

Diversity & Employee Referrals

A report about diversity and inclusion in referral recruiting and how you can increase your D&I with your employee referral program.



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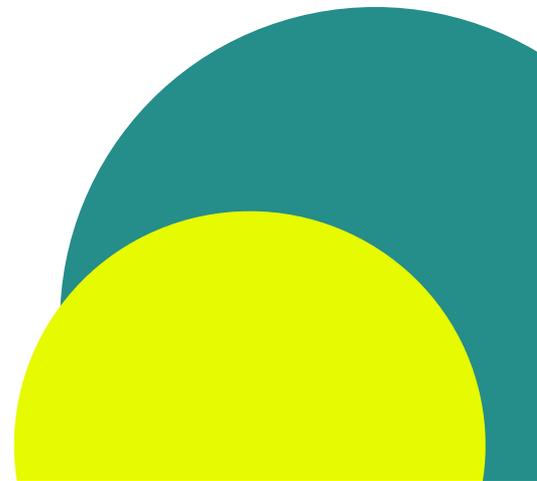


Introduction

Firstbird is the global leading digital employee referral program, and while we might be a tech company, we believe that human connections are the heart of everything we do. Our mission is to connect people with the right job, and companies worldwide with suitable candidates, all through the power of referrals.

In today's day and age, diversity is critical for the success of any business. Having a diverse hiring process brings in diverse talent that prompts innovation, increases knowledge and know-how in teams and encourages creative problem solving - also known as "The Medici effect". Cross-cultural, inter-disciplinary and socio-economic intersectionality result in radical innovations. It's a well known fact that diverse teams are simply smarter, more innovative and make fewer errors in decision-making processes.¹ And with executive teams onboard, your company can achieve better results in higher innovation revenue, profitability and success.

Given the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, the question if employee referral programs are the right tool for creating diverse teams spontaneously arises. It is a well known rumour that employee referrals can be a challenge when building heterogeneous teams. Nevertheless, referrals are the evergreen of recruiting, and many companies are aware of the beneficial power of referrals. One of our latest survey reports showed us that among the many reasons 85% of companies have implemented employee referral programs as an internal recruiting channel, the main reason for doing so is to increase the quality



Diverse Workforce Benefits

- Higher **profitability**: companies with gender-diverse teams in the top quartile are 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile. Regarding ethnic and culturally diverse teams, top-quartile companies outperformed those in the fourth one by 36% in profitability.³
- Higher **innovation revenue**: diverse management teams have 45% higher innovation revenue vs. below-average diverse teams of 26%.²
- Higher **success**: 89% of HR and hiring professionals say a multi-generational workforce (Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z) makes a company more successful.⁴

of their hires.⁵ This reason is intrinsically linked to the vast outreach to the passive workforce that employee referral programs provide. Recruiting passive candidates is indeed the most popular tactic when it comes to competitive recruiting.⁶ In fact, experienced specialists and skilled workers are the most common job positions filled via referrals.⁷

When it comes to the challenges of the emerging hybrid-remote working models and consequently the remote recruiting process employers must now undertake to source talent from across the globe, employee referrals are a leading recruiting strategy.¹³ But even so, is the recruiting of diverse talent possible through referrals? That is what we asked our diversity and inclusion experts, so that together we can match the highly beneficial referral recruiting channel with strategies and methods to build an inclusive workplace and heterogeneous teams. This whitepaper aims to provide you with examples, suggestions, and further readings on how you can hire a diverse workforce through referrals.

Employee Referral Benefits

- Better ROI: 82% of employers rated employee referrals above all other sources for generating the **best return on investment**.⁸
- Higher **retention rate**: referred hires have greater job satisfaction and stay longer at companies - 46% stay over 1 year vs 33% of candidates hired through career sites.⁹
- Faster **application-to-hire time**: it requires 29 days for referrals, 39 days for job boards, and 45 days for career sites to onboarding.¹⁰
- Broader **talent pool**: companies can expand their talent pool by 10x by leveraging on employees' networks.¹¹
- Lower **cost-per-hire**: 55% of companies report lower hiring costs.¹²

The D&I Workplace and Referrals: The Main Challenges

It is no secret that our personal networks are homogeneous when it comes to socio-demographic, behavioural and interpersonal characteristics.¹⁴ Notwithstanding similarities that lead to connection, we live in a complex, technology-driven, globally and constantly interconnected world where people with diverse socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, religious and political beliefs, education, sexual orientation, and even disabilities have never before been in such close proximity.

Nevertheless, some social groups still experience discrimination, and this also occurs in the workplace. That is why some employers have implemented Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) measures and practices to ensure that companies have diverse teams and foster a work environment where employees feel respected, valued, supported and above all, accepted. If you are interested in knowing more about the current state of diversity in companies around the world, we recommend reading “From Good Intentions to Lasting Impact - State of Diversity Hiring Report 2021”, by SmartRecruiters. The report collates diversity commitments and hiring strategies from more than 400 companies worldwide.

Overall, the pandemic has increased the gender gap by a generation, from 99.5 years to 135.6 years.

Minority Group Employment Statistics

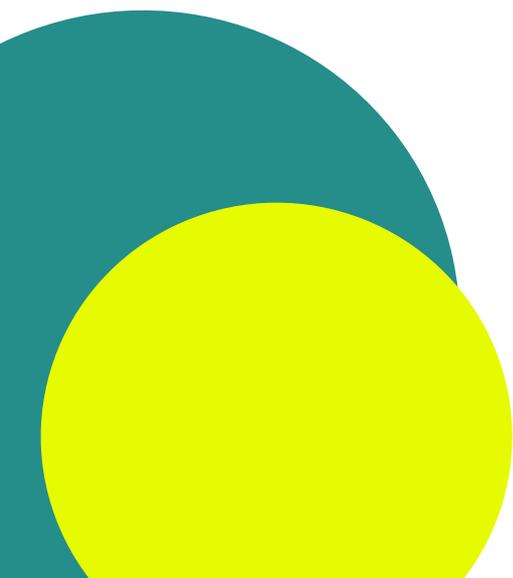
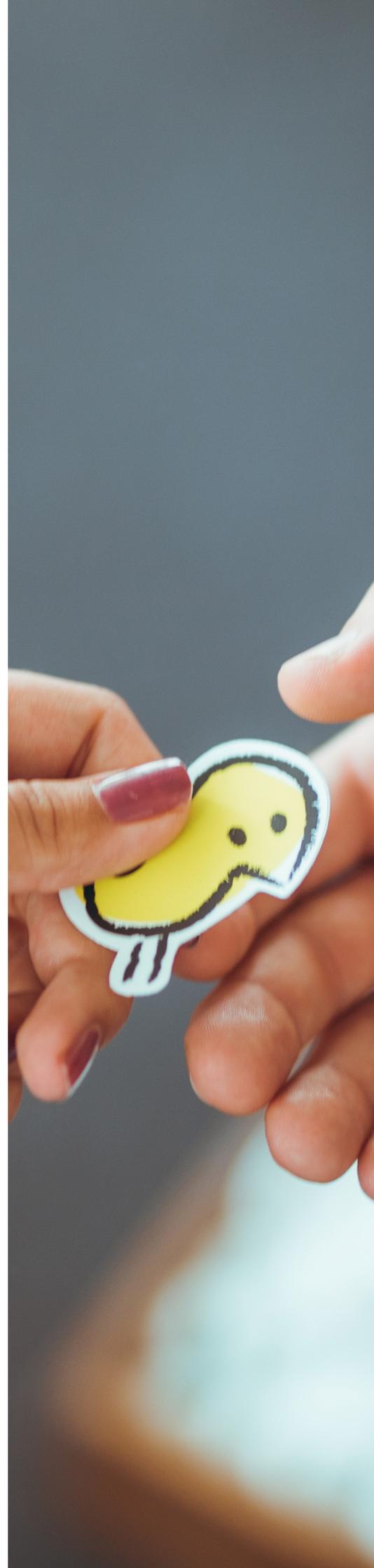
- Women earn on average 14.1% less per hour than men and, in general, earn around 40% less than men because almost a third of women across the European Union only have part-time jobs. The gender pay gap has grown further due to the COVID-19: hours dedicated to childcare has increased from 26 to 31 hours per week on average. Overall, the pandemic has increased the

