



HOW-TO GUIDE

HOW TO BE A VISIBLE LEADER

Executive Sponsor and
Champions





Business in the Community's Race Equality Campaign has been monitoring the impact of visible leadership on race for over 30 years.

This long-standing commitment has led to the establishment of the [Race at Work Charter](#), which, since its inception, has seen over 1,000 businesses—both large and small—sign up to its seven key actions.

Through its network of employers and surveys conducted in partnership with YouGov, the Race Equality Campaign has tracked the progress of race equality in the workplace.

The findings from these surveys show significant progress, particularly in executive and champion sponsorship.

In 2015, 32% of businesses reported executive sponsorship for race equality; this figure rose to 33% in 2018 and then reached 44% in 2021—demonstrating a clear upward trend in leadership commitment to race equality.

The Leadership, Employees and Procurement survey with YouGov in 2024 found that for large employers this has

been increased to 60% of employees saying there was an executive sponsor for equality and fairness at the top of their organisation and executive sponsorship for inclusive procurement also.

In contrast, 31% of employees in small organisations said this.

The role of the executive sponsor

Executive sponsors provide visible leadership on race and ethnicity within their organisation, driving actions such as setting goals for ethnically diverse representation, briefing recruitment agencies and supporting mentoring and sponsorship.

[The Voices from the Race at Work Surveys Report 2024](#), emphasises the critical role of leadership in advancing workplace equality.

It presents three key calls to action for employers to encourage racial equality in the workplace, along with an additional call to action for HR Directors.

By mobilising leaders to champion equality and inclusion initiatives, organisations can create environments that support the

progression and retention of ethnically diverse talent.

This leadership engagement is essential for embedding equality into the organisational culture and ensuring sustained commitment to these values.

Thank you to the employers and leaders across the BITC Race Leadership Team and Race at Work Charter organisations who have demonstrated leadership and commitment to action.

Make the case for action

Potential boost to the UK economy

The government independent McGregor-Smith Review: [Race in the workplace](#) (2017) found that equal workplace progression for Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse individuals could significantly boost the UK economy.

Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) estimates that ethnic minority businesses (EMBs) could increase their contribution from £25 billion to £100 billion annually with the right support, while the McGregor-Smith Review

found that equitable workplace progression could add £24 billion per year to the UK economy.

The McKinsey & Company's 2023 report, [Diversity Matters Even More](#) found that companies with executive teams in the top quartile for gender, ethnic and cultural diversity are 39% more likely to outperform on profitability than those in the bottom quartile.

Raise awareness of your customer base

Knowing the diversity of your customer base can help you build the business case for your workforce to reflect your customer demographics.

The [BITC Regional Insights on Race factsheets](#) provides insights into the range of potential customers by region which can enable national or local businesses to consider this as part of marketing and customer engagement plans.

Reflecting on your customer base in the workforce

According to 2021 Census data for England and Wales, the ethnic composition has become more diverse compared to 2011. 18% of the population in 2021 identified as Black, Asian, Mixed, or other ethnically diverse groups, an increase from 14% in 2011.

This means that attracting, retaining and developing your Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse talent widens your talent pool.

The Youth Futures Foundation booklet [Narrowing the Gap: Tackling Ethnic Disparities in Youth Employment](#) highlights key findings based on the experiences, outlooks, and attitudes of over 2,200 young people from Black, Asian, Mixed Race, and other ethnically diverse backgrounds. The report reveals that more than **8 in 10 (84%)** of these young people are concerned about facing barriers or challenges related to their ethnicity or background when it comes to securing work or employment.

Having a deliberate, well-publicised strategy for fairness and equality will help attract this key demographic.

It is critical that an executive sponsor for race can visibly listen and engage with all employees on the topic of race equality.

Top tips for engagement include:

1. Establish Listening Circles

Listening circles offer a powerful way for leaders to engage with Black, Asian, Mixed Race, and other ethnically diverse employees in a meaningful and respectful way.

By promoting active listening and dialogue, leaders can create a more inclusive workplace, uncover challenges that need addressing, and build stronger, more trusting relationships with their workforce.

2. Mobilise leaders at different levels

Seek to embed champions and ambassadors throughout your organisation at different levels.

They can ensure key messages are cascaded across the organisation and provide employees with a contact as issues

arise, including attraction, recruitment, retention, progression or other identified priorities in your organisation.

The '[Voices from the Race at Work Surveys Report 2024](#)' underscores the necessity for leaders at all organisational levels to actively engage in promoting race equality.

3. Reverse mentoring and two-way mentoring models

Consider setting up a reverse mentoring or two-way mutual mentoring programme, pairing senior managers with employees from diverse minority backgrounds.

[The Race at Work Charter Survey 2023](#), found that 72% of employers reported having board members or senior team members who mentor and/or reverse mentor ethnic minority employees.

4. Internal communications campaigns

Encourage your employees to complete and update all personal details (including ethnicity data) on your data collection systems.

This will enable you to establish a baseline of representation in your workforce at every level. You can then form an accurate

picture from which to set aspirational goals and targets, monitor ethnicity, pay and measure the impact of any positive actions and interventions.

5. Establish an advisory body

Engage a group of key stakeholders within the business who can provide insight, support and challenge proposed actions and plans. This advisory group should have wide and varied composition, including external representation and representation from relevant employee networks. The executive sponsor should own the agenda as a part of this group.

The [2023 Race at Work Charter Survey](#), identified that **88%** of participating employers have established an ethnicity advisory body or working group.

How Business in the Community can support you

Our Inclusion & Wellbeing Advisers take an intersectional approach, recognising that individuals hold multiple identities that can intersect and influence their experiences at work.

To find out more, [get in touch with our Advisory team](#).