ACEC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# COMMUNITY BUILDING
ROADMAP
2025 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall, participating firms demonstrate measurable engagement across all four domains, including Workplace, Workforce, Marketplace, and Supplier/Community, though levels of structural integration vary considerably. The average Overall Score among participating firms is 55 percent, with a median score of 57 percent, placing the typical participating firm within the Emerging maturity category under the 2025 framework.

Using the defined maturity thresholds, including Optimizing (85% and above), Managing (70%–84%), Emerging (55%–69%), and Aspiring (below 55%), the distribution of participating firms is reflected in the following graph:

Overall Assessment Results
n = 57

Optimizing, 2%
Managing, 18%
Emerging, 33%
Aspiring, 47%
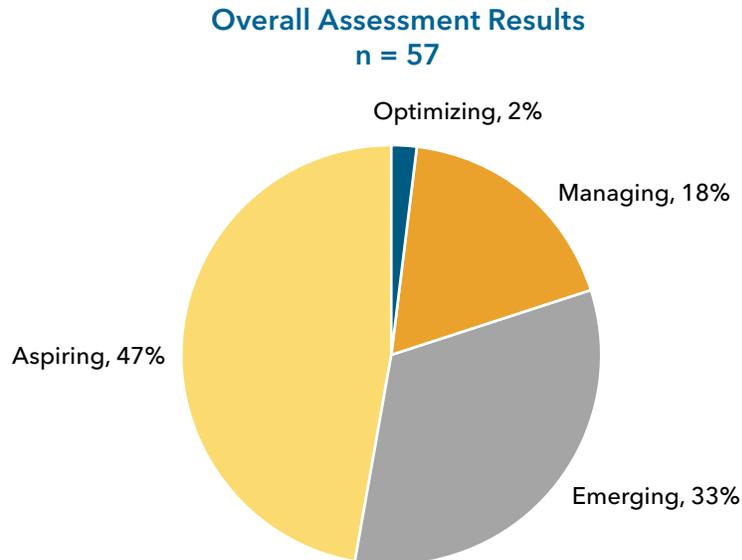
Nearly half of participating firms remain in the Aspiring range, while one-third have progressed into Emerging. One in five participating firms meets the criteria for Managing maturity, and a small proportion have reached Optimizing levels.

Scores range from 17 percent to 86 percent, indicating substantial variability among participating firms in how inclusion and belonging practices are structured and implemented.

Domain-Level Performance

When examined by domain, participating firms report varying levels of maturity.

- **Workplace:** 64% average score (Emerging)
- **Marketplace:** 58% average score (Emerging)
- **Workforce:** 49% average score (Aspiring)
- **Supplier/Community:** 47% average score (Aspiring)

Workplace represents the strongest-performing domain, with nearly half of participating firms classified as Managing or Optimizing. In contrast, Workforce and Supplier/Community show heavier concentrations in the Aspiring category.

These results indicate that participating firms report stronger performance in areas related to leadership commitment, internal culture, and marketing oversight than in workforce systems integration or structured community engagement.

Workplace: Leadership Commitment and Cultural Positioning

The Workplace domain reflects comparatively higher maturity levels among participating firms. Leadership commitment is widely reported, with 91 percent indicating that the President or CEO demonstrates commitment to inclusion often or always, and 81 percent reporting similar commitment among other senior leaders.

Most participating firms report implementing workplace-focused initiatives. Ninety-eight percent report initiatives aimed at increasing engagement and supporting a culture of inclusion, and 96 percent report initiatives focused on creating an inclusive work environment. Public articulation of workplace or community values is reported by 84 percent of participating firms.

However, formal strategy adoption is less universal, as 53 percent report having a formal strategy in place, 18 percent report that one is in progress, and 28 percent report having no formal strategy. Structured leadership training is reported by 51 percent, indicating that while awareness and cultural messaging are widespread, leadership capability-building is less consistently implemented.

Accountability mechanisms show partial integration, with 62 percent reporting that inclusive leadership behaviors are incorporated into leader evaluations and 66 percent reporting similar integration for employee evaluations.

