA almost \$2M

The Associated Press

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs wasted nearly \$2 million when most of the smartphones bought during the pandemic for homeless veterans went unused, according to an inspector general's report.

The report, released Wednesday, found that the Veterans Health Administration spent nearly \$7 million to purchase 10,000 phones with unlimited prepaid calling plans but that 85% of the phones gathered dust. As a result, it lost \$1.8 million in wasted data plan costs. The inspector general also found that \$571,000 was wasted on data plans due to poor oversight of its purchase of nearly



The inspector general called for better program monitoring.

81,000 iPads.

The smartphones and iPads were purchased as part of the efforts to increase homeless

veterans' access to telehealth, a program that saw video visits increase from about 2,500 in February 2020 to 38,000 in September 2020. The veterans were enrolled in supportive housing program.

The inspector general concluded that Veterans Health Administration officials, who were part of the Connected Care program, made a good faith effort to help veterans get smartphones. But they found there was a "lack of information for officials to be able to determine the quantity needed for the targeted veteran population."

The inspector general recommended improvements in the storage of smartphones and tablets.

It called for the VA to "estab-

lish a realistic goal for days in storage along with a process for closely monitoring days in storage for each data plan provider and taking corrective actions when the goal is not being met." It also called for a cost-benefit analysis, in coordination with contractors, to create a process that starts the data plan charges only after the device has been issued to a veteran.

The VA did not respond to a request for comment. But in the report, the VA's undersecretary for health concurred with the recommendations.

The VA said the Connected Care program was also transferring excess loaner iPhones to the Veterans Health Administration Homeless Program for distribution.