

Advocating for Equality

An Interview with Carla Grant Pickens, Vice President, Global Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer, IBM

EDITORS' NOTE *As the Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer for IBM, Carla Grant Pickens leads a global team dedicated to creating an inclusive culture and a workforce that reflects the world, while responding to societal issues that impact IBM employees and the communities they live and work in. During her 20+ year career at IBM, she has held roles in HR Leadership, Talent Strategy and Programs, and Executive Succession & Development across the company, and has worked and lived in both the U.S. and Asia. She holds an IBM patent and the prolific title of "IBM Inventor" for Workforce Retention and Compensation Analytics. Prior to IBM, she worked in consulting at Oracle and Northrop Grumman. She sits on the boards of the Federal City Council and Connected DMV and enjoys volunteering with youth in her area, most notably as a Mentor and the Executive Champion of the Carver High School P-TECH program in Baltimore, Maryland. She earned a BS in economics and an MS in human resources from the University of Maryland.*



Carla Grant Pickens

COMPANY BRIEF *IBM (ibm.com) is a leading global hybrid cloud and AI, and business services provider. The company helps clients in more than 175 countries capitalize on insights from their data, streamline business processes, reduce costs and gain the competitive edge in their industries. Nearly 3,000 government and corporate entities in critical infrastructure areas such as financial services, telecommunications and healthcare rely on IBM's hybrid cloud platform and Red Hat OpenShift to affect their digital transformations quickly, efficiently and securely. IBM's breakthrough innovations in AI, quantum computing, industry-specific cloud solutions and business services deliver open and flexible options to its clients. All of this is backed by IBM's commitment to trust, transparency, responsibility, inclusivity and service. IBM has been named as a "Top 10 Working Mother Best Company," a "Top 10 Company for Dads," and a "Top Place to Work for LGBTQ Employees" by the Human Rights Campaign, among others.*

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

As IBM's Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, I'm charged with carrying forward IBM's rich heritage in advocating for equality. At IBM, we take seriously our responsibility to ensure meaningful action. I lead the company's global efforts to realize a workforce that reflects the world in which we live and work, where every IBMer feels included and is supported

to thrive. I'm driving a modern-day agenda focused on education, skills, and jobs to create opportunity for diverse groups around the world.

Will you provide an overview of IBM's diversity and inclusion initiatives?

At IBM, we are driving outcome-oriented, rigorous diversity and inclusion actions focused on four strategic areas:

- Advocacy that drives systemic change which creates opportunity for diverse communities;
- Allyship where we provide the training and support to help every IBMer be an upstander through inclusive behaviors;
- Employee experiences that champion all diverse communities of IBMers and support every employee to thrive and bring their authentic selves to work;
- Accountability that harnesses data transparency and AI to enable action and deliver outcomes for increased diversity representation and inclusion at every level of our company.

How engrained is diversity and inclusion in IBM's culture and values?

Diversity and inclusion has been core to the company throughout our history and remains so today. In 1911, the newly formed Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company, later renamed IBM, included Black and female employees from its founding. In 1935 IBM established "equal pay for equal work." Less than 20 years later, IBM Chairman Thomas J. Watson wrote Policy Letter No. 4, the company's first corporate equal opportunity policy, more than a decade before the U.S. Civil Rights Act. We've expanded our nondiscrimination policy to include sexual orientation (1984), gender identity and expression (2002), and genetics (2005).

We've long recognized the value of diversity of thought, experience, background and identity. We believe that the outcome of fully igniting diversity and inclusion within our teams leads to greater innovation, agility, performance and engagement, and enables both greater business growth and positive societal impact.

IBM's purpose is underpinned by a corporate culture driven to achieve growth for our clients, our company and ourselves. Fundamental to our transformation is empowering every IBMer to exemplify the behaviors that foster a culture of conscious inclusion where innovation can thrive and individuals progress. While IBM has a rich heritage in diversity and inclusion, we are still learning, growing and making progress.

How do you engage your employees in IBM's diversity efforts?

IBM has over 300+ chapters of Business Resource Groups (BRGs) and as members of our BRGs, IBMers are using their passion for equality to co-create the future of diversity and inclusion at IBM. More than 50,000 IBMers are involved in our BRGs, where employees are free to share their personal experiences about being a racial or ethnic minority, part of the LGBTQ+ community, neuro-diverse or physically disabled, female or a veteran, among others.

We also host Executive Councils for global Women, LGBTQ+, People with Diverse Abilities, and in the U.S., for Blacks, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Veterans. These councils are each sponsored by an IBM senior vice president and engage the executives from each community to help grow inclusion, enable development and advancement, support the attraction and retention of diverse talent, and serve the community. The councils have adopted an agile way of working with clear outcomes and self-directed work teams to advance IBM's representation and culture of inclusion.

Core to the continuous evolution of IBM's diversity strategy is the involvement of members of each diverse community. This has led IBM to many industry-leading innovations, such as extended same-sex partner benefits in 50 countries, expanded gender affirmation benefits in the U.S., Brazil and Canada, and in the U.S. increased paid parental bonding time up to 20 weeks for birth moms and 12 weeks for dads and adoptive parents.

