

Diversity Helps Foster Warfighting Readiness, Panelists Say



Marine Corps Brig. Gen. A.T. Williamson, right, says the service is modernizing how it manages and recruits talent. *NAVY LEAGUE / Lisa Nipp*

Less than 30% of youth today are available for military service, said Michelle Godfrey, senior advisor for diversity and inclusion, U.S. Coast Guard. As the nation becomes more diverse, one of the keys to attracting and retaining that scarce talent is to foster equity and inclusion efforts, said Godfrey and other panelists during the Aug. 3 session on Inclusion and Diversity as a Force Multiplier.

“The data backs it up – the more diverse team you have, the higher your performance,” Godfrey said.

In the Navy, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts help foster warfighting readiness, said Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr., deputy chief of naval operations for manpower, personnel, training and education and chief of naval personnel.

“If you want to outfight the enemy, you have to outthink them, and the way you do that is by leveraging diverse and inclusive leadership,” he said.

Nowell said the Navy is currently implementing 56 recommendations from a DEI task force. For instance, recruiters now look at applicants’ whole personality rather than just quantifiable measures like SATs. Navy leader trainer development is taking DEI into account and is looking at bias in terms of decision science. Navy classrooms are also using a bias mitigation tool. The key, Nowell said, is to use data analytics while still being able to rely on intuition as well.

The Marine Corps is modernizing its manpower system, including talent management, said

Brig. Gen. A.T. Williamson, director, Manpower Plans & Policy Division, U.S. Marine Corps. Along with ethnic inclusivity, diversity of thought, experience and background also helps build a cohort of inclusive teams, he said.

The Marine Corps is currently working on and vetting a DEI framework, Williamson said. It's also conducting a survey to see if there's bias within the personnel evaluation system, and asking questions about inclusion during exit surveys.

The Coast Guard has a DEI action plan with 36 distinct actions, Godfrey said. The organization has completed a women's retention study and expects a study to be published this month on recruitment and retention of underrepresented minorities. In April, the Coast Guard deployed a virtual mentoring program that helps foster DEI efforts. Close to 1,000 people have signed up for the program's mentoring app, she said.

The Coast Guard also offers tools on how to have DEI conversations, Godfrey said. It's trained more than 100 diversity and inclusion change agents, who offer coaching for various DEI situations. Performance appraisals also include diversity and inclusion competency.

The Department of the Navy has exceeded its social and economic DEI goals for the past six years, said Jimmy Smith, director, Office of Small Business Programs, Department of the Navy. During the last fiscal year, it spent \$17.3 billion on small businesses that were in diverse socioeconomic categories, he said. It's also working with historically black colleges and universities on recruitment efforts.

"We're fighting to attract talent," Smith said. "We're spending money in places we haven't before."

In terms of equity, only some companies can perform jobs like shipbuilding, Smith pointed out. But the Department of the Navy is committed to doing a better job of enforcing how those companies are distributing funding to their subcontractors.

“We need to change our bias from always going to certain places to get certain things done,” he said. “We need to create more competition. At the end of the day, it’s all about fairness.”

All of the speakers emphasized that DEI efforts encompass more than just race, religion, age and sexuality. They also include factors like inclusivity of education and viewpoints, and diversity of thought and problem-solving.

Smith believes DEI initiatives should be deeply personal as well. “Being a father of three girls, there are things women in our workforce go through today that I never want to see my girls ever have to go through,” he said.