



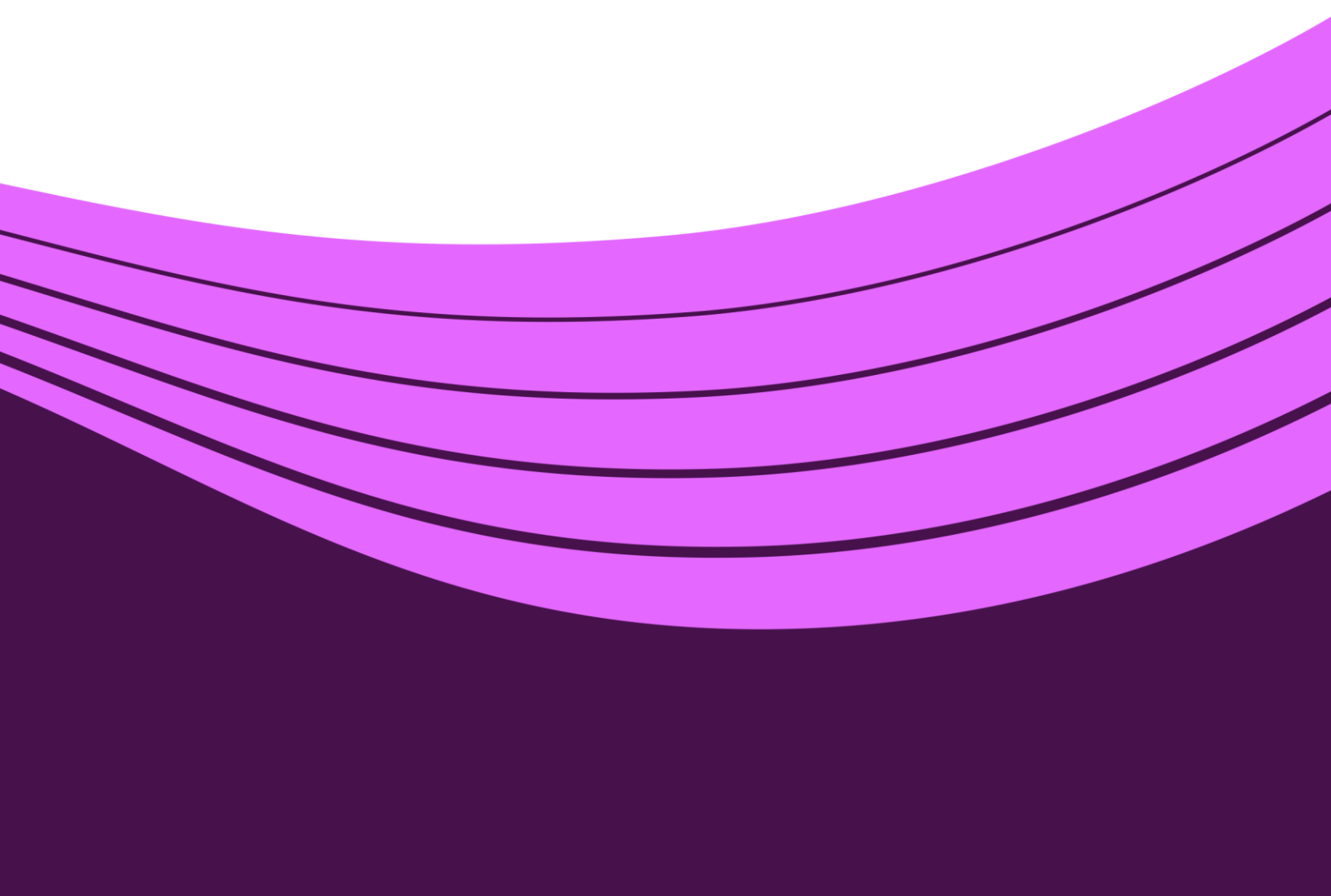
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Talent Solutions for Better Workplaces

