

Creating an Equitable Workplace for All

An Interview with Lilian Vanvielt, Executive Vice President and Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, Alliant Insurance Services

EDITORS' NOTE Lilian Vanvielt is a 30-year insurance industry veteran who serves as Alliant's Executive Vice President and Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer. As the head of Alliant's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) initiative, Vanvielt leads a company-wide effort focused on promoting DE&I within Alliant and throughout the broader insurance industry through awareness, training, mentoring, and career development. In addition



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to her role, Vanvielt is one of the nation's leading brokers in the education space. She leads the Alliant Kindergarten to Community College (K-14) Public Entity program and plays an influential role in setting the program's national business strategy. A proud survivor of stage III breast cancer, Vanvielt currently serves as Director of the Susan G. Komen Leadership Foundation in San Diego and was the organization's Honorary Breast Cancer Survivor of the Year in 2018. She holds a bachelor's degree in economics and history from the University of California, Los Angeles.

COMPANY BRIEF Alliant Insurance Services (alliant.com) is one of the nation's leading distributors of diversified insurance products and services. Operating through a national network of offices, Alliant offers a comprehensive portfolio of services to clients.

How do you define the role of a Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and how critical is it for the role to be engaged in business strategy?

A Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Officer must be aligned with the company's business strategy to ensure and instill meaningful DE&I change both internally and externally. The role of the lead DE&I professional is crucial in cultivating an engrained DE&I plan that aligns with the organization's business priorities and objectives.

Despite the importance of fostering belonging and creating an equitable workplace for all, progress can be made exceptionally difficult without leadership buy-in. Building an infrastructure of top-down support establishes the overarching accountability vital to internally advancing DE&I within an organization and

paves the way for external change. Ultimately, we must collectively commit to accountability when building the kind of workplace where employees from all backgrounds can thrive.

Will you provide an overview of Alliant's diversity, equity, and inclusion mission?

Alliant's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) mission is to nurture and sustain an inclusive culture that boosts employee engagement, attracts a diverse talent pool, advances innovative problem-solving for our clients,

and allows all our people to thrive. Above everything, we are focused on the retention and advancement of underrepresented professionals. Our six-pillar strategy, outlined below, takes a multi-faceted, metrics-driven approach to promoting DE&I at every level of our organization.

1. **Accountability:** We believe what gets measured, gets done. We hold ourselves responsible by setting realistic internal and external goals to advance our DE&I mission and establishing systems and processes to keep track of our progress.

2. **Culture:** By cultivating a human-centric culture, we direct our focus to individuals and transforming organizational behavior by promoting allyship, increasing retention, and advancement efforts through engagement in our mentorship and forthcoming sponsorship programs.

3. **Representation:** By partnering with colleges and universities with historically underrepresented student populations to establish risk management internship programs, we continue to nurture the talent pool and broaden student access to the insurance industry.

4. **Clients:** We take great pride in providing stellar client service that incorporates diversity of thought and representation.

5. **Brand Development:** As a nationally recognized top insurance brokerage firm, we are keen to leave our DE&I imprint in the wider insurance industry.

6. **Community Investment:** Both in business and in the world at large, Alliant holds fast to the belief that we can make a difference. It's a commitment we are proud to live out each day in communities across the nation. Through the launch of our Alliant Insurance Foundation, we are striving to

make the insurance industry more accessible for underrepresented students.

How engrained is diversity, equity, and inclusion in Alliant's culture and values?

Alliant believes that diversity, equity, and inclusion is not a byproduct of our success, but a catalyst for it. As an organization, we are wholly invested in furthering the DE&I needle. From establishing a department of six professionals focused on executing our data-driven DE&I strategy to developing programming that focuses on equitable representation, our culture prioritizes inclusion initiatives that promote belonging. Below is a list of key initiatives organized by our department that comprise our efforts and illustrate how engrained DE&I is in our culture and values:

1. Provide program coordination and general administrative support to our seven, formalized Employee Resource Groups (ERG) that represent our women, racial/ethnic minority, LGBTQ+, and veteran communities; we also have an ERG that provides support to our community of cancer survivors and caregivers,

2. Engage in Alliant Learning in the Workplace, a monthly curriculum-based programming that moves our workforce from passive to active allyship across our company,

3. Conduct DE&I fluency workshops with our different departments,

4. Launched and grow an Alliant DE&I LinkedIn page that helps us with culture building and elevating the profiles of underrepresented professionals,

5. Streamlined a process that endeavors to equitably provide sponsored development opportunities to our high-potential, underrepresented talent, and

6. Worked in conjunction with our Alliant Insurance Foundation to design, launch, and grow an Alliant Fellows program that creates access and opportunities for racial/ethnic minority students in the insurance industry.

How important is it to have diverse perspectives and experiences at the table when making business decisions?

