

Professional Development's Role in Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

February 2022



As we shift away from virtual meetings with neat, non-hierarchical squares, and return to in-person meetings at a table with c-suite designated spaces, we take a hard look at who has a seat at that table. What do they look like? Are they representative of their organization? What steps did they take to reach that chief officer position? How can we, the transportation industry as a whole, ensure that we are creating equitable opportunities to ensure those seated at the table reflect the communities our transit agencies serve and the people they employ?

Historically, the transit industry has proved inequitable towards communities of color. Beyond the public transit segregation that led to [bus boycotts](#) in 1955, [research](#) shows that transportation, often through infrastructure development, has inequitably impacted the health, vibrancy, and economic growth of these communities. Meanwhile, racial and gender hiring biases prevented, and [continue](#) to prevent, the advancement of Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) representation from within the industry.

By creating opportunities for professional development—a form of continuing education—and making them an industry standard in both the public and private sector, organizations can ensure that they are supporting the growth and development of all of their employees. Through accessible training opportunities, webinars, seminars, scholarships or other forms of financial help to fund educational opportunities, employees are encouraged to advance their careers.

Our industry is constantly transforming with new technological developments like the [Internet of Vehicles](#) and fully [electric](#) and autonomous vehicles. Professional development opportunities are crucial for employees to stay informed as they enable individuals to learn new skills and sharpen their expertise. In

a sometimes-uncertain job market, employees can set themselves apart from the crowd and propel themselves toward promotions into leadership opportunities and more.

Furthermore, professional development presents networking opportunities, which helps individuals increase their base of contacts, and perhaps even more importantly, such [connections](#) help employees feel more understood and supported.

For all of these reasons and more, MTI is proud to host a variety of opportunities for professional growth, connection, and empowerment, including the [Mineta Leadership Academy](#). The Academy is devoted to developing exceptional public sector leaders to serve the transportation industry. The Academy provides individuals with opportunities to cultivate leadership skills, enhance their leadership competencies, and collaborate with peers and [mentors](#).

This Academy follows the example of our founder and namesake U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary, Norman Y. Mineta by cultivating leadership excellence in a diverse group of professionals who are committed to building and maintaining a world-class transportation system in an environment that is constantly changing. The Leadership Academy is committed to the notion that effective leadership is a skill that can be learned, developed, and sharpened over time. Expert speakers at the academy provide participants with core competency training, and state-of-the-art leadership assessment tools assist in determining leadership style, communication patterns, conflict resolution style and other capabilities. Additionally, such opportunities like those at the heart of the [Leadership Academy](#) boost employee morale while creating clear pathways for career advancement.

MTI recently held the [Riding with Transportation Equity](#) panel to ensure our community continues crucial conversations around racial equity in the industry. This panel urged our industry to make space for all perspectives and voices, ensuring the continual improvement of transportation for everyone.

Whether or not the days of endless virtual meetings are gone, professional development opportunities remain an important tool in growing connections between people from all backgrounds. By championing equity and diversity in transportation and carving out space for historically marginalized people in professional spheres, we can ensure our industry is a reflection of the people we serve and of our communities as a whole so that we can continue to make transportation a safe, efficient, equitable experience for all.

MTI Executive Director, Karen Philbrick, PhD