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Science of Influence

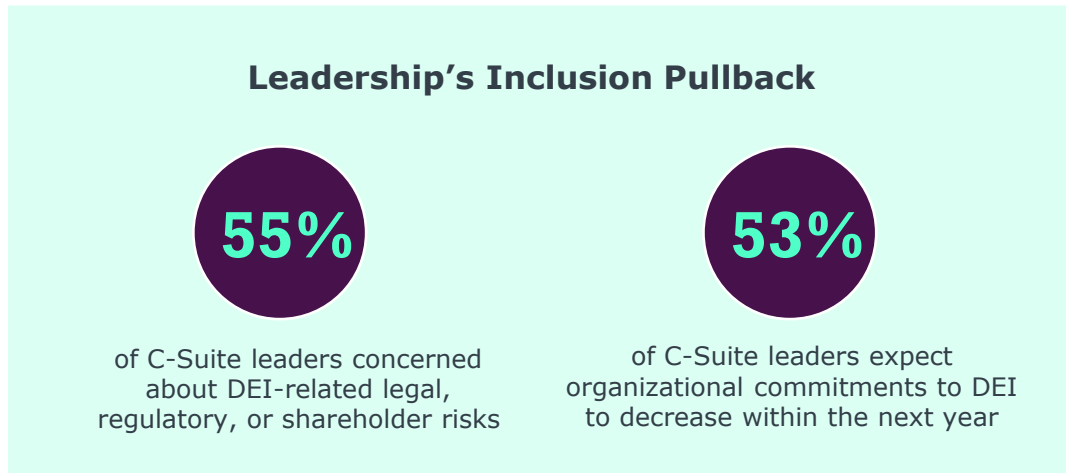
A Blueprint for Turning Your Vision into Executive Commitment



# Introduction: Securing Leadership Support Today

**Not long ago, nearly every CEO was pledging their commitment to inclusion. Today, many of those voices have grown quieter or disappeared entirely.**

The data confirms this decline. In a [recent survey](#), the majority of C-Suite leaders voiced concerns about legal and shareholder risks tied to DEI, and more than half said they expect commitments to decrease in the coming year.



For inclusion leaders, this decline has real consequences. Executive support is critical to the survival and success of inclusion initiatives: Research shows that projects with active executive involvement are [35–40 percent](#) more likely to succeed.

Yet Seramount research shows Chief Diversity Offices (CDOs) spend, on average, **only 20 percent of their time engaging the C-Suite**, with the rest consumed by day-to-day execution. This gap in executive engagement means that inclusion leaders struggle to counteract declining support, leaving critical initiatives at risk.

## Why Support Is Slipping

Several factors are driving the decline in executive backing:



### DEI Misconceptions

Many leaders view inclusion as “side-of-the desk” work; in fact, it rarely ranks among the top five business priorities for senior leaders.



### Leadership Turnover

More than half of C-Suite leaders plan to leave within two years, forcing inclusion leaders to rebuild relationships repeatedly.



### Superficial Support

Following 2020’s surge in CDO hires, few were given the data, authority, or resources needed to succeed.



### External Headwinds

Anti-DEI shareholder proposals have increased by 23 percent since 2020. Additionally, 128 anti-DEI bills have been introduced, 23 of which were enacted.

# Rethinking Executive Buy-In

## Three Common Approaches to Executive Buy-In

Most inclusion leaders rely on one of three strategies:

### The Morally Motivated



"My C-Suite knows DEI is the **right thing to do** and we are responsible for creating the best workplace for our employees and our clients."

### The Business Believer



"My C-Suite knows that DEI is a core value of our organization and **good for business generally.**"

### Balance Sheet Strategist



"My C-Suite knows that DEI helps **create shareholder value** and contributes to making the organization more money."

## Most Leaders Rely on Less Effective Approaches

✗ **20%**

use the "Morally Motivated" approach

✗ **65%**

use the "Business Believer" approach

✓ **15%**

use the "Balance Sheet Strategist" approach

It's no wonder shareholder value attributed to DEI has fallen to a 10-year low, and only **1 in 5** CDOs strongly agrees they can influence their C-Suite to support inclusion.

In this environment, inclusion leaders need shift to what works: Frame DEI as a driver of shareholder value.

# Rethinking Executive Buy-In (cont.)

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## A New Blueprint for Executive Buy-In

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Seramount research identifies a different path: applying influence science to position inclusion as a driver of organizational resilience and growth.

### The Science of Influence Framework

The *Science of Influence* framework outlines four steps to turn executive interest into sustained executive commitment:

1. Identify a Current Business Priority
2. Build Your Singular and Precise Ask
3. Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence
4. Show the Impact on the Business Sheet

This blueprint is designed to help inclusion leaders make a strong, strategic case for sustaining their work in 2025 and beyond, offering practical guidance to present the most relevant, business-focused case for inclusion to C-Suite leaders in today's challenging environment.

