

DEI In Davos? How Global Inclusion Found Its Way Into The Swiss Alps

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I cover the intersection of equity, leadership, and DEI in business.

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Every year, in the small alpine village of Davos, Switzerland, the most influential people in the world travel to the most elevated town in Europe to take part in a week of closed-door meetings, dinners and community. The reason? The World Economic Forum (WEF).

The WEF is a space for discussing the world's challenges and has been held in the same town since 1971.

And while the presence of prime ministers, presidents, central bank leaders, CEOs, executives and global influencers has always been highlighted, one thing traditionally has been overlooked: diversity.



Adrienne C. Smith, founder of the Can: Diversity Collective Davos and Chief Diversity Officer, ...

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Enter The Can: Diversity Collective

For Adrienne C. Smith, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at FleishmanHillard, the lack of visible conversations around DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) at international events was seen as an opportunity to create a stage to invite those who are on the front lines affecting policy in this area.

Her passion is to build and lead an organization that represents the global voice of inclusion—by teaching, inspiring and sharing resources, as well as platforming the voices of key individuals who rise above the headwinds.

This topic has become more important in today's social climate, when programs around DEI are under attack.

Ms. Smith's efforts to build those stages began in Cannes, France, at the International Festival of Creativity in 2019, home of the Cannes Lions. So much of the creativity targets people of color (POC) and is created by POC, yet this representation wasn't visible in the event's 20,000-plus attendees. She decided to take a stand and said, "No more." That was when her organization, Can: Diversity Collective, was born, and that became the location of her first on-site activation, [Inkwell Beach - Cannes](#).

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A picture of Inkwell Beach taken on January 20th, 2025 in Davos, Switzerland. PHOTO COURTESY: SEBASTIAN HAGAN WITH BENTO ENTERTAINMENT

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Why the name Inkwell Beach?

The original Inkwell Beach was located in the Oak Bluffs section of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, and it has been a central gathering place for Black Americans since the early 20th century. At the time, the beaches were segregated. A carved out area of the beach was dedicated for families and communities of Black residents and visitors, which they could enjoy without harassment from others. It was called "Inkwell," as a subtle nod to the exclusionary practices of the era, and it has since become a symbol of community and cultural pride. Around the same time, a second Inkwell began on the beaches of Santa Monica, California.

Ms. Smith's use of the name Inkwell Beach was a nod to this

important history.

Enter Davos

In 2024, Ms. Smith set her eyes on what many consider the most powerful event in the world, along with the success of her efforts at Cannes, she came to Davos, Switzerland to create what she didn't see and couldn't feel at the Forum.

This year's [Inkwell Beach - Davos](#): The Global Impact of Inclusion Experience builds on last year's momentum, bringing together distinguished speakers, activists and thought leaders to explore the critical need for inclusion in today's rapidly evolving world.

Over 500 people from over 30 nations registered to attend, and every seat was filled to hear the roster of 35 speakers, including [Valeshia Butterfield](#), founder and CEO of SEED Media; [Wanji Walcott](#), chief legal and business affairs officer at Pinterest; and [Chris Foster](#), CEO of Omnicom Public Relations Group (OPRG). These speakers shared their vision of a more diverse future and presented strategies to tackle some of the most pressing global challenges, such as leadership, technology, and the evolution of equity and belonging.



Adrianne C. Smith with Ana Domingues, General Manager FleishmanHillard, Brazil, Valeshia ...
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The WEF's Lighthouse Programme

As the topic of investing in and aligning around DEI becomes more prevalent internationally, creating a single source of best-in-class examples has become imperative to help lead and guide companies in this area.

With that in mind, the WEF began their Lighthouse Programme, designed to pragmatically identify proven, effective initiatives that advance DEI across industries and geographies. Their annual [Insight Report](#) shares best practices that ultimately contribute to stronger business performance and competitiveness.

Their 2025 report, which is their third, showcases eight Lighthouses and seven Highlights, aiming to equip leaders with insights to contribute to faster DEI impact across the global business community and policy-making space. Given that there is no silver bullet, the intention behind the case studies is not to provide a list of initiatives to replicate but to illustrate key elements of what contributed to each initiative's impact—and compare it across the previous cycles of the Lighthouse Programme to date.

What's next?

For Ms. Smith, the next generation is more clearly coming into focus, alongside the need for industry legacy planning for future generations to benefit from. She calls it “succession planning.”

Her Ambassador Program offers underrepresented talent at every level the opportunity to learn from global thought leaders, through curated experiences including exclusive panels, networking and workshops. The program has already educated and inspired 100 ambassadors from 6 continents and, most importantly, is building a community.

Organizations that have been pro DEI should take note.

“When you create access to everyone, all boats rise,” Ms. Smith said.

When asked her thoughts about the narrative to eliminate DEI, Ms. Smith said, “Don’t believe the hype. As long as the wealth gap exists, you are going to need DEI. DEI will never die.”

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