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Is it critical to have metrics in place to track the impact of IBM’s diversity and inclusion efforts?

At IBM, diversity is a business imperative, core to the company’s culture, supported by formalized goals and measurable progress. Accountability is critical to fostering a diverse and inclusive company. Our senior executives are held accountable for improvement in the career progression and representation of each underrepresented minority group and women. Compensation for our C-suite and all IBM executives is calculated in part based on their organization’s progress in improving diversity for women and underrepresented minorities.

Our data is part of who we are, informs what we do, and supports us to scale cultural and behavioral transformation across IBM. At IBM, our data fuels a science-based model to help advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. This includes multiple dimensions across our societal and business initiatives such as:

- Recruitment pipeline development to maximize the flow of diverse individuals to IBM;
- Communities and Business Resource Groups (BRGs) which elevate engagement and inspire the world;
- Skills-based hiring to power IBM into the future;
- Differentiated experiences affirming IBMers belong, are engaged, and are heard;
- Mentorship and career development programs to increase diversity representation in management and executive roles across our company;
- Transparency in IBM’s diversity mix and accountability in selection decisions;
- Respect for the individual and appreciation of our differences and intersectionality;
- Innovative technology enabling Equity and Equal Opportunity in IBM programs and practices.

While diversity is the right thing to do, you mention that it is also a business imperative. What do you see as the impact of diversity on driving better business outcomes?

Diversity and inclusion has long been part of our business model. It is our belief that D&I are key to our company’s success and will help propel innovation and expand access to opportunity. This will make IBM a better, stronger company. We are reminded

in this moment that we need to go further. Corporations have an opportunity to lead and inspire. This is a critical moment where we all must do better in our efforts around diversity, equity and inclusion. Employees are expecting their leaders to step up to shape a more inclusive, diverse and equitable workforce. We are at an inflection point to create a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the world in which we live.

How valuable is it to have the commitment of IBM’s board in its diversity and inclusion efforts?

Accountability is critical to fostering a diverse and inclusive company. In 2021, the IBM Board of Directors added a diversity modifier to the Company’s annual incentive program to reinforce senior management’s focus on improving a diverse representation of our workforce. IBM has pursued the highest standards of corporate responsibility for more than a century, and our Board of Directors is actively engaged in overseeing the Company’s diversity and inclusion efforts. Consistent with IBM’s legacy of welcoming and supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce, the Board of Directors has adopted a policy committing the company to publish a report annually assessing the company’s diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and programs. Further, in the spirit of enhanced transparency, we have committed to publish EEO-1 data in 2022 after the completion of the separation of our managed infrastructure services business.

What do you tell young, diverse talent about the opportunities that exist to grow and lead in the industry?

For more than five years, IBM has worked to create more equitable pathways for people to acquire tech skills to secure family-sustaining jobs. As we have created programs to support a “skills over degrees” approach, we have seen their potential for enabling corporations to address two key challenges of our time: closing economic divides that exist around the world based on race, antiquated class systems, prejudice and more; and bringing millions of women back into the global workforce in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, we took key actions to make tech jobs more accessible through skill-building:

1. The requirement of a bachelor’s degree can unnecessarily limit the pool of available and diverse talent, which is why we have

eliminated this qualification from job postings where it is not necessary to perform the job. Currently, approximately 50 percent of our U.S. job openings do not require a four-year degree. We are working to scale this approach globally.

2. The IBM Apprenticeship Program offers people from all backgrounds with pathways to technology jobs – receiving training as cybersecurity analysts, system administrators, digital designers, developers and more.

3. The IBM Skills Academy is a skills-oriented training program to empower students and faculty of various backgrounds with the skills needed to excel in today’s high-demand technologies. Upon successful course completion, faculty and students can receive badges in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, blockchain, design and quantum computing.

4. In its 10th year, P-TECH is a public education reform model created by IBM that enables skills attainment and career readiness now reaching over 150,000 students in the pipeline in 266 schools globally. IBM is offering 1,000 paid internships for P-TECH students and graduates in the U.S. from now until December 31, 2021 – a 10x incremental increase.

5. IBM SkillsBuild is a free digital learning and career readiness program, readying people for in-demand entry level IT and non-IT roles in many industries.

6. In 2020, IBM joined 40 leading companies to create OneTen, an organization that will combine the power of these committed American companies to upskill, hire, and promote one million Black Americans over the next 10 years into family-sustaining jobs with opportunities for advancement.

In addition, in summer 2021, we launched the IBM Accelerate program. 1,000 diverse students will participate in IBM Accelerate, an eight-week live, free, interactive learning program to prepare early-year U.S. college students for careers in technology. They will gain skills in software development, consulting, marketing, design, hardware development and sales, as well as soft skills such as leadership and collaboration. To help ensure student success, each will be matched with an IBM mentor and earn a space at the front of the line to compete for coveted IBM apprenticeships. ●