## Methodology

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To inform this blueprint, our Research team drew on multiple sources:

- **In-depth interviews** with Chief Diversity Officers representing ~20 percent of CDOC membership, along with a range of C-Suite executives. These conversations surfaced core challenges, tested potential solutions, and helped shape the framework.
- **Quantitative insights** from a real-time pulse survey of 150 inclusion leaders, providing perspective on current practices and barriers.
- **Employee Voice Sessions** with 400 participants, offering on-the-ground insights into organizational culture and inclusion efforts.

The result is a set of specific, scalable, and actionable recommendations designed to help leaders advance DEI, regardless of the stakeholder, business objective, or industry.

# Step 1: Identify a Current Business Priority

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## Description and Components

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Inclusion leaders should tie their ask to a clearly stated, high-priority goal recently emphasized by the C-Suite—drawing from current sources such as earnings calls or board meetings—to ensure alignment with leadership’s immediate focus and investment.

Consider two key elements when building your ask:

- ▶ **Current Relevance**  
Articulated by a C-Suite leader or executive in the most recent quarterly earnings call, business review, board meeting, or investor update
- ▶ **Organizational Priority**  
Directly aligned with the financial health and/or operating principle



## Applying the Framework

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**Scenario:** To achieve FY26 growth target, the company plans to expand operations in South America. Success depends on attracting and retaining local talent; if key roles can’t be filled quickly, expansion will stall, and projected revenue growth will be at risk.

**Ask:** Invest in recruitment and talent development strategies for expansion in South America.

- ▶ **Current Relevance:** Aligns with the FY26 vision and immediate growth priorities
- ▶ **Organizational Priority:** Supports business scaling and mitigates risk to projected growth



## Reflection Questions

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- At the last company-wide meeting, what were the first three things said by your CEO?
- What adjustments can you make to your current priorities to better align them with your organization’s current priorities?
- What is the risk of not delivering the output of your ask?

## Step 2: Build Your Singular and Precise Ask

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### Description and Components

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Define and articulate the request in a concise statement that clearly defines the output and the result of the ask.

► **Output**

The “thing” you are requesting (i.e., time or resource)

► **Result**

The specific and measurable projected impact of the output



### Applying the Framework

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**Scenario:** Retention and engagement among early-career employees at manufacturing sites had declined, leading to increased replacement costs and productivity concerns.

**Ask:** Launch a three-month ERG visibility campaign across all manufacturing sites.

- **Output:** A series of ERG-led events and communications at every site over three months
- **Result:** Increased engagement and retention of early career employees, reducing replacement costs and supporting a more inclusive culture



### Reflection Questions

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- What is the specific and measurable result you expect from your ask? What could you adjust to make your result even more specific and measurable?
- Who are the key stakeholders impacted by this ask, and how will you involve them or secure their buy-in?
- Connecting to Step 1: How does your ask align with your organization’s current business priorities?

## Step 3: Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence

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### Description and Components

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Inclusion leaders must show their specific ask is grounded in credible data. This data should come in two forms: quantitative internal data and benchmarking data. A successful evidence-based argument contains both.



#### Quantitative Internal Data

Document the current state with employee engagement surveys, workforce demographics, etc.



#### Benchmarking

Contextualize the gap and show clear urgency by comparing against historical data or peer/industry data.

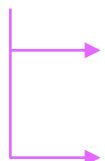


### Applying the Framework

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**Scenario:** Staffing opportunities and product availability in skilled trades industries are limited by current recruitment team composition, which does not reflect the diversity of regional talent pools.

**Ask:** Increase diversity within recruitment teams to better reflect regional markets and attract a wider range of talent, helping to expand staffing opportunities and product availability in skilled trades industries.



**Internal Data:** Employee engagement data, workforce development pipelines, demographic data of current office locations

**Benchmarking Data:** Census data and Bureau of Labor Statistics talent availability across geographic regions



### Reflection Questions

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- Does the data you included provide context to establish urgency by demonstrating the problem is worth dedicating immediate time and resources to it?
- Does this evidence matter to the key stakeholders identified in Step 2? If not, what evidence would matter to them?
- Can you segment the data to show how it impacts high-potential talent, key business areas, or revenue-generating lines of business?

## Step 4: Show the Impact on the Balance Sheet

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### Description and Components

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Inclusion leaders must state how their ask directly impacts the balance sheet—core financial statements that provide a snapshot of a company’s financial position at a specific point in time—of their organization.



