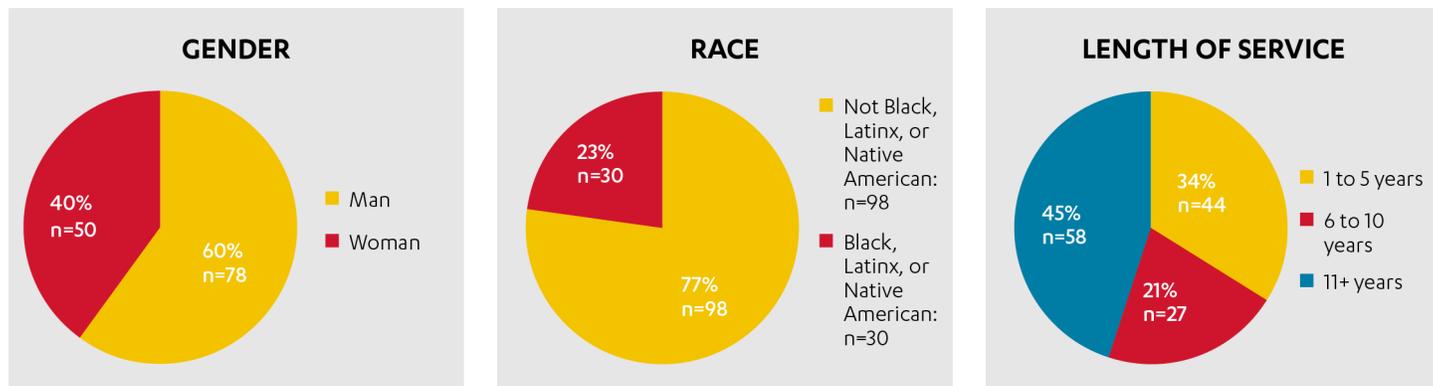# University Leadership Perceptions Survey

## BACKGROUND AND METHOD

The university leadership perceptions survey was developed to understand the challenges and supports needed to cultivate a culture of inclusive leadership at Rutgers. The emphasis was on perceptions, recognizing that positionality relative to the central administration shapes reality. The survey respondents were members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) – Senior/Executive Vice Presidents, direct reports to a member of the SLT, Chancellors (Camden, Newark, New Brunswick, RBHS), and direct reports to a Chancellor, including Deans. The aim of triangulation, asking this diverse set of leaders the same set of questions recognizing their different vantage points, was to enable the central administration to learn better what perspectives they share, how they are perceived by others, and what needs to be done to maximize our opportunity to attain excellence. Since the survey was conducted by a team internal to Rutgers, anonymity was essential to encouraging authentic sharing. Participants received an invitation email that served as a key enabling them to take the survey only once and allowing Qualtrics to send reminders, but once the participant began the survey their identifying information linked to their email address was no longer attached.

The response rate of 84%, 133 participants in a universe of 159, provides confidence that the findings offer a holistic sense of where the central administration stands on values, principles, and sensibilities about inclusion to inform the work needed to move the institution forward. We asked 3 voluntary demographic questions: gender identity (woman, man, genderqueer, another gender identity), race/ethnicity (Black, Latinx, or Native American), and years employed at Rutgers (1 to 5, 6 to 10, 11+ years) to be able to compositionally describe the survey population. The vast majority of respondents chose to provide this information, 128 of 133.

**GENDER**

40% n=50 Woman
60% n=78 Man

- Man
- Woman

**RACE**

23% n=30
77% n=98

- Not Black, Latinx, or Native American: n=98
- Black, Latinx, or Native American: n=30

**LENGTH OF SERVICE**

45% n=58
34% n=44
21% n=27

- 1 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- 11+ years

The survey contained 17 Likert scale questions, which measured positive or negative responses to a statement, such as: to a great extent, to some extent, to no extent or strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. We purposefully did not offer a neutral option. A few participants took issue with this approach, noting that these are nuanced issues and a neutral option such as somewhat agree/disagree, would have been better for them. One participant wrote, "Forcing an answer into agree/disagree (strongly is a superfluous adverb for anyone with firm opinions) does not allow for a nuanced response, and potentially lessens the value of/skews the data obtained." However, opinions, especially about leadership, are rarely neutral. To best inform the path forward, we made the survey design decision to force participants to express an opinion. This was a perception survey after all and unlike interviews or focus groups where there can be follow up to get at nuances in meaning, in a survey neutral answers cannot be unpacked. Another participant's reflection on completing the survey affirmed this choice, "The significance of our gaps was impressed on me by reflecting on how to answer, especially when there was no intermediate choice, just 'agree' or 'disagree'".

The range of questions asked sought to prompt reflection on three themes: 1) the extent to which diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) inform organizational life at Rutgers, 2) the central administration's organizational approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and 3) evidence of the integration of DEI organizational best practices in the way Rutgers operates at present.

The survey contained 5 open-ended questions that offered respondents a chance to reflect, beyond the limitations of a multiple-choice scale, on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Rutgers, sharing any information they wanted to inform the path forward. The question prompts were as follows:

1. Did your meaning, understanding, and/or implications of DEI change over the course of the survey? Why or why not?
2. What supports are needed for Rutgers to fully integrate DEI foundationally into how the university operates?
3. What may get in the way of Rutgers fully integrating DEI foundationally into how the university operates?
4. From your perspective, what specific things need to change to make Rutgers a leader in institutional equity?
5. Please share any additional information you would like us to know that is not captured above.

Many respondents spent time and gave a good deal of thought to the open-ended responses. The results presented below reflect the coding of responses by the DICE analytical team. After an initial reading of the responses, the team individually created themes, codes, and notes that they reconciled to create the themes and sub-themes shown below. Three overarching threads emerged: 1) challenges to/with senior leadership, 2) university culture, and 3) infrastructure. The interconnectedness of these threads suggests that there are multiple points of action, not a singular one. In sum, the university leadership perception survey tapped into different dimensions of the present thinking regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion among university leadership, identifying the challenges and possibilities that lie ahead.

## DEI IN ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE AT RUTGERS

The first set of questions aimed to gauge participants' sensibilities on the extent to which diversity, equity, and inclusion shaped organizational life at Rutgers. Across a range of measures, the modal response was "to some extent," by a large margin.

**DEI IN ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE AT RUTGERS**
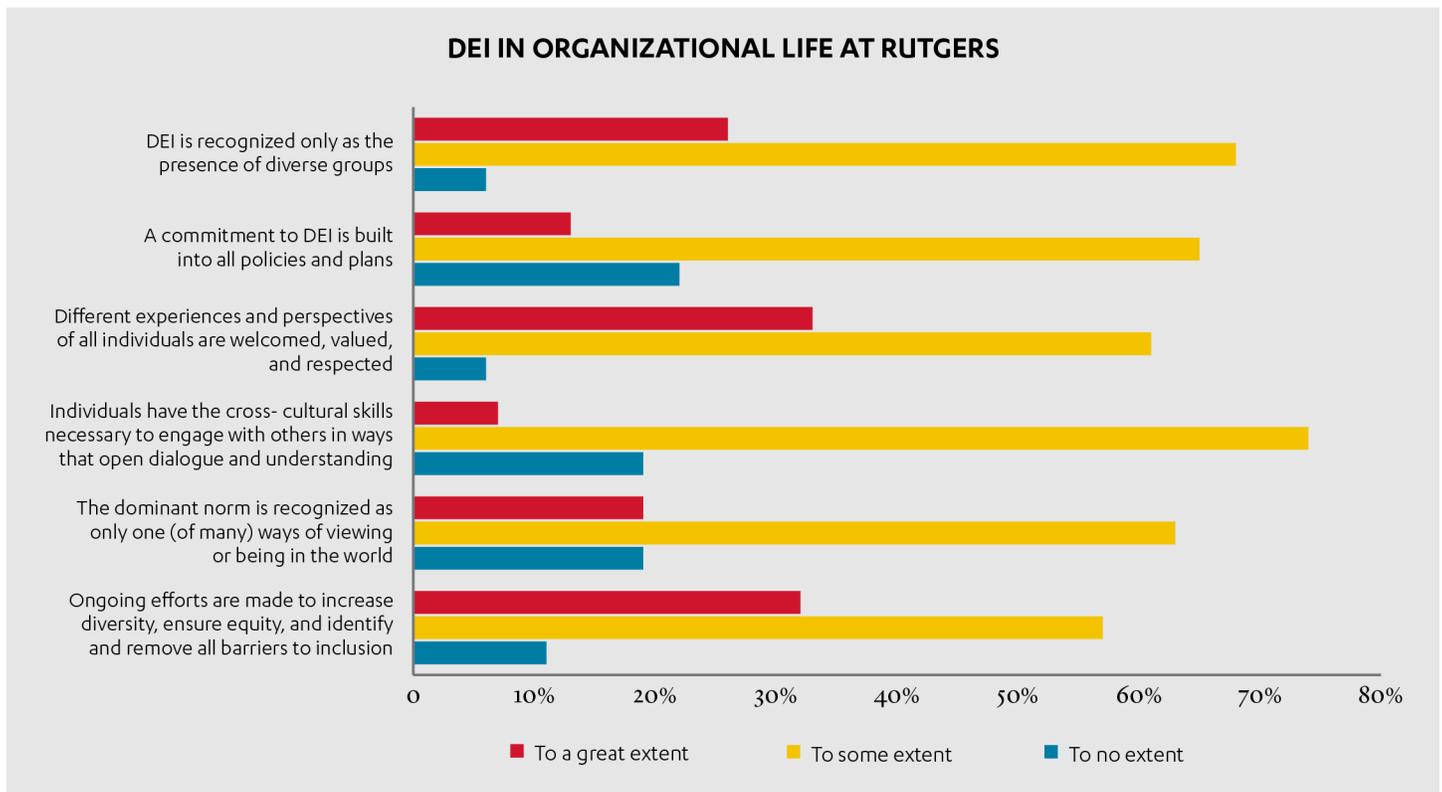


# INCLUSION IS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS TO JOIN AND PARTICIPATE FULLY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

Similarly, when asked from their perspective, how committed to inclusion was Rutgers as an institution, 26% said "very committed" and 53% said "somewhat committed." However, the perception of commitment increases dramatically when respondents are asked about the commitment to inclusion among people with whom they work most directly. Fifty percent said "very committed" and 38% said "somewhat committed." This disconnect is explained in part by reflections in the open-ended responses as individuals reflect on their immediate work environment/peers and clarify what would signal commitment to inclusion as well as present gaps at the senior leadership level.

"To its credit, Rutgers always had individuals and individual programs or initiatives that have had a lasting positive impact...But there never has been the central leadership necessary to create a comprehensive vision based on a common set of ideas and aspirations that leads to the design of a comprehensive DEI framework for the institution; a design that is capable of identifying what we have already, identifying what we need but don't have, building out what we don't have, and integrating with what we do have in a coherent, step-by-step fashion."

"The absence of clarity as to exactly what we mean by DEI, how it should be enacted, what evidence we should look for that progress is being made, establish a meaningful measurement system, provide meaningful accountability and recognition for appropriate outcomes."

"I find that those I work with value the principles of DEI, what they lack is the ability to operationalize it."

"We have had a very strong commitment to diversity and inclusion and equity in our unit for a number of years. We talk the talk and walk the talk. We could always be better, of course, but we have made a conscious effort to educate ourselves..."

"There is a negative perception, and in some cases that is based on history of past events, of the university's level of commitment and there have been too many 'false starts' to addressing these matters. Efforts and campaigns get started but then stall and do not continue to fruition. This can cause issues with the community, even if they want to engage in conversation, the continued perception and results are that it will be an exercise in futility and will not be followed through and deliver real value."

## ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH TO DEI IN THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

The next set of questions asked respondents to reflect on the central administration's organizational approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Among the respondents who were not members of the central administration (excluding the SLT and their direct reports), the vast majority of respondents were required to engage with central administration (40% "to a great extent" and 40% "somewhat"), with about 20% indicating very little or no engagement.

First, respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences with university strategic planning. Specifically, the extent to which diversity, equity, and inclusion goals were clearly specified (9% said "to a great extent"), metrics were used to gauge progress on university DEI goals (7% said "to a great extent"), and strategic investments were made to advance DEI goals (8% said "to a great extent"). In all, when reflecting on Rutgers' organizational approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion in strategic planning, the lack of perceived organizational commitment needs attention. The open-ended responses add nuance and give voice to the frustrations of leaders due to the lack of purposeful action.

"Our primary obstacle is allowing other priorities to push DEI activities lower on the priority list. Ironically, we can be a more effective institution by embracing more diverse and inclusive ideas and practices, but instead we put aside our DEI efforts whenever the next problem arises. We must all be in agreement that lack of inclusion is a major problem that keeps us from being the best we can be and make DEI our driving agenda."

"Rutgers does not conduct strategic planning in most things they do very well historically. Funding due to COVID-19 will be a barrier. Attitudes are very difficult to change at Rutgers since there is no integrated system or foundation for DEI and no strategic planning. I've been a member of numerous DEI initiatives at Rutgers and each one has stagnated due to lack of upper level support and no plan!"

"Better, more serious, and consistent inclusion of diverse perspectives in analysis, strategic planning, decision making and execution. Movement beyond perfunctory box-checking."

"A vision for a university that leads in institutional equity needs to be developed, followed by a commitment of resources to develop and implement strategic plans. Those who do not make institutional equity a priority lose their right to lead. And we have to stay after this year after year. If we do these things, Rutgers can be a leader in institutional equity."

The consensus that a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion has not characterized the university in the past, however is matched by the clarity of 86% of leaders who reported that diversity, equity, and inclusion is "very important" to Rutgers' mission and future success. Further, it is recognized as important for a broad range of institutional stakeholders, including current and prospective students, staff, and faculty as well as alumni and public perception. When asked whether they agreed that diversity and equity were institutional priorities, 88% "strongly agreed" or "agreed."

To move beyond abstract notions of commitment, we sought to capture the ways in which diversity as an institutional priority is signaled. The vast majority of respondents think diversity as a university priority should be signaled through adjudication of complaints, communications materials, fundraising objectives, engagement of diverse alumni, hiring practices, retention and promotion of a diverse faculty and staff, strategic investments, and student recruitment and financial aid.



**SIGNAL OF DIVERSITY AS A UNIVERSITY PRIORITY**
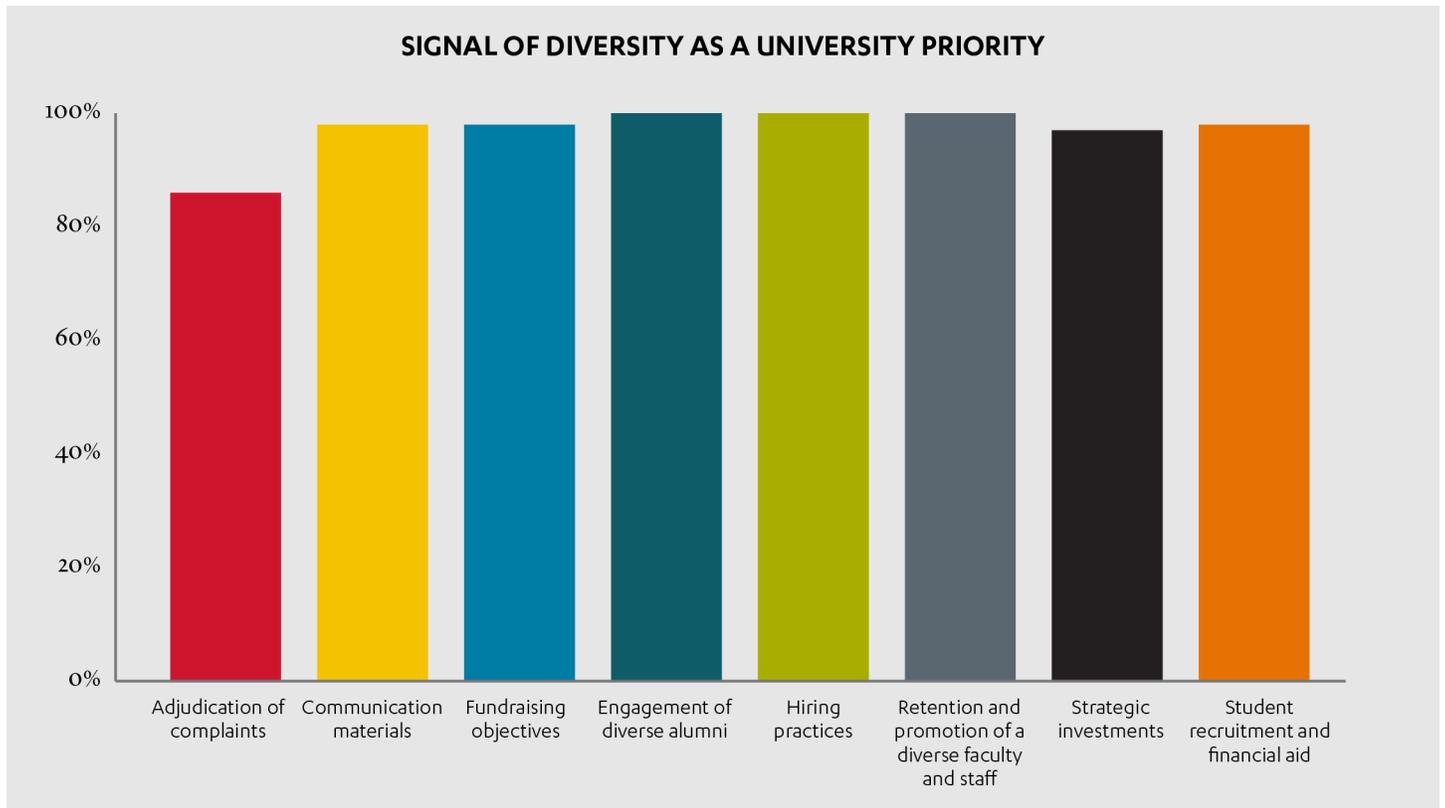
These are practical considerations that inform almost every aspect of university life. Nearly all respondents, 99%, view inadequate attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion as risky for the university, with 57% describing it as "very risky."
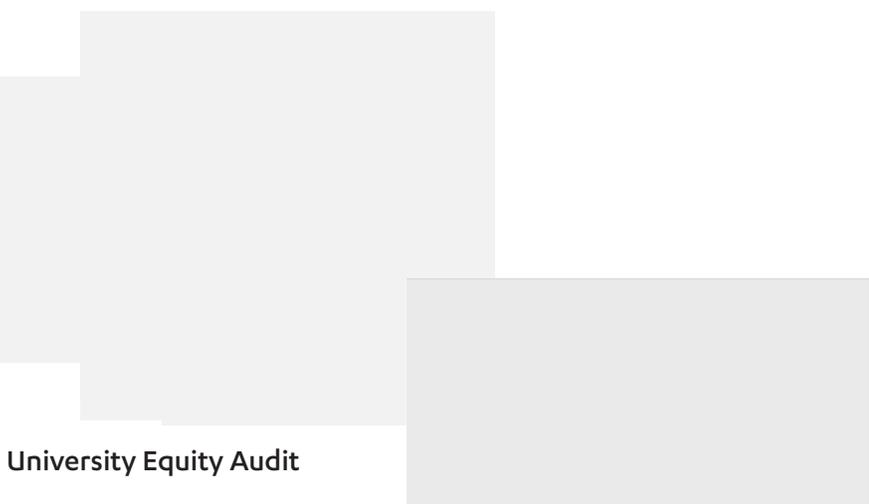
Yet, when asked to rate the central administration's capacity to lead institutional efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, less than half rated its capacity as high. Forty percent of respondents rated central administrative activities (policy, funding, and endorsement) as "seldom" or "never" supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Similarly, almost half of respondents felt that central resources to support DEI were not leveraged well across Chancellor-led units and current processes minimally support equity and the consideration of diverse voices in important decision-making by the central administration. Finally, the majority of respondents disagree that measures of accountability exist for leaders to uphold university DEI values.

How would you rate the central administration's capacity to lead institutional efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion?

| Very High | High | Moderate | Low | Very Low |
|-----------|------|----------|-----|----------|
| 12% | 29% | 42% | 11% | 5% |

Do you agree that measures of accountability exist for leaders to uphold university DEI values?

| Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 9% | 28% | 52% | 11% |

To what extent do you feel that central resources to support DEI are leveraged well across all Chancellor-led units?

| To a great extent | Somewhat | Very little | Not at all |
|-------------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| 7% | 44% | 44% | 5% |

To what extent do current processes support equity and consideration of diverse voices in important decision-making by the central administration?

| To a great extent | Somewhat | Very little | Not at all |
|-------------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| 7% | 48% | 41% | 5% |

How often do you perceive the activities of the central administration (policy, funding, and endorsement) as supporting DEI?

| Most of the time | Some of the time | Seldom | Never |
|------------------|------------------|--------|-------|
| 13% | 48% | 38% | 2% |

Given the concurrence on the risk of inadequate attention to DEI, the assessment of our present organizational approach is a cause for concern that was expressed in the open-ended responses.

"The SLT seems to be poorly informed of DEI issues."

"People assuming that DEI is a zero-sum game...the failure of leadership to make a clear and compelling case that diversity is the path to excellence...DEI fatigue where people get tired of having the same (sometimes painful) conversations with no evidence of progress."

"A lack of understanding of how structures create barriers. An inward focus at the top that fails to listen to dissenting voices."

"Rutgers is labyrinthine and filled with individual fiefdoms that resist change. Many people try to hold on to their area of power, placing that over institutional priorities, and given the complexity of the University, they are able to derail best intentions."

"Leaders need to communicate more frequently and more directly with all levels of faculty, students and staff. A clearly articulated and communicated vision for what we should strive to be with leaders setting the example."
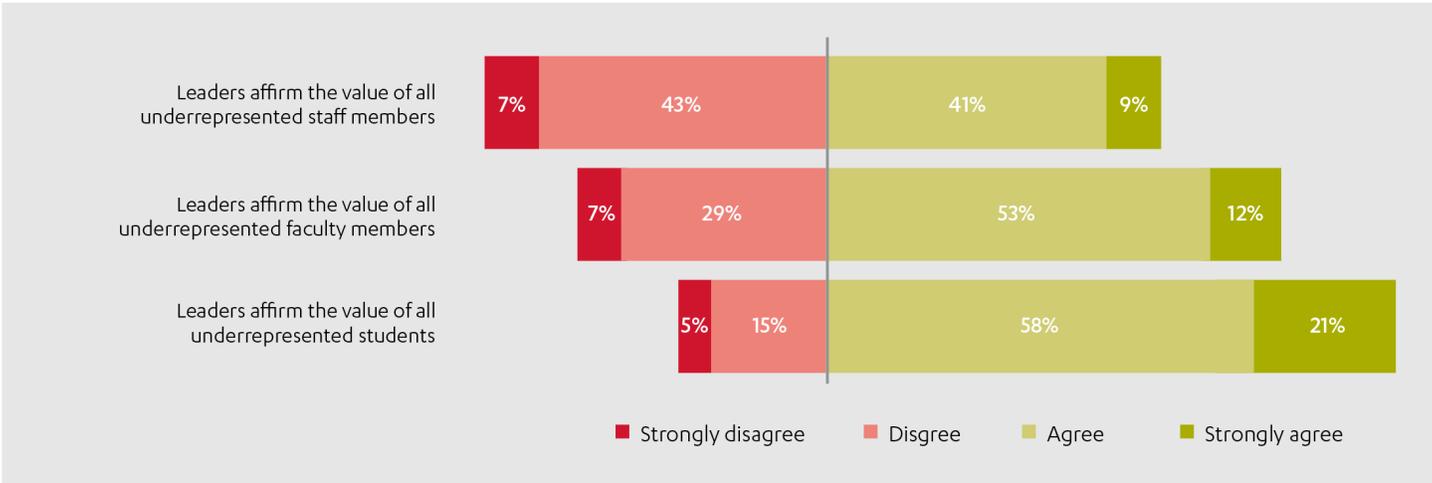
"We need to walk the talk. If we just pay lip service to DEI, we might as well do nothing at all. Add DEI items to every major discussion of institutional priorities. Hold leaders accountable for certain DEI metrics in performance evaluations..."

These responses do not mean that the current central administration leadership cannot support institutional transformation. However, it suggests that purposeful leadership development and foundational skill building will be a critical indicator of organizational change, enabling them to lead and support university-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Respondents spoke to this directly as well.

"Many of us have not necessarily focused on this in our careers. Not a judgment; just an opinion. Training and awareness are key so that we get it right. The best intentions may fail without a true understanding of how to be a better leader in this regard."

"Diversity, equity, and inclusion can be an intimidating topic both because of fears among those who currently lead the University and because so few leaders feel adequately prepared to drive this agenda at Rutgers. It will be important to provide guidance and guardrails for our leaders as Rutgers begins to make DEI a strategic priority throughout the University so that it becomes part of our core values and not just another flavor-of-the-day."

Leaders affirm the value of all underrepresented staff members: Strongly disagree 7%, Disagree 43%, Agree 41%, Strongly agree 9%

Leaders affirm the value of all underrepresented faculty members: Strongly disagree 7%, Disagree 29%, Agree 53%, Strongly agree 12%

Leaders affirm the value of all underrepresented students: Strongly disagree 5%, Disagree 15%, Agree 58%, Strongly agree 21%

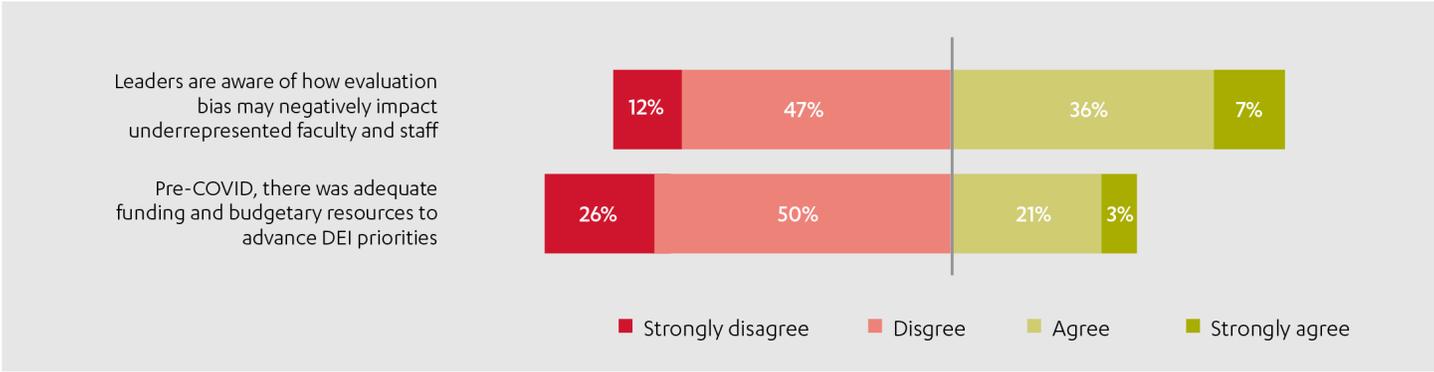Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

The final set of Likert scale questions focused on evidence of integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion best practices in how Rutgers operates at present.

Overall, the majority of respondents agree that leaders affirm the value of underrepresented staff, faculty, and students. However, the margin of agreement was much higher for faculty and students, by nearly 20%, suggesting a great deal of improvement is needed in the valuing of staff diversity.



Commitment to DEI is emphasized in job posting, job descriptions, outreach: Strongly disagree 4%, Disagree 26%, Agree 54%, Strongly agree 15%

Awareness of DEI is included in candidate criteria: Strongly disagree 7%, Disagree 40%, Agree 42%, Strongly agree 11%

The hiring process for staff includes an effective system for the recruitment of applicants from underrepresented populations: Strongly disagree 12%, Disagree 53%, Agree 27%, Strongly agree 8%

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

The next cluster of questions address how diversity is emphasized in the hiring process. Two-thirds of respondents (69%) agree that a commitment to diversity is emphasized in job postings, descriptions, outreach and just about half (53%) agree awareness of DEI is included in candidate criteria. Yet, there is substantial disagreement, 65%, that the hiring process includes an effective system for the recruitment of applicants from underrepresented populations. This theme was expanded on in the open-ended responses.

> "Recruitment of top candidates is restricted by unrealistic benchmarks established by staff that have little or no domain expertise in the subject matter. Narrowing and artificially restricting the recruitment pool impacts the long-term institutional capabilities as a whole."

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leaders are aware of how evaluation bias may negatively impact underrepresented faculty and staff | 12% | 47% | 36% | 7% |
| Pre-COVID, there was adequate funding and budgetary resources to advance DEI priorities | 26% | 50% | 21% | 3% |

Performance management is an important part of employee life critical to recognition, rewards, and opportunities for promotion. Yet the majority of respondents, 59%, felt leaders were unaware of evaluation bias, which occurs when a person allows their conscious or unconscious prejudice to affect their evaluation, especially how it may be negatively impacting underrepresented faculty and staff. One respondent said,

> "Leaders need to be held accountable for making improvements in the hiring and retention of minority, disadvantaged, and in some instances women faculty and staff. Nancy Cantor has proven it can be done without 'lowering standards.' Universities too frequently believe that any minority candidates that are hired must be the very best while being much more willing to hire mediocre white men."

Effectuating institutional change to support diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities will require additional financial investment. However, this question aimed to assess whether there was adequate funding and budgetary resources to advance DEI priorities prior to the fiscal constraints resulting from COVID. The vast majority of respondents, 76%, felt there was not, and many spoke directly to this as one of the things that needs to change to make Rutgers a leader in institutional equity.

> "Limited view on what DEI requires; funding; staff and admin stretched too thin."

> "A proper DEI initiative that provides funding from Central on a permanent basis, rather than the bridge money model that pushes the financial obligation wholly on what are frequently under-funded units."

> "Lack of financial resources and risk of financial insolvency/hardship, having no money can be very distracting from pursuing a DEI agenda."

> "There need to be more DEI-related offices and personnel, including within individual units. There also needs to be a university-wide commitment to access through community engagement and a willingness to redefine excellence and potential within the context of higher education."

We have clustered the remaining open-ended responses by topic to showcase the range of concerns leaders view as critical to organizational change to support diversity. A strong theme was the absence of infrastructure, resulting in a perception of siloed DEI work across the University system. To enable forward movement respondents expressed a desire for a cohesive strategy and plan for DEI as well as better incorporating education and development as part of the university's ecosystem. The quotes below provide insight into the way leaders perceive present organizational design and practices as requiring reimagining in order to make diversity, inclusion, and equity commitments a University priority.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

"We expend hours of time each week on navigating RU bureaucratic hurdles in many functions of our work. These organizational challenges eat up the day and leave little time or capacity for us to do DEI work well. Please prioritize simplifying processes and streamlining reporting obligations."

"I believe Rutgers has the potential to be a national leader in the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. However, that will require a deep examination of its culture and practices and a strong leader willing to make difficult decisions about how we prioritize DEI. Given the competing priorities of leading such a large and complex organization, and the new threats facing higher education more broadly, this work will likely grow more challenging, but also suffer from the necessity to redeploy limited resources elsewhere to support the university's operations. I hope as we build our plan for moving forward we are honest about these challenges and realistic about what we can achieve in the next 3-5 years and perhaps even further out."

## INEQUITY ACROSS CHANCELLOR-LED UNITS

"Whether intentional or not, Rutgers has 3 campuses that are represented and treated differently in accordance with their level of diversity. The missions and sizes of the campuses are different so equality is not the issue. However, resources are not allocated equitably. The web presence is not synthetic across campuses (e.g., the dynamism of the New Brunswick site is not echoed across all sites). Whether correlational or causal, the differences are read as reflecting a greater commitment to white students than to students of color."

## CHALLENGES TO FACULTY DIVERSITY

"The structure is such that there is a lack of accountability or reward/ acknowledgement for a dean who makes decisions that advance diversity and inclusion."

"The entrenched culture of the American Research University. The striving of all of us in this community to be more like those seen as the 'elites' leads to institutional isomorphism. That striving does not support diverse voices."

"Tenure and promotion standards are a major barrier to integrating DEI, as they have calcified around norms that are not sufficient to capture the breadth of scholarly contributions that matter."

## EMBRACING FAILURE

"RU is like all of higher education: we live in a culture of achievement and success; that's what we talk about, and how we are rewarded. No one talks about falling down (except later, as part of a school-of-hard-knocks narrative). Getting to DEI is not only about aspiration or always having been the biggest advocate or ally. It's about failure, personal and collective. And a willingness to learn and--as we all say now—'do the work'."

## DEFINING DEI

"DEI is still considered to be principally 'diversity,' defined as different-looking faces at the table. The equity and inclusion parts are not understood. In fact, D, E, and I are treated as the same things and interchangeable. There is little acceptance with equity that it may mean some people giving something up (usually privilege, or even resources). I've worked in plenty of places that look diverse but are not at all inclusive as there is still a dominant culture to which all are expected to conform--and that is still dictated by a few. This is true at every level: students, faculty, and professional staff."

"I hope you've considered political ideology in DEI. Some of my responses are based on the fact that I do not think Rutgers is diverse in terms of this attribute and I don't think it is a welcoming environment for those who are not left leaning."

"Take an intersectional approach to DEI (e.g., consider how race, gender, class and under-discussed identities such as ability status converge to inform work life and learning). Add J to DEI so that justice is central in our work."

## CONCLUSION

In sum, the results show that leaders recognize the need to change and the obstacles that lie ahead. A cross-cutting theme was that forward movement will require intentionality, diligence, and accountability. One leader summed up the sentiment of many in saying,

"Rutgers has the potential to be a leader in DEI because New Jersey is very diverse—diversity that increasingly is reflected in our student body. We will likely evolve into an institution that genuinely embraces DEI, but it is our choice right now as to whether we will merely evolve to where we want to be or strategically launch ourselves into that position. We need bold decision-making right now to do the latter that will buck some of the prevailing norms of higher education, but that is what true leadership is about: recognizing when that is called for."

Most noted that strategic planning focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion will be core to furthering the institutional commitment. There was an emphasis on clarity of process and encouragement of broad participation across ranks and status to create university-wide investment in the need for and path to change. The development of a unifying vision joined with a clear plan of action that emphasizes accountability will facilitate institutional transformation.