



2026 TRENDS

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

TREND 1

Maintaining Inclusive Talent Development Practices During a Shift in Employee Demographics

TREND 2

Improving Representation in Clinical Trial Enrollment, Design, and Operations

TREND 3

Promoting Inclusive Product Design and User Experience

TREND 4

Applying Equity-Centered Approaches to AI and Technology

As organizations continue into 2026, [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\)](#) efforts are evolving in response to changing workforce dynamics, advancing technologies, and growing expectations for impact. The focus is shifting from broad commitments to how inclusion and culture are embedded across talent development, operations, and innovation.

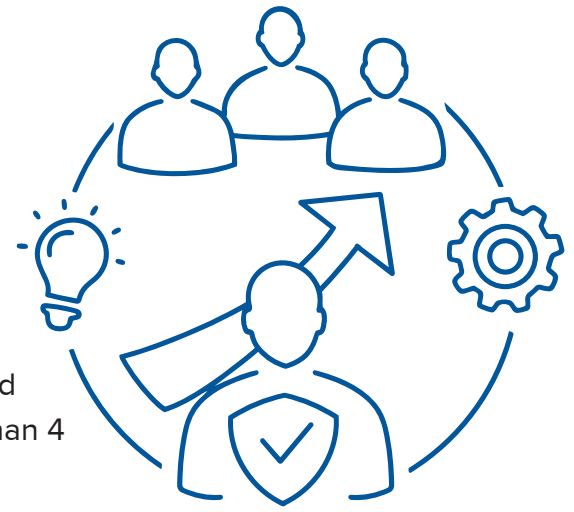
From adapting inclusive practices for a changing employee population to improving [representation in clinical research](#), designing more accessible products, and applying equity-centered approaches to AI and technology, organizations face both [new challenges and meaningful opportunities](#).

In this report, we highlight the key DEI trends shaping 2026 and what leaders should be preparing for in the year ahead.



TREND 1

Maintaining Inclusive Talent Development Practices During a Shift in Employee Demographics



Industries across sectors are experiencing a significant demographic shift as Baby Boomers rapidly approach retirement age. This so-called “[silver-tsunami](#)” shift will continue through at least 2027, with more than 4 million people reaching retirement age annually. As a result, many employers risk losing up to [10% of their workforce over the next five years](#).

Critically, many of these departing employees hold decades of [institutional knowledge](#), established relationships, and leadership experience that are not easily replaced.

Despite this risk, preparedness remains uneven. According to the Association for Talent Development, [56% of U.S. employers](#) don’t have a formal succession plan in place. As a critical strategic priority, [succession plans are the key](#) to helping organizations manage leadership turnover.

Because many Baby Boomers occupy executive and senior-level roles, organizations that fail to intentionally build future leadership pipelines risk creating [leadership bottlenecks](#) that slow decision-making and constrain growth. Effective succession planning requires an intentional, inclusive approach to developing future leaders. This includes structured upskilling and reskilling tactics such as mentoring, coaching, [knowledge transfer](#), and on-the-job stretch roles.

[Behavioral assessments](#) can help identify employees with demonstrated leadership traits and clarify the competencies needed for their development. Importantly, inclusive talent development practices must move beyond informal networks and “known quantities,” as [marginalized groups are often overlooked](#) when development opportunities rely solely on visibility or sponsorship.

At the same time, knowledge and skill transfer are becoming increasingly critical for Gen Z and other early-career employees entering the workforce. As organizations navigate this demