

CECP's Peer-To-Peer Dialogue: Internal and External Anti-Racism Leadership

Summary of Key Themes and Best Practices on Corporate Response

Virtual Listening Sessions Held: June 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10, 2020

Background: CECP heard from a number of companies that they would like to have a conversation with peers on how corporations are leading inside their companies on anti-racism and outside on partnerships on social justice, racial equity, community organizing, and law enforcement. We invited companies to join one of five conversations with peer CECP companies. The following is a summary of what participants shared and learned during these facilitated conversations; each participant was given time to speak on actions, resources, and questions. Led by members of the CECP team: Kari Niedfeldt-Thomas, Managing Director; Jinny Jeong, Manager; Ella Snow, Executive Assistant to the CEO.

Key Highlights of Corporate Responses and Actions: There were several unique, and unparalleled elements in the role of corporations in response to this particular social and civil issue. With a focus on collective action and long-termism, highlights of responses include the surprising **speed** and **sense of urgency** that permeated through their leadership and employees, which led many companies to **articulate their stance**, sometimes political, and **respond swiftly** – both internally and externally. The cadence and volume of **communication with employees increased**, some of which were already set in place and hence aided by communication protocols due to the pandemic. **Social media** tools were an influential and efficient way to increase communication and educate. There was a noted **shift in the risk tolerance for the politics** that may arise from partnering with certain nonprofit organizations and community groups. Other commonly cited themes and examples are noted below.

Theme #1: Creating Dialogue and Engaging Employees: Many companies publicly acknowledged that silence is no longer an option and committed to speaking up and out. They prioritized reflecting and listening to each other through the following efforts and encouraging participation in ‘opt-in opportunities’:

- **Listening to employees:** Holding company-wide calls, townhalls, fireside chats, listening circles, listening groups, webinar series
- Ensuring everyone is included with **diverse representation in discussions**, while also **communicating directly to Black employees** to let them know they are supported
- Allowing the space for **employee resource groups (ERGs)** and employees to lead the conversations:
 - Examples: Workplace Allies Panel, African Affinity group Black Voices Panel, Black Leadership Alliance Group, African American Network / African Americans Associate Resource Group, African & African American Diversity Employee Network, African Heritage resource group, Black Organization for Networking and Development (BOND), African American Ancestry Resource Group
- **Focusing on allyship:** hosting an external firm to present on a model of allyship, creating allyship training and counting it as volunteerism to incentivize education
- Levering the enhanced **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)** that were established at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, for some, also included an increased number of mental health days
- **Using volunteerism to connect employees:** Holding a virtual fundraiser; organizing self-monitored, at-home 5k running races, organizing an ongoing ‘Summer of Service’

Theme #2: Focusing on Learning and Increasing Empathy: The content for the aforementioned listening sessions were focused on building off of existing inclusion program and efforts as well as new training and education for all levels of employees. Companies acknowledged that they do not yet have all the answers on how to move forward, but committed to investing internally to reflect, listen, learn, and grow through the following ways:

- **Accepting the discomfort** of addressing this (i.e. holding ‘uncomfortable conversations’), **acknowledging white privilege** and committing to not relying on Black people to educate others, grappling with **naming white supremacy and structural racism**, while also bringing along people who are new to these terms/ideas
- Creating a **resource guide, toolkit, discussion guide, and training** on racial injustice for managers and associates to support each other and effectively listen (and hear) what support their teams need during this time. This included training for ERG leaders, as well as training on how to have difficult conversations with others, and creating a new **intranet page** on employee resources
- Inviting all employees to **silently kneel and/or observe a moment of silence** for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, particularly during the minutes preceding George Floyd’s funeral
- Holding a special event or providing a **day off for employees in honor of Juneteenth** (June 19)
- Redirecting ERG funds that weren’t used since the move to working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Providing social media training for **social media campaign** launched to amplify voices of African Americans in the company
- Remembering to focus on **wellness campaigns** and access to mental health services, providers, and mobile phone apps

Theme #3: Senior Leadership in Action: Senior executives opened up and expressed their emotions, along with declarations on actions, education, and new initiatives. Building off the cadence and practice of communicating regularly with employees due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies cited it has been an easier and quicker process addressing this specific issue:

- Many **CEOs immediately made a statement** — either internally to employees, or externally to the public — some with the same message. For those who used different language for the different audiences, the messages echoed the same commitment for racial equity, anti-racism, or social justice
- The role of **those who lead D&I** within the company such as the Chief Diversity Officer or Diversity Business Group lead were elevated to be part of these actions
- Some CEOs and senior leaders committed to **conduct a top down review and evaluation** of all corporate actions, programs, policies such as hiring, promotions, and pay
- List of CECP-affiliated company statements can be found on <https://cecp.co/cecp-anti-discrimination-statement/>

Theme #4: Social Investments: In addition to the learning and conversations, companies committed to making social investments through grant making and community partnerships:

- Committing to **funding and supporting nonprofit organizations** that are working on racial equity and social justice. This includes a commitment to taking efforts to **listen to partners**

to receive advisement on a comprehensive social strategy to focus on a range of diverse audiences

- **Evaluating funding strategies** around social equality and racial equity, and reviewing matching gifts and program grants
- **Accelerating existing or launching a new multi-year plan** to operationalize DEI strategies
- Encouraging **employee giving** and community engagement by increasing and/or expanding company matches. Some companies also expanded their policy to allow matches and volunteerism with organizations that are supporting peaceful protestors

Theme #5: Looking Ahead: Companies were focused on collective action with employees and the community, but also expressed desire to be intentional and thoughtful about how to move forward with these actions and commitments, focusing on impact on both a local and national scale. Some of the methods cited were:

- **Holding everyone accountable** for action steps with a requirement to report back on progress, and continuing to listen with intention. This includes creating a **concrete, long-term, measurable, and transparent inclusion plan**
- Planning a **strategy roadmap** with evaluation and metrics for creating long-term, sustainable community relationships and partnerships
- **Reevaluating HR policies**, hiring processes and practices such as creating action steps to **recruit** underrepresented people; develop **2030 goals** regarding diversifying the workforce and further diversifying the leadership team
- Leaning on those who have worked on this for a long time such as The Kellogg Foundation, Ford Foundation, etc.
- **Continuing to provide safe spaces** for employees to keep the conversation going
- **Focusing on mental health** and encouraging employees to take time off

Questions and Considerations for Leading Corporations

- How might the role of CSR be levered to create long-lasting change and equip corporations to lead boldly?
- How might you lever successful business practices for the philanthropy side of the company so that the departments are aligned?
- How can you be confident you are listening to the right voices?
- How might you identify the right nonprofit partners with which to work? This includes vetting policies and procedures.
- How might you identify the right DEI framework to use for internal training and education?
- How might you focus on supporting capacity building efforts for organizations that are receiving new funds and new outreach for partners?
- How might you provide guidance to board members who would like to facilitate conversations with their fellow board members or organization staff?

Additional resources on [anti-racism statements](#), [issue brief on racial equity and social justice](#), [pulse survey results on DEI metrics from grantees](#), and more can be found by logging into MyCECP on <http://www.cecp.co>.