Overall, Workplace results suggest that participating firms have established visible executive commitment and programmatic initiatives, though governance structures and full accountability integration vary.

Workforce: Systems and Analytics Integration

The Workforce domain records an average score of 49 percent, placing the typical participating firm in the Aspiring category. The maturity distribution shows 63 percent of firms classified as Aspiring, with smaller proportions reaching Emerging (20%), Managing (15%), or Optimizing (2%).

Participating firms report widespread use of compliance-oriented workforce analytics. Nine in 10 (93%) collect employee demographic data, 86 percent analyze compensation data, and 73 percent analyze promotions. However, fewer analyze employee engagement (48%) or performance ranking patterns (39%), suggesting more limited integration of systemic workforce diagnostics.

Recruitment practices emphasize accessibility and inclusive language. Nearly all participating firms (98%) report offering broadly appealing benefits, and 81 percent report using inclusive job descriptions. However, only 52 percent report using interview panels with an inclusive lens, and 46 percent report sharing inclusion-related information during recruiting. Formal sponsorship programs are reported by 15 percent of participating firms.

Professional development opportunities are nearly universal (96%), and informal mentoring is common (81%). Inclusive succession planning is reported by 71 percent, while only 29 percent report using promotion metrics explicitly tied to inclusive outcomes.

These findings indicate that while access-based workforce practices are widely implemented, structured advancement mechanisms and comprehensive analytics integration are less consistently reported.

Marketplace: Marketing Oversight and Client Integration

The Marketplace domain shows an average score of 58 percent, with a broader distribution across maturity categories. While 42 percent of participating firms fall within the Aspiring range, 21 percent reach Managing and another 21 percent reach Optimizing levels.

Internal marketing oversight is widely reported. Eighty-eight percent of participating firms indicate that they review marketing materials most of the time or always to avoid stereotypes or negative representations.

Integration into business development processes is more variable. Fifty-six percent report including inclusion strategies when pursuing work, and 65 percent report responding to clients' culturally and geographically diverse needs.

Client demand appears stronger in the public sector. One-third (37%) report that public-sector clients ask often or always for articulation of inclusion commitments, compared to 16 percent for private-sector clients.

Marketplace results suggest that participating firms commonly apply internal brand diligence, while integration into competitive positioning varies across firms.

# Supplier/Community: Engagement and External Commitments

Supplier/Community represents the lowest-performing domain, with an average score of 47 percent. The maturity distribution shows 62 percent of participating firms in the Aspiring category, with smaller proportions reaching Emerging (19%), Managing (17%), or Optimizing (2%).

Participating firms most frequently engage through volunteer efforts and scholarships. Eighty-four percent report volunteering employee time and labor, and 67 percent report supporting scholarships.

Less commonly reported activities include hosting internal conversations about community issues (51%), providing financial resources (44%), sponsoring programs (42%), and making formal public statements (31%).

Client expectations vary by sector. Public-sector clients are more likely than private-sector clients to request articulation of inclusion commitments, though overall demand remains moderate.

