



**Empire State  
Development**

DIVERSITY • EQUITY • INCLUSION

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2027

## Letter from ESD's President and CEO



Dear ESD Colleagues,

New York State celebrates diversity, inclusion and equality—it is a source of strength, it fuels creativity, and it expands opportunity.

Empire State Development prizes those values too: we are proud to have a world-class team delivering on our mission to promote economic development and create jobs, and this document reflects our commitment to continue to invest in our team and foster an inclusive, diverse and high-performing workforce.

This report – ESD's first ever DEI Strategic Plan – lays out a series of concrete steps ESD will take to cultivate a workplace that values and embraces the unique perspectives, backgrounds and experience of every individual. That means increasing transparency around compensation and professional development, breaking down silos and improving communication vertically and across teams, building organization DEI capacity, and continuing to diversity in all ways.

This document also emphasizes our commitment to ensuring that our programs and investments reach underserved and historically disadvantaged populations. At ESD, we believe we maximize our impact when we drive shared, inclusive economic growth.

The DEI Strategic Plan was built on thorough internal agency analysis and has been finalized through the hard work of our colleagues. I want to thank the DEI Action Committee and the DEI Strategic Planning Committee for their efforts to bring this document to fruition.

With the release of this plan, our work is just beginning – in the coming months, we plan to hire a Diversity Officer and launch into implementing the goals we have set forth for ourselves. And we will hold ourselves accountable by tracking our progress and conducting annual evaluations of the status of the plan.

As the first African American to lead ESD, nominated by New York's first female Governor, the values of inclusiveness, equity and shared prosperity have always been central to my work. Under Governor Kathy Hochul's leadership, I am committed to helping ESD build a more inclusive environment where every employee can thrive as we work to improve the lives of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,  
Hope Knight

# INTRODUCTION

## Mission Statement

The mission of Empire State Development (“ESD”) is to promote a vigorous, inclusive and growing state economy, encourage business investment and job creation, and support diverse, local economies across New York State through the efficient use of loans, grants, tax credits, real estate development, marketing, and other forms of assistance.

To support our economic development mission, ESD:

- invests strategically in infrastructure, innovation, place-making and revitalization, tradable sectors, and workforce development, with a focus on sustainability and historically disadvantaged populations across the state;
- is transparent and responsive to the needs of diverse communities and businesses across the state, including through the active participation of the Regional Councils;
- supports the retention and growth of existing businesses, the resilience of communities, and the development of new businesses and industries;
- promotes equality of economic opportunities for minority- and women-owned businesses (“MWBs”) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses (“SDVOBs”);
- assists in the development of underutilized property to spur community revitalization, housing, and commercial activity;
- provides early-stage support for new ventures, including the research and development and commercialization of new technologies; and
- strengthens New York State’s innovation-based economy through partnerships with our acclaimed universities, promoting entrepreneurialism through the development of incubators and next-generation manufacturing and technology hubs across the state.

In order to most effectively promote a vigorous state economy and support prosperous local economies, ESD must: ensure its programs and initiatives address the needs of and are accessible to all New Yorkers, including those from underserved communities like **People of Color, Women, Disabled and LGBTQ residents, economically distressed/disenfranchised residents, religious and ethnic minorities, immigrants and others**; and overcome and work to undo the ramifications of **past discriminatory practices** that have resulted in certain communities being **historically disenfranchised/under resourced**.

To meet this DEI mission authentically, we must cultivate a workplace that values and embraces the unique perspectives, backgrounds and experience of every individual. By fostering an environment of inclusiveness, equality, transparency and mutual respect, we aim to empower employees to thrive, innovate and contribute to a collective success that reflects the richness of our diverse community.

## Process

The DEI Strategic Planning Process began after ESD went through a comprehensive DEI Climate and Organizational Assessment. To best design strategies and actions that meet the specific DEI strengths and challenges within ESD, the DEI Strategic Planning process began in the fall of 2023 and spanned 6 months, led by the collaborative work of the DEI Strategic Planning Committee.

Members of that committee were:

- Jason Clark, EVP, Division of Minority & Women's Business Development
- Ed Hamilton, Executive Deputy Director & EVP, Administration
- Jonevan Hornsby, President, Empire State New Market Corporation; AVP, Portfolio Management & Project Finance; Director, Financial Analysis & Underwriting
- Ross Levi, Executive Director / Vice President, Tourism
- Allison Madmoune, Regional Director, Mohawk Valley
- Noah Rayman, Chief of Staff
- Omar Sanders, Regional Director, Southern Tier
- Carlyne Turner-Beverly, Senior Counsel, Senior Counsel & Ethics Officer
- Bette Yee, Senior Director, Entrepreneur Development

The strategic plan was aided by the input of ESD's DEI Action Committee:

- Kelly Baquerizo, Director of Tourism Grant Programs
- Marta Castillo, Associate Agency Services Analyst, DMWBD
- Jillian Cringle, Senior Counsel
- Maria Gately, Senior Manager, Human Resources
- Jonevan Hornsby, President, Empire State New Market Corporation; AVP, Portfolio Management & Project Finance; Director, Financial Analysis & Underwriting
- Rose Jeffrey, Manager, Office Operations, Harlem Community Development Corp.
- Donasia Joyner, Senior Manager, Learning & Organizational Development
- Robert Kwon, VP, Portfolio Management & Project Finance & Director, Risk Management
- Ross Levi, Executive Director / Vice President, Tourism
- Rosemary McCabe, Senior Project Manager, Western NY
- Dana Ochia, Director, Small Business Liaison and Outreach
- Yma Oria, Project Manager, Community Development & Administrator, Harlem Community Development Corp.
- Anna Pakman, Vice President, Digital Marketing
- Carlyn Turner-Beverly, Senior Counsel and Ethics Officer
- Ralph Volcy, Senior Director, Procurement, Policy & Training
- Eric Warren, Senior Project Manager, Mid-Hudson
- Markly Wilson, Director, International Marketing
- Bree Yatkowitz, Cultural & Organizational Development Manager
- Bette Yee, Senior Director, Entrepreneur Development

The planning process culminated in March of 2024.

## Alignment

Using outcome based planning, the ESD DEI Strategic Plan is organized around six strategic ESD-focused outcomes. These outcomes were informed by a DEI Culture and Climate Assessment, performed by the consulting firm Tangible Development, and are designed to maximize effectiveness and impact of ESD's current and future DEI work.

- **Outcome 1:** ESD has strong and multiple roles which have embedded in them responsibilities to sustain long-term DEI change
- **Outcome 2:** ESD increases DEI Knowledge and Skills across all layers of the agency through training and professional development opportunities
- **Outcome 3:** ESD continues to measurably diversify in all ways
- **Outcome 4:** ESD further develops organizational transparency and progression
- **Outcome 5:** ESD mitigates the impact of bureaucracy/hierarchy on the staff experience by reducing vertical power dynamics
- **Outcome 6:** ESD increases the proportion of underserved populations in ESD programs and services and identifies and eliminates known barriers to programs and services to the greatest extent possible

These six outcomes demonstrate the strategic and tailored way ESD will ensure the agency is meeting the objectives outlined in the [Executive Order 187, Workforce and Diversity Strategic Plan](#) to: Develop strategic leaders, recruit and retain talent, foster inclusive culture and deliver effective programs and services.

Measuring the success of the outcomes and strategies requires evidence of the eight standards outlined in Executive Order 187's [Framework and Implementation Plan](#)

1. Informed and committed leadership
2. Clearly articulated roles and responsibilities
3. Continuous policy review and development
4. Dedicated resources
5. Collective accountability
6. Education and training
7. Program plan integration
8. Performance measures

In the following document, all outcomes, strategies and metrics illustrate ESD's commitment to diligent and strategic work to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive Empire State Development internally and externally.

## Shared and Transparent Accountability

In addition to the commitment from Leadership, ESD's current and future work will be supported by the DEI Action Committee, in coordination with Leadership and the HR team, which will help ensure the DEI work is discussed, tracked and moved forward with care and clarity. Evaluation of the implementation/status of the DEI Strategic plan will happen annually and be led by the DEI Action Committee in coordination with Leadership and HR.

# OUTCOME 1:

## ESD has strong and multiple DEI roles and responsibilities to sustain long-term DEI change.

The 2023 Organizational Assessment found a need to strengthen ESD’s organizational structure to support an expanding DEI focus. In order to sustain ESD’s DEI efforts, the following strategies have been identified to build organizational DEI capacity across the agency.

### OBJECTIVE 1.1: BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT ESD’S DEI WORK.

**Strategy 1.1.A:** Hire a Diversity Officer or similar position supported with resources

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Commissioner, HR & Finance	2024

**Strategy 1.1.B:** Create a departmental liaisons system to embed DEI responsibility and support within each ESD Department

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Diversity Officer	2025

**Strategy 1.1.C:** Institutionalize the DEI Action Committee by ensuring volunteer time is recognized or rewarded

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Commissioner, HR, & Finance	2024

**Strategy 1.1.D:** Add DEI-specific roles and competencies to all job descriptions, beginning with senior leadership and managers

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
HR & Managers & Legal	2024 - 2026 (rolling updates)

**Strategy 1.1.E:** Develop Employee Resource Groups/Affinity Groups

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Diversity Officer, DEI Action Committee	2025

## OUTCOME 2:

ESD increases DEI knowledge and skills across all layers of the agency through training and professional development opportunities

Employees from historically marginalized populations believe their colleagues need more DEI knowledge and awareness. They are looking for their colleagues and supervisors to make fewer assumptions about who they are, their culture, their skills and their honesty. This is an opportunity for additional training, identified as a need by employees with marginalized identities as well as by the overall employee population.

### OBJECTIVE 2.1: IDENTIFY DEI KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND TOPICS TO PRIORITIZE

**Strategy 2.1.A:** *Create and execute a DEI learning and development plan for ESD employees to strategically integrate DEI knowledge and skills. Trainings should emphasize the target areas below that were identified in the Tangible Development Culture and Climate assessment report:*

- Inclusive leadership and supervision training with an emphasis on dialogue and navigating healthy conflict
- Defining allyship, bystander intervention techniques and taking action in the workplace
- Systemic racism, racial bias, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia
- Based on the outcomes of the culture and climate assessment, the following groups should be the focus when learning on how to create and sustain a safe and empowered workforce for:
  - People of Color
  - Transgender people
  - People with disabilities
  - LGBPQ people
  - People of low socio-economic status
  - People who are non-U.S citizens
  - Religious minorities, including navigating belief systems in the workplace

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Diversity Officer & HR	2025 - 2027

## OUTCOME 3:

ESD continues to measurably diversify in all ways

EEO data suggests an organization that has racial and gender diversity. However given the multiple locations across the state, the racial diversity in particular is higher in some offices than others. Based on disaggregated data by location, it is clear that employees in the New York City area are surrounded by colleagues with a greater diversity of racial, sexual and disability identities than other locations across New York State.

### OBJECTIVE 3.1: BUILD INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO INTENTIONALLY RECRUIT DIVERSE CANDIDATES ACROSS ALL ESD DEPARTMENTS

**Strategy 3.1.A:** Enhance existing recruitment strategy to diversify and increase candidate pools, including tracking of demographics to measure recruitment efforts over time

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Diversity Officer, HR and Managers	2024 - 2025

**Strategy 3.1.B:** Undertake departmental level outreach for specific departmental functions through alternative and industry-specific outreach (college internships, job shadowing opportunities, outreach to schools and professional associations, etc.)

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
HR & Departmental Managers	2025

### OBJECTIVE 3.2: CONTINUE TO DEVELOP INFRASTRUCTURE FOR UNDERSTANDING AND MEASURING THE DIVERSITY OF CURRENT ESD EMPLOYEES

**Strategy 3.2.A:** Collect a more inclusive and fuller range of identity demographic data from both new and existing employees, including and beyond the required EEO data that are already being collected, to better understand and serve the workforce by exploring demographic profile surveys and internal HR capabilities

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
HR & Legal	2024 - 2025



**OBJECTIVE 3.3: DEVELOP PROCESSES TO MITIGATE BIASES IN HIRING**

*Strategy: 3.3.A: Require annual implicit bias training for hiring managers and all ESD staff involved in the hiring process*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
HR & Diversity Officer & Legal	2024 - 2025

*Strategy 3.3.B: Add DEI-oriented questions in the hiring process*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
HR & Diversity Officer & Legal	2024 - 2025

## OUTCOME 4:

ESD further develops organizational transparency and progression

ESD employees share a desire for more collaborative decision-making and constructive communication for decision-making, conflict navigation and progression within the agency. Transparency and effective communication is a key DEI priority for leadership.

### OBJECTIVE 4.1: DEVELOP GREATER TRANSPARENCY AROUND COMPENSATION AND ADVANCEMENT AT ESD

**Strategy 4.1.A:** *Identify and address pay disparities revealed in the compensation report & analysis*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Commissioner, HR, & Legal	2024

**Strategy 4.1.B:** *Provide clarity and transparency on advancement opportunities at ESD for current employees (annual reviews, compensation study, disseminating job openings internally)*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Commissioner, HR, & Management	2024

### OBJECTIVE 4.2: CREATE NEW PATHWAYS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT ESD

**Strategy 4.2.A:** *Explore changes to professional pathways to eliminate barriers and support internal growth of ESD staff*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
HR, Diversity Officer, & DEI Action Committee	2024 - 2025

**Strategy 4.2.B:** *Further develop the mentorship program to expand and deepen connections across ESD staff*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Diversity Officer, HR, & DEI Action Committee	2025

**OBJECTIVE 4.3: MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF BUREAUCRACY/HIERARCHY ON THE STAFF EXPERIENCE BY REDUCING HORIZONTAL POWER DYNAMICS THROUGH CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL CONNECTION**

**Strategy 4.3.A:** *Build cross-departmental connection/knowledge development through New Employee Orientation Programs, Regular Departmental Updates, interagency gatherings and Lunch and Learns*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Organized at the agency level by Leadership	On-going

**Strategy 4.3.B:** *Explicitly acknowledge the valued presence, meaningful contributions, welcomed status and specific community/identity needs and occasions of marginalized groups including but not limited to People of Color, Women, Disabled and LGBTQ employees, economically distressed/disenfranchised employees, religious and ethnic minorities and immigrants:*

- *Finalize the function/purpose of the DEI Action Committee*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
DEI Action Committee & Executive Sponsor	On-going

- *Recognize/celebrate/elevate holidays/commemorations through emails/comms/other activities that support a Cultural Calendar*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Public Affairs & Executive & DEI Action Committee	On-going

- *Develop a more robust intranet resource database by creating a DEI Resources section*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Public Affairs & HR	On-going

- *Ensure cultural competence and sensitivity in communication and social media standards*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Public Affairs & Marketing	On-going

## OUTCOME 5:

ESD mitigates the impact of bureaucracy/hierarchy on the staff experience by reducing vertical power dynamics

One of the biggest challenges to ESD’s DEI work is the navigation of power dynamics, particularly the power dynamics that come with having a steeply hierarchical organizational structure. Moreover, the impact of leadership turnover related to changeover/transitions is and will continue to be a challenge for progress. The following objectives aim to mitigate the impact of the power dynamics latent in the hierarchy and bureaucracy. This work has a clear focus on building structures and processes that advance DEI work, rather than relying on individual leadership priorities or goodwill.

### OBJECTIVE 5.1: CREATE RECURRING, CONSISTENT AND CREATIVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND ESD STAFF

**Strategy 5.1.A:** *On 3-month rolling basis, request feedback from leadership through:*

- *Exec team members/senior managers attending events/having office hours*
- *Recurring town halls of leadership*
- *Recurring Department Head meetings*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Commissioner & Leadership Team	On-going

**Strategy 5.1.B:** *Emphasize, model and support a collaborative work environment encouraging an open-door culture and office hours with leadership*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Leadership Team	On-going

**Strategy 5.1.C:** *Disseminate policies and procedures more clearly to staff, including through informing and training managers*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
HR & Managers	On-going

## OUTCOME 6:

ESD increases the proportion of underserved populations in ESD programs and services and identifies and eliminates known barriers to programs and services to the greatest extent possible

In order to most effectively promote a vigorous state economy and support prosperous local economies, ESD must: ensure its programs and initiatives address the needs of and are accessible to all New Yorkers, including those from underserved communities like People of Color, Women, Disabled and LGBTQ residents, economically distressed/disenfranchised residents, religious and ethnic minorities, immigrants and others; and overcome and work to undo the ramifications of past discriminatory practices that have resulted in certain communities being historically disenfranchised/under resourced.

### OBJECTIVE 6.1: INTEGRATE DEI ACTION PLANNING AT THE DEPARTMENTAL AND PROGRAM LEVEL

**Strategy 6.1.A:** *Provide DEI action planning training at the departmental and program level to better equip teams and employees to translate intent into action/impact*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Diversity Officer	2026

**Strategy 6.1.B:** *Each department and program will provide tailored annual DEI action plans that identify programs and services that impact the targeted populations and/or address historical barriers in policy or practice.*

ESD Entity Primarily Responsible for Implementation	Tentative Timing
Diversity Officer & Departments	2026