

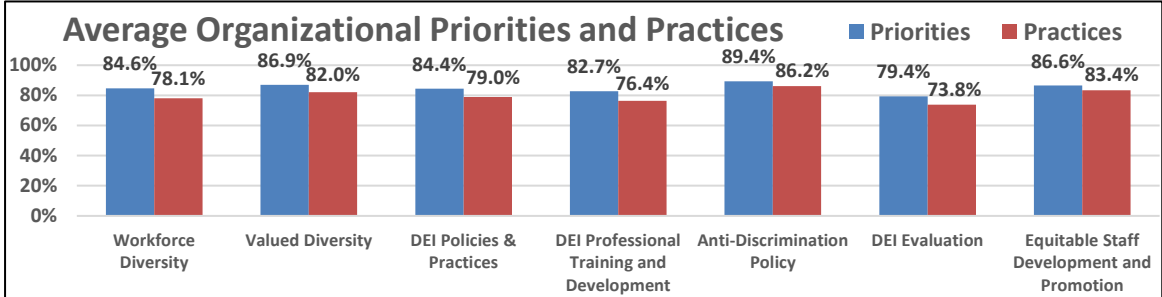


NLCDD Research in Action: Advancing Equity in Practice, Exploring the DEI Implementation Gap in Disability Services

Delivering high-quality services for people with disabilities requires organizations to actively advance equity, inclusion, and respect for diverse identities and lived experiences. When Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are meaningfully integrated into practice, they strengthen teams, enhance service quality, and create environments where all people feel valued and supported. In the disability field, data from the Organizational Priorities and Practices Inventory (OPPI) shows that disability sector organizations highly prioritize DEI, with strong intentions to address anti-discrimination, value diversity, and support equitable staff development. However, professionals across roles rate implementation, or actual enactment of DEI best practices, much lower, particularly in areas of workforce diversity, training, and evaluation. Overall, OPPI data highlights the ongoing challenge of translating commitment into consistent, everyday practice.

Drawing on responses from 1,171 professionals across disability field organizations nationwide, including executives, managers, and frontline staff, this brief provides a comprehensive view of how employees in provider, government, and other types of agencies rate their organization's priorities and day-to-day practices related to DEI, showing how values of equity and inclusion are put into action across the field. Findings underscore the need to strengthen alignment between organizational commitments and implementation in practice.

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Strong Organizational Commitment to DEI: IDD professionals report high prioritization of Anti-Discrimination (89.4%) and Equitable Staff Development and Promotion (86.6%), reflecting a strong emphasis on protections against bias and fair access to growth opportunities. This prioritization helps shape organizational culture, supporting psychological safety, staff retention, and a more inclusive, prepared workforce.

Gaps Between Priorities and Practice: Implementation consistently trails priorities, with the most meaningful gaps in Workforce Diversity (6.5%) and DEI Training and Development (6.4%). These gaps suggest that organizations face difficulty embedding DEI into ongoing workforce systems. In practice, this may reflect challenges in recruiting and retaining diverse staff, as well as reliance on one-time or inconsistent training rather than sustained, integrated learning approaches.

What These Gaps Signal for Practice: Gaps in areas like DEI evaluation (5.7%) further indicate limited mechanisms for tracking progress and accountability. Strengthening DEI in practice will require more deliberate integration into core systems, particularly hiring, professional development, and performance management, to ensure that commitments translate into consistent action.

Questions? Comments? Contact Us!

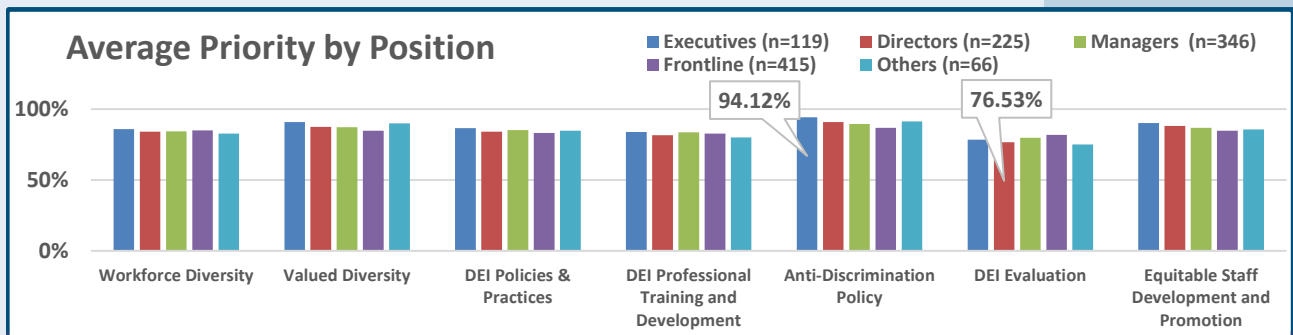
For additional information about the National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities visit:

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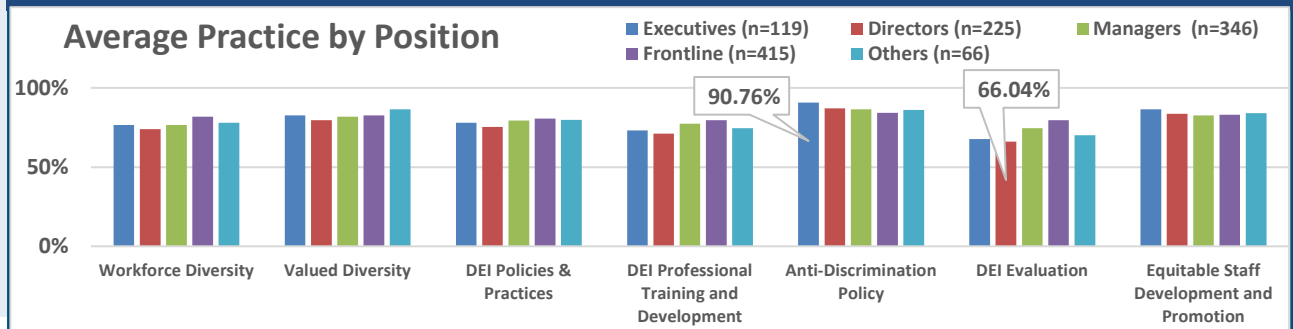
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The chart above indicates that employees across all organizational roles consistently report high prioritization of DEI, reflecting a shared and organization-wide commitment to equity and inclusion. *Anti-Discrimination Policy* stands out as the most prioritized area, particularly among Executives (94.1%), highlighting a strong emphasis on preventing discrimination and fostering inclusive environments. In contrast, *DEI Evaluation* shows the lowest prioritization, especially among Directors (76.5%), suggesting that systematic assessment of DEI efforts may receive less attention. Other areas, such as *Workforce Diversity*, *Valued Diversity*, and *Equitable Staff Development and Promotion*, remain consistently high across roles, reinforcing a strong foundation for DEI across organizations. Overall, this pattern suggests broad alignment in valuing DEI throughout organizations, with modest variation by position and opportunities to strengthen focus on evaluation and accountability.



Findings from the chart above show greater variation in DEI practices across organizational roles compared to priorities, although overall implementation remains relatively strong. *Anti-Discrimination Policy* is the most consistently implemented practice, particularly among Executives (90.8%), suggesting that formal protections are widely in place across organizations. In contrast, *DEI Evaluation* remains the lowest-rated area, especially among Directors (66.0%), indicating limited use of structured approaches to assess DEI efforts. Other areas, such as *Workforce Diversity*, *Valued Diversity*, and *Equitable Staff Development and Promotion*, fall within the mid-to-high 70% to low 80% range, with Frontline staff often reporting slightly higher levels of implementation than leadership. Overall, this pattern suggests that while DEI practices are broadly present, there is greater inconsistency across roles and clear opportunities to strengthen evaluation and accountability mechanisms.



The chart above shows that Executives and Directors report the largest gaps between DEI priorities and practices, particularly in *DEI Evaluation* (10.6% for Directors), suggesting that while leadership values assessing DEI efforts, consistent implementation remains limited. Notable gaps are also present in *Workforce Diversity* and *DEI Professional Training and Development*, indicating challenges in translating commitment into action. In contrast, Frontline Staff report the smallest differences across most indicators, with the lowest gap in *Equitable Staff Development and Promotion* (1.7%), reflecting closer alignment between priorities and day-to-day experiences at the service level.

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