gender gap by a generation from 99.5 years to 135.6 years.¹⁵

- Only 15% of the signers of the Diversity Charter for LGBTI equality and inclusion implemented inclusive policies in the workplace.¹⁶
- In 2019 in the European Union, foreign-born persons (aged 20-64) had higher unemployment rates than native-born (12.3% vs 6.0%). The rate for persons born elsewhere in the EU (other than born in the reporting member state) stood at 7.3%.¹⁷

The Challenge With Referrals & Diversity

When it comes to referrals, the propensity of employees to refer prospective colleagues akin to themselves reflects the general statistics framework above. For example, referrals benefit white men more than any other demographic group: white women, men of colour, and women of colour are respectively 12%, 26% and 35% less likely to receive a referral.¹⁸ Beaman, Keleher and Magruder's experiment on men and women's referral choices under different incentives and constraints is a vivid example. The study reports that men tended to refer more male applicants (77%) despite referring qualified women when they have been asked to. Women also referred female colleagues at the same rate they themselves would apply for a position (43%). An interesting finding of the study is that performance did not offset men's tendency to provide male referrals.¹⁹



A Word from the Experts

To find a solution to one of the most prominent concern employers have with referral recruiting channels, we asked experts in D&I on how to balance employee referrals with an equal and inclusive hiring process. We spoke to Joanne Lockwood and Rocki Howard and drew lessons from their extensive expertise in the matter.

The Expert: Joanne Lockwood

Joanne Lockwood is a Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Specialist who promotes transgender awareness and engages with organisations to develop policy & best practices to be more inclusive for all people. Lockwood often works with talent acquisition and HR teams and advises them on building an inclusive employee lifecycle, from hire to retire.

Together with Joanne Lockwood, we discussed the issue of biases in recruitment. As we learned, both the main advantage and disadvantage of referrals is that current employees refer former colleagues and acquaintances they share common interests, cultural, educational or social backgrounds; or simply get along with. Therefore, it is quite logical to assume that referrals bring in a homogeneous workforce.

Joanne Lockwood explains that when your employees refer people as described above, they act out of affinity bias. This is one of the most common biases in recruitment. Recruiters who tend to hire on “gut feeling”, as Lockwood warns, are applying another unconscious and so-called bias: confirmation bias.



“Let your employees act as a funnel, and ask them to refer not for the cultural fit, but for the ***culture-add.***”

Joanne Lockwood, Diversity Specialist

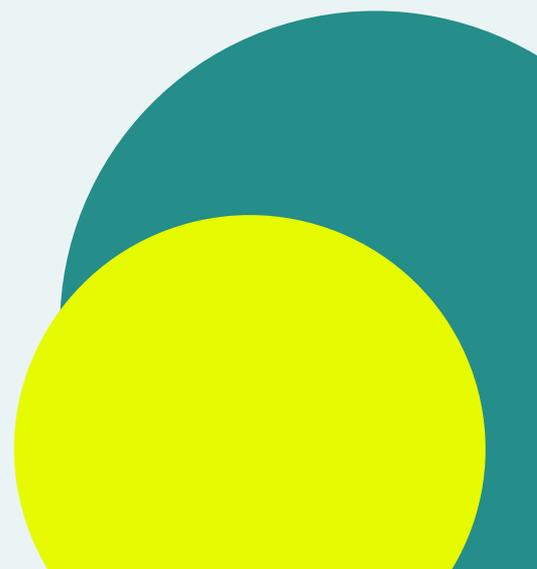
This pulls them into assessing candidates according to their personal beliefs, aspirations and desires. Another widely known bias is gender bias, which is when men are referred more for a job than women, as we learned on the previous page.

The same biases happen to your employees when providing referrals. Studies show that they are driven both by referring people similar to themselves and by referring those who fit certain stereotypes or credentials for a role.²⁰ So, if these unconscious biases can sometimes trick even the most conscientious recruiting professionals, how can your employees refer people who are different from them?

Joanne Lockwood recommends encouraging your employees to refer people they don't know without worrying about their fit. "Let them act as a funnel and, above all, ask them to refer not for the cultural fit but the "culture-add", Lockwood says. After all, TAs are the ones sifting through applications and having the final say in hiring decisions. Another functional approach is to assess whether the candidate meets hiring criteria before assimilating the information of their gender. For example, consider asking for resumes that don't provide information on the applicant's gender, ethnic background or age. A further strategy could be involving externals within your recruiting process. Our 2021 Employee Referral Benchmark Study showed that 31% of the companies also offer externals the opportunity to refer candidates for their employee referral program.

Deloitte Expands Network with Alumni

Deloitte, the leading professional service provider worldwide, implemented Firstbird's digital employee referral program in various branches starting in September 2020, and invited a group of 41 alumni to be Talent Scouts in their program. Deloitte's addition of external Talent Scouts gave them the opportunity to reach a broader population, which were in this case their alumni's networks, to gain access to a never-ending pipeline of a varied and talented workforce for the future.²¹



The Expert: Rocki Howard

Rocki Howard is Chief People and Equity Officer at The Mom Project, former Chief Diversity Officer at SmartRecruiters, and host of the Voices of Diversity podcast. Howard has over 20 years of experience leading TA teams and creating high-performing, inclusive cultures. She features as an HROA Global Provider Executive of the Year, in Empower's list of Global Top 100 Ethnic Minority Executives two years in a row, and Involves/Yahoo Finance's Top 100 SHEroes Executives list.

Together with Rocki Howard, we discussed the issue of always having the same group of employees providing referrals. This is a challenge that was also highlighted by our findings in this year's Benchmark Survey, with



“You will find that many ERG members embrace the opportunity of being organizational diversity advocates.”

Rocki Howard, Diversity Advocate

7 out of 10 companies reporting that only 1 - 5% of employees provide referrals on a regular basis (for example, at least once per quarter). Thus, having the same Talent Scouts always drawing from the same networks results in homogeneous referrals, even if you have a diverse workforce at your disposal that could eventually refer prospective employees with different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds.

Howard recommends, first of all, to assess where your company is truly ready to welcome diversity. Hiring employees from historically excluded groups for management roles simply as a means to showcase that your company embraces diversity is merely performative. For your diverse workforce to feel like they truly belong, an authentic understanding of and commitment to equity and inclusion must be prevalent throughout your culture and combined with a systematic, business-led approach to diversity and inclusion (D&I) underpinned by leadership accountability. The recent SmartRecruiters' State of Diversity Hiring Report states that 51% of respondents were not strategically driven when setting diversity hiring goals, indicating there is still a lot of companies can do to embrace D&I.²²

One way to create a welcoming environment for your employees is to encourage Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) within your company. While the primary focus of these groups is to provide a place where employees can feel a kinship with each other and build a strong support system, you will find that many ERG members embrace the opportunity of being organizational diversity advocates, Howard says. As such, they can be a great resource for diverse referrals, the minimization of bias in job descriptions and their experiences when they are willing to publically share can help portray your organization's genuine commitment to diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

Finally, Howard reminds us, that to attract talent from multiple dimensions of diversity, it is important to adopt Diversity Brand Equity principles by taking steps to use gender-neutral and straightforward language and overall content that will make all prospective candidates feel welcomed to your company.

So what are Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)?

Employee Resource Groups are voluntary, employee-led groups whose aim is to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with the organizations they serve.

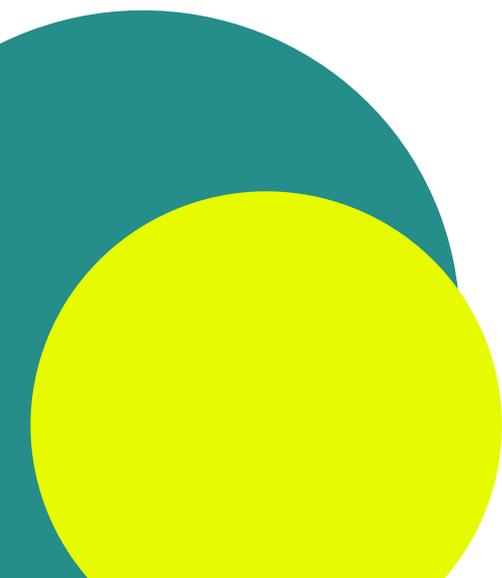
They usually led and participated in by employees who share a characteristic, whether it's gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, lifestyle, or interest. The groups exist to provide support and help in personal or career development and to create a safe space where employees can bring their whole selves to the table. Allies may also be invited to join the ERG to support their colleagues.²³

Engaging Your Current Diverse Workforce

Our annual Employee Referral Benchmark Study indicated that for many companies, only a low percentage of employees actively provide referrals regularly. We therefore asked our Firstbird Customer Success managers how to boost low employee engagement within an employee referral program, and encourage employees (your Talent Scouts) to make referrals actively. Firstbird's Customer Success managers believe in the power of transparent communication. The effectiveness of an employee referral program's promotion doesn't depend on the quantity or how many times it is communicated internally, but rather the quality and how it is communicated.

“Getting off to a good start with an employee referral program means strategically defining your communication strategy by considering who your target groups are inside the company and which channels and messages can best reach them. We have learned from our experience and studies that internal employee events around the employee referral program lead to significantly more hires. Therefore, our overall tip would be to find a way to explain, in person, why employee referrals are important for the company. Seize this opportunity to emphasise why hiring a diverse workforce matters and ask your employees for referrals from underrepresented groups”, said Sabrina Schiestl.

Firstbird's Customer Success team also suggest to experiment with monetary and non-monetary referral incentives to find the most appropriate rewards that engage your employees in providing diverse referrals. However, bear in mind that the cash bonus amount does not significantly influence the referral and application rate.²⁴



Common Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives

Kapor Center's Tech-leavers study analysed why employees from underrepresented groups voluntarily left their jobs in technology-related industries or functions. The main reason resulted from unfairness or mistreatment in the workplace. Nevertheless, researchers also explored five common diversity and inclusion initiatives that were:

1. Having a Diversity and Inclusion director;
2. Setting explicit diversity goals;
3. Paying bonuses for employee referrals of candidates from underrepresented backgrounds;
4. Conducting unconscious bias training;
5. Establishing Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).

The study showed that when all 5 diversity and inclusion initiatives were in place, the overall experiences of unfairness and mistreatment were significantly lower. Furthermore, the study also showed that companies achieved statistically significant results in decreasing unfair treatment and increasing retention rates by paying out a reward for diverse referrals.²⁵



How Intel Put Diversity First

In 2015 at Intel, the executive board set hiring of a diverse workforce as one of the strategic performance goals. The objective was to reach “full representation” in 2020, meaning hiring employees that reflects the variety of the workforce employed in the technology industry. The company invested \$300 million towards strategic initiatives to achieve their goal, which included paying bonuses for diverse referrals. Intel reports the bonus structure helped double its diversity hires in just one year (2015-2016), exceeding its goal of 40% diversity hires by 3%. In 2015, Intel's diversity gap was 2,300 employees. By the end of 2018, the company had narrowed it to 376 people.²⁶