Supplier/Community results suggest that participating firms commonly engage through direct service activities, while structured or formally institutionalized community strategies are less widely reported.
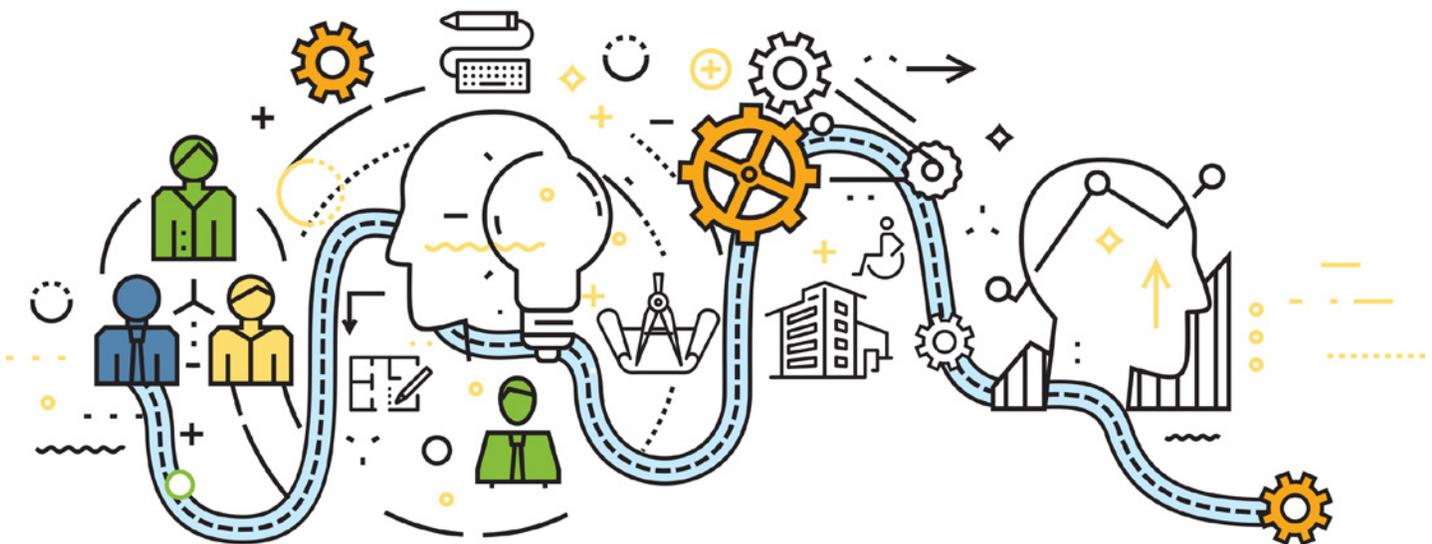
METHODOLOGY

The 2025 Community Building Roadmap reflects the practices and structures of the firms that elected to participate in this year's assessment. In 2025, ACEC Research Institute refreshed and re-positioned the assessment as the Community Building Roadmap (previously the Diversity Roadmap) to better reflect the broader set of workplace, workforce, marketplace, and community practices captured by the tool. The 2025 assessment also reflects updated questions and a revised scoring rubric; accordingly, results should be interpreted as a standalone snapshot of participating firms' self-reported practices at the time of completion.

Scores are derived from participating firms' responses to structured questions across four domains, including Workplace, Workforce, Marketplace, and Supplier/Community. Each domain score reflects the proportion of measured practices reported as present, and the Overall Score represents a composite of these domains. The maturity categories provide a standardized way to group firms based on their overall level of reported integration.

100% – 85%

OPTIMIZING: Outstanding Work! Your Firm is Best in Class!

An optimized inclusion and belonging program is a comprehensive and strategic initiative that is deeply integrated into the firms' culture, values, and business strategy. It is an ongoing journey that requires continuous effort, adaptability, and genuine commitment from all levels of the firm. Keep up the great work!

84% – 70%

MANAGING: Good Job! You're Doing Well.

A well-managed inclusion and belonging program is effective in implementing and maintaining the firm's inclusion and belonging initiatives but may be lacking in some areas. By incorporating a strategic approach and a few additional best practices, you should be able to become a best-in-class firm in no time. Revisit the survey to check your progress and keep up the good work.

69% – 55%

EMERGING: Keep Broadening and Developing Your Plan.

An emerging program includes a strong commitment to creating a welcoming, collaborative, and inclusive firm where people feel they belong, but has a less developed and comprehensive strategy. Keep employing some of the best practices you have incorporated and develop a game plan for broadening your approach. Revisit the survey to check your progress and try to incorporate best practice tips found in the assessment report.

Below 54%

ASPIRING: Congratulations! You've Taken the First Steps.

An aspiring program indicates a growing awareness and recognition of the importance of inclusion and belonging, but the efforts are still relatively limited and may not be fully integrated into the firm's culture and practices. Recognizing there are areas of improvement you need to address is the first step in maturing your program. Check out the best practice tips in the assessment report for maturing your inclusion and belonging program.