Diverse perspectives are integral in making successful business decisions and establishing a welcoming and collaborative workplace. When done and communicated

“We are focused on equitably allocating career advancement and development resources to our underrepresented professionals, women included, to ensure their talents and potential are recognized and celebrated.”

effectively, equitably representative decision-making at the table signals that all are valued across the organization. From an internal perspective, informed decisions foster organizational innovation, increase problem-solving capabilities, and attract more talent and business opportunities. When assessing external value, research demonstrates that leadership and business development teams largely benefit from a more diverse and representative workforce, as they can expansively and genuinely connect with their clients to an exponential degree. In an industry like insurance, where the underrepresented populations being served continue to grow, it is vital to ensure that they are served by brokers as diverse as they are. We want Alliant to be an organization that consistently attracts and retains top talent by virtue of having leaders that are representative of our population.

Will you discuss Alliant’s commitment to expand opportunities for career growth and advancement for individuals with diverse backgrounds and life experiences?

In addition to investing and supporting our seven fully-fledged Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) across varying affinities, Alliant and our dedicated DE&I department are developing and maintaining relationships with underrepresented identity-specific insurance organizations, including Women in Insurance, Ellevate Network, Asian American Insurance Network, Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement, Rainbow Risk Alliance, and the National African American Insurance Association. We have also had past relationships with the Latin American Association of Insurance Agencies and the National LGBTQ+ Bar Association. In collaboration with these partnerships, the DE&I department is developing corresponding mentorship and sponsorship programs to further advance and develop our underrepresented high-potential leaders.

With a streamlined process established, we also continue to equitably allocate sponsored development opportunities and resources to our women, racial/ethnic minority, LGBTQ+, and veteran professionals. Additionally, our Alliant Fellows program and other collaborative academic partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and

Universities, including Howard University and Southern University A&M College, provides accessible career development resources to students interested in pursuing careers in insurance.

In your role, how valuable has it been to have the commitment of Alliant’s senior management in the company’s diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts?

The commitment from senior management is essential to the success of our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) efforts, and our executive team has taken an active stance in ensuring that DE&I is woven into every aspect of Alliant’s operations by supporting our DE&I department in developing and executing our six-pillar data-driven, people-centric strategy. Additionally, our Chairman and CEO, Tom Corbett, has pledged both his support and that of Alliant’s to CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion (CEOAction.com). This pledge is the largest CEO-driven business commitment to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace across industries and to commit to change and learning from each other. Our goal is to leverage our top-down leadership support to move the needle on DE&I in the insurance industry, foster belonging, and advocate for meaningful and impactful change that is sustainable.

You lead the Alliant Kindergarten to Community College (K-14) Public Entity program. What was the vision for creating this program and how has the program evolved?

As a public entity specialist and a nationwide industry leader in the education space, I am at the forefront of business strategies for the public entity sector alongside supporting the Alliant Kindergarten to Community College (K-14) Public Entity initiative. I am committed to protecting invaluable community assets, and this collaboration is the ideal partnership to advocate for schools and an honorable opportunity to give back. Just as Alliant is dedicated to investing in our employees and ensuring all feel welcome, our shared commitment to investing and strengthening our communities are equally prioritized through this program.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women in leadership positions in the insurance industry?

It is no secret that historically, the insurance industry has predominantly been led by men. Over time, we have seen an increase in women insurance professionals in senior roles, and today, more than ever, our industry prioritizes women in leadership. However, while the opportunities for women in leadership positions have increased, there is still much work to be done. While insurance is largely comprised of women, they are primarily concentrated at the lower rungs of organizations and their upward mobility is largely influenced by their visibility to senior leadership. At Alliant, we’re mitigating unconscious gender bias and advocating for promotion through sponsorship and mentoring. We are focused on equitably allocating career advancement and development resources to our underrepresented professionals, women included, to ensure their talents and potential are recognized and celebrated. We, as women, must collectively support one another and establish a community of awareness, allyship, and advocacy to move the needle forward for women leaders in insurance.

You have spent more than 30 years of your career in the insurance industry. What has made the industry so special for you?

The insurance industry provides a multitude of avenues to pursue my mission of serving our communities for the greater good and advocating for their best interest. This vision stems from my unique perspective as a proud survivor of stage III breast cancer and as a woman of color from an immigrant family. My fortitude in the face of adversity is inherent, but largely bolstered by the sincere and exhaustive support I received from Susan G. Komen. I have always sought to use my work and influence to advocate for health equity and remain an active spokesperson for breast cancer education and prevention. I am forever indebted to my community and strive to utilize my specialization in risk management and public entity to provide the necessary and essential support system to fortify what they’ve built. I aspire to strengthen all my relationships within the public sector as my community has strengthened me. Unified, we can prepare for a successful and protected future. ●