Asking for Diverse Referrals

In a study carried out in collaboration with the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD), two-armed randomised controlled trial (RCT) testing was conducted to see whether using targeted referrals would increase the referrals, applications and hires of women. Employees were asked to provide referrals in areas of MOD where women had been historically underrepresented. They were randomly split into two groups: the group of control and the intervention group. The intervention group were invited to share the open position with five women. The control group did not receive this communication.

The study showed that targeted referrals had improved the gender balance among referrals (54% women), while referrals in the control group reflected the gender make-up of the organisation (40% women). This finding implies that targeted referrals can rebalance existing inequality by simply asking for referrals from minority groups. That is exactly what experts running the study recommend: organisations should consider testing and encouraging their employees to share roles with people they know from a broader range of underrepresented groups.²⁷



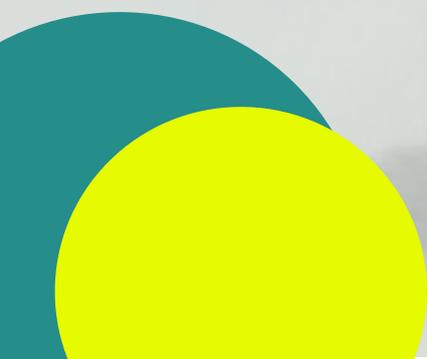
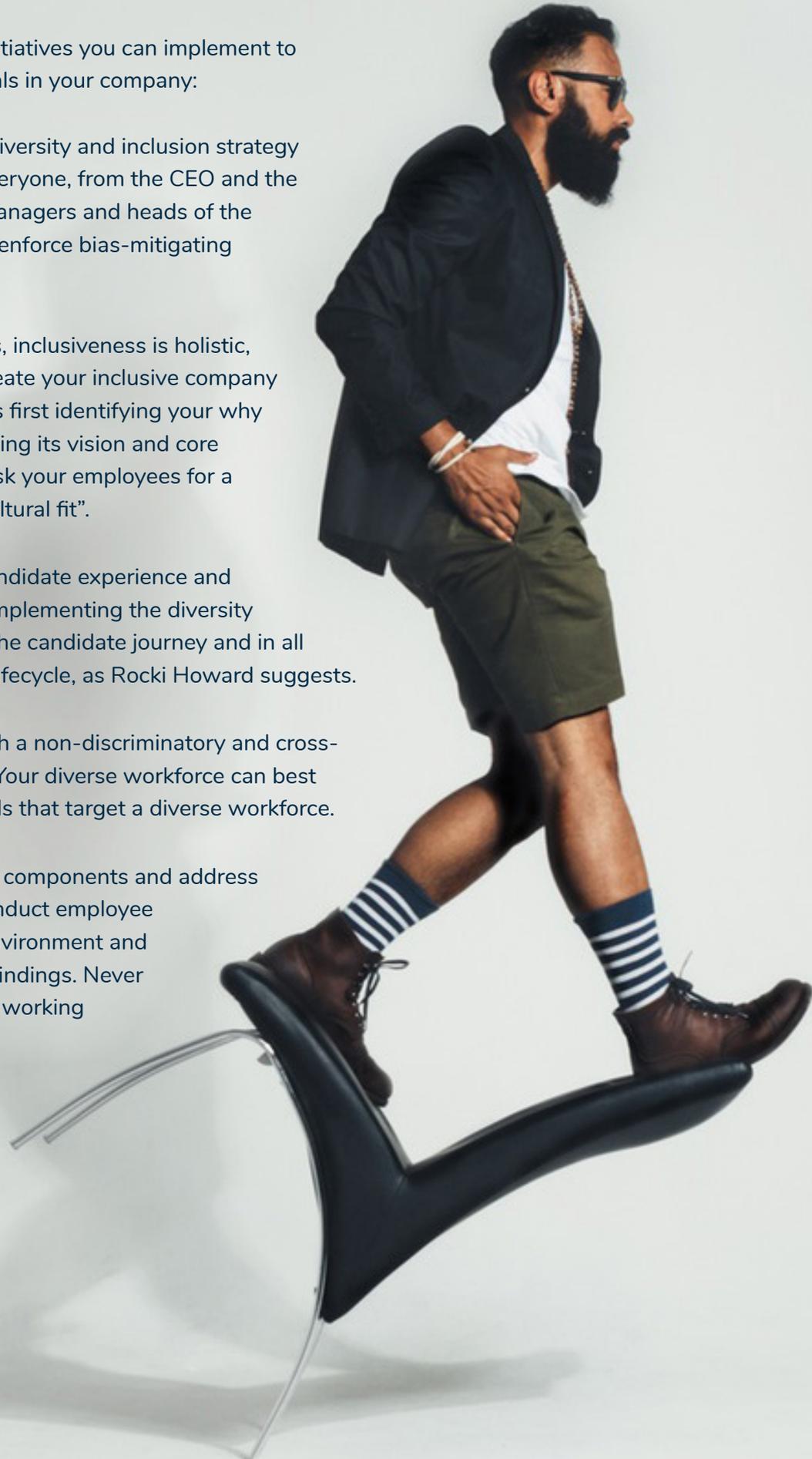
Pinterest Narrows the Gap

