BLUEGRANITE
DATA • INSIGHTS • ANALYTICS

# OUR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STORY

## Background

BlueGranite's diversity and inclusion story began amidst the demonstrations over the death of George Floyd in May 2020. After a staff meeting, a team member shared their experiences of discrimination that echoed the stories of other black and brown people throughout the country. As a result, we formed the Diversity and Inclusion (D & I) group, consisting of company leaders and employee volunteers, to explicitly support D & I efforts at BlueGranite.

Our group quickly realized that the topic is large, complex, and would require some hard conversations. We also realized that although racism is critically important, and was in the foreground because of the demonstrations, the overarching problem of bias encompasses all the other discriminatory dimensions that surround each person – gender, sexual orientation, creed, ability and so on. As we look around our industry, it's plain to see that equal representation faces real challenges.

## First Steps

We decided on two actions initially to make sure our response would be as effective as possible. First, we thought it was important not to reinvent the wheel, since so much work has already been done in this area, so we needed to make connections with other change-minded organizations.

Second, we needed to take time to be deliberate about how we responded to the growing unrest and to formulating a unifying company commitment to diversity that we would institute and embrace to guide our efforts and facilitate open and honest communication within the organization, which is what this effort is really about – listening and understanding others' stories.

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# OUR COMMITMENT

To begin formulating our commitment, we wanted to define why diversity and inclusion are relevant and significant to our mission and core values. These actions applied to our internal team, as well as the clients we serve.

**CORE VALUES**
- Client First
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Innovation
- Have Fun

Taking a few of our **current core values** as examples, "Teamwork" and "Clients First," we broke down our rationalizations as follows:

Teamwork: We wouldn't be who we are as a company without teamwork. It's what makes us unique.

Diversity and inclusion are relevant and significant to Teamwork to:
- Best support and value the expertise and experiences of all colleagues
- Emphasize that anyone with the skills to work at BlueGranite can work at BlueGranite

Clients First: We're all about creating a great experience for our clients and delivering value at a rapid pace. We use our knowledge and expertise to determine where we can make the most impact on our clients' and partners' organizations.

Diversity and inclusion are relevant and significant to Clients First to:
- Best serve an increasingly diverse current client base
- Broaden and enrich our potential client base

# INTERNAL RELATIONS

## OUR D & I STORY CONT.

During our Staff Retreat in November 2020, we introduced the following Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion to the whole company, to communicate the aspiration BlueGranite has to be a champion in our industry, actively working towards and supporting change:

**We embrace diversity and inclusion because:**

- It helps us create positive and authentic relationships within our team and with our clients and partners.
- It supports our High Performing Culture by fostering innovation and improving leadership.
- It enables us to incorporate the skills, talents, and experience of all our colleagues, with all their rich and varied backgrounds.

**We support diversity and inclusion by:**

- Proactively building relationships across boundaries of culture / race / color / national or ethnic origin / gender / creed / sexual orientation / age / ability.
- Actively listening to one another and striving for mutual understanding and empathy.
- Learning from and collaborating with other organizations already working on improving diversity in tech.

**We will increase diversity and inclusion through:**

- Conversation and reflection to see, understand, and change implicit habits or biases we may have.
- Committing to build a diverse team and inclusive culture, including examining how we find, recruit and retain, and welcome team members.
- Collaborating with partners to promote diversity and inclusion strategic initiatives across the technology industry.

## Inclusiveness

We've launched Affinity Groups based on knowledge and interest within our Microsoft Teams work environment, to give colleagues new ways to connect with each other about relatable topics and help create an inclusive company culture. Our Wellness Team supports D & I efforts by hosting after-hours events such as trivia, company-wide activities such as fitness challenges, hosting remote lunch hours on Fridays, and connecting individually with new team members 2 and 4 weeks into their tenure. Because we are a remote workforce, and our team works with a variety of clients, it's important to create innovative ways our team members can connect with one another and form interpersonal relationships.

## Open Communication

In December 2020, we sent out an anonymous internal D & I survey to gauge a baseline for inclusion at the company and to provide an anonymous communication channel to discuss D & I to leadership.

So far this year, we have used the results from that survey to create a concrete action plan around D & I training. Along with planned formal training, we now also share D & I "Did You Knows" at staff meetings, to provide microlearning opportunities for our employees on topics such as Unconscious Bias.

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# EXTERNAL RELATIONS

OUR D & I STORY CONT.

## DIVERSE CLIENTS

BlueGranite is working on a **client project** to support pairing people with accessible careers using Microsoft AI-enabled services. For people with disabilities, finding jobs with understanding, accommodating employers can be a challenge. To help facilitate these opportunities, **Our Ability** provides a website that connects employers with people with disabilities. The process is simple: candidates can search for positions and employers can search for candidates, but the system itself does not attempt to make these connections on its own.

To achieve this type of service, a human (for example, somebody working in vocational rehab) would have to review the candidates and positions on the site to match them up manually. In an effort to expand and automate these services, **Our Ability partnered with the Microsoft AI for Accessibility Program and BlueGranite** to develop an AI-driven solution with an emphasis on accessibility.

## NEW PARTNERSHIPS

We connected with **AvePoint**, the largest independent software vendor of SaaS solutions to migrate, manage and protect data in Microsoft 365, through Microsoft Inspire in September 2020, allowing us to learn from their journey of instituting a D & I culture within their organization. This knowledge helped us accelerate our own D & I implementation.

We also began a new diversity partnership with **BDPA**, a non-profit organization of professionals working in or having an interest in the Computer Science and Information Technology fields that provides resources to support the professional growth and technical development of minority individuals in the information technology industry. We have introduced D & I initiatives for each quarter - one of those is providing workshops on data & analytics topics and setting up a mentorship program through BDPA. BlueGranite will kick the partnership off towards the end of February 2021 with three workshops. The goal of these workshops is to introduce the data analytics career to the attendees holistically. The workshops will be followed by more in-depth training that will focus on specific skillsets needed in data analytics. The partnership will also include mentoring when it is feasible.

At a level to promote direct organizational impact for BlueGranite, we have begun utilizing additional networking platforms to facilitate the D & I initiative of broadening our own team with a diverse culture. The **BDPA Career Center** is a new and improved tool for their members to engage with potential employers at the pace they want to engage. We aim to leverage this tool as an employer to bring awareness to our available positions, which may present better opportunities for quality candidates.

# OUTCOMES

"Think big, start small" is a defining model at BlueGranite, and that model extends to our D & I efforts as well. Although we have accomplished much in a short period of time, this will be an ongoing and collaborative initiative. As we continue to discover, learn, and implement new programs and partnerships, we will keep our lines of communication open for any and all feedback. We will keep working to expand our current diversity and inclusion efforts until they are standard practice throughout the organization, internally and externally. We are committed to offering a welcoming, safe, diverse, and inclusive environment to our current and future team member, clients, and partners.