#### Bottom-Line Business Metric

An indicator that is used to assess an organization’s financial health, efficiency, and success

#### Bottom-Line Metrics

- Revenue (growth/loss)
- Client Renewal Rate
- Risk Mitigation
- Operating Margin



### Applying the Framework

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**Scenario:** Recent sales data shows underperformance among certain sales teams, particularly those with less access to mentorship and inclusive support. This is limiting growth in new booked business and overall revenue.

**Ask:** Launch a pilot mentorship program centric to the ERG members to promote inclusive best practices and equip allies with guidance on effective allyship. The program will support and mentor underperforming salespeople who are also ERG members, fostering skill development for both allies and mentees and increasing their ability to generate new booked business and drive revenue.



**Bottom-Line Business Metric:** Revenue, New Booked Business



### Reflection Questions

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- What measurable data point will show that this initiative positively affects the organization’s bottom line?
- What is the cost to the bottom line if your ask is not supported?
- If this initiative succeeds, how would you scale it or continue ensuring it positively contributes to the bottom-line metrics you’ve identified?



# The Blueprint in Practice: A Real-World Case Study

## How Community Engagement Drove Market Success in Country X

### Context

Recently, Organization A, an anonymized B2B organization, announced the deployment of a new product in Country X, a move critical for future growth. To support this, the CDO launched a targeted engagement strategy with Indigenous communities, focusing on building relationships and a diverse, inclusive workforce. This approach not only demonstrated social responsibility but also positioned Organization A to win more contracts and generate more revenue in this strategic market.

### Application of Bottom-Line Framework

#### 1 Identify a Current Business Priority

- Current relevance: Directly aligns with the current strategic priority in Country X's markets and builds goodwill and infrastructure for the long-term investment of future business in the country
- Organizational priority: Corporate social responsibility image of Organization A is boosted by effective engagement

#### 2 Build Your Singular and Precise Ask

The Ask: Invest in an Indigenous community engagement strategy in response to the development of a new product being launched in a new market

- Output: Engagement strategy for Country X's Indigenous community
- Result: Positions Organization A to win more contracts with local customers, cultivates a positive relationship with Country X's government, and ultimately generates more revenue

#### 3 Curate Relevant and Convincing Evidence

- Internal data: Supplier diversity and procurement data, current employee demographics, risk analysis on reputational damage
- Benchmarking data: Industry and peer performance in Country X with and without Indigenous community engagement strategies, NGO benchmarks for business in Country X

#### 4 Show the Impact on the Balance Sheet

- Bottom-line metric: If engagement is successful, the product launch will face fewer obstacles and risks, leading to faster and more reliable revenue generation

**Key Outcome:** By prioritizing Indigenous community engagement, Organization A secured new contracts and strengthened its market position in Country X.

# Conclusion

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The landscape has shifted. It is no longer enough for inclusion leaders to frame DEI as the right thing to do or to link it broadly to business performance. Executives increasingly expect evidence that inclusion contributes directly to the bottom line. To maintain and grow C-Suite commitment, inclusion leaders must show how their initiatives create shareholder value.

Organizations that align inclusion initiatives with business priorities and demonstrate bottom-line impact are positioned to outperform peers, create lasting value, and build more resilient workforces. The *Science of Influence* framework provides a path forward, equipping leaders to translate inclusion into measurable outcomes that sustain C-Suite commitment.

At **Seramount**, we know this shift isn't easy. Reframing inclusion to demonstrate bottom-line impact requires new approaches and trusted guidance. Drawing on four decades of experience and partnerships with 600+ organizations, we provide practical tools to help leaders connect inclusion strategies to business results and sustain executive commitment.

## Next Steps

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### Apply the Framework

Use the *Science of Influence* framework to craft a compelling, evidence-based request for C-Suite and executive leadership support.



### Join the Cohort

Join our next Science of Influence Impact Cohort to get the insights, tools, and support to lead inclusion in the new era.



### Shape What's Next

Incorporate these strategies into your 2026 planning to future-proof inclusion by linking it to bottom-line metrics.

► Ready to take action? [Contact us](#) to get started.

## Explore More Resources

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### Watch the Webinar

[Science of Influence:  
Turning CDO Vision into  
C-Suite Commitment](#)



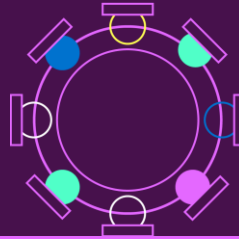
### Get the Tool

[Science of Influence  
Blueprint Builder](#)



### Read the Blog

[5 Business-Critical  
Risks of Scaling Back  
Inclusion](#)



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