To narrow the workforce employment gap from minority groups in engineering roles, Pinterest asked their employees to refer women and prospective candidates from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds. The company reported a 24% increase in women referrals and a 55-times increase in applicants from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds referrals.²⁸

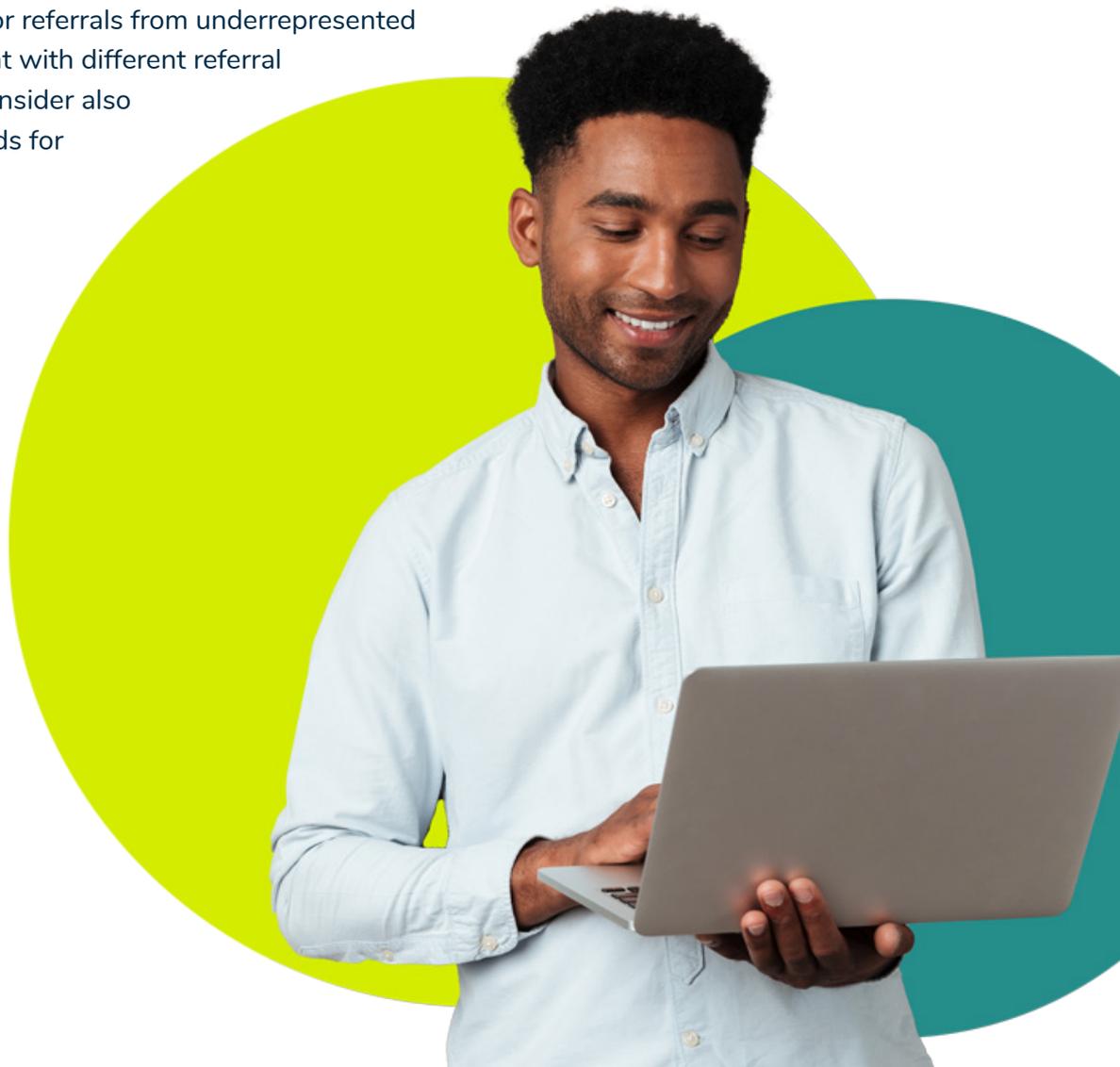
Conclusions & Takeaways

Here are the main D&I referral initiatives you can implement to increase incoming diverse referrals in your company:

1. Develop and implement a diversity and inclusion strategy promoted by leadership. Everyone, from the CEO and the board of directors, to the managers and heads of the teams, should support and enforce bias-mitigating strategies.
2. As Joanne Lockwood states, inclusiveness is holistic, active and deliberate. To create your inclusive company culture, Lockwood suggests first identifying your why of D&I culture and then setting its vision and core values. And remember to ask your employees for a “culture-add” instead of “cultural fit”.
3. Develop a fair and equal candidate experience and personal management by implementing the diversity hiring tool kit, both during the candidate journey and in all stages of the employment lifecycle, as Rocki Howard suggests.
4. Inclusive practices start with a non-discriminatory and cross-cultural job ad description. Your diverse workforce can best assist you in creating job ads that target a diverse workforce.
5. Examine your demographic components and address your concerns: regularly conduct employee surveys on your working environment and be transparent about your findings. Never stop trying to improve your working environment.



6. To boost employee engagement, promote new vacancies in company meetings, and be sure to explain to your current employees the job's must-have. In many cases, employees don't make referrals because they are not confident with the job profile.
7. Strive to develop a diverse talent pool by involving external groups of Talent Scouts in your employee referral program.
8. Involve your brand ambassadors in promoting your employee referral program. In each workplace, there is at least one person that other employees rely on and look up to, someone who has the company values at heart. Invite them to be a leader in providing diverse referrals!
9. An inclusive culture goes hand in hand with open and transparent communication. Explain why diversity in the workplace matters and motivate your employees to provide diverse referrals.
10. Offer incentives for referrals from underrepresented groups. Experiment with different referral bonuses types. Consider also diversifying rewards for different roles.



Further Reading and Sources

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Firstbird is the global leader in employee referral programs. We combine our state-of-the-art technology with our expertise to bring global corporations and their employee referral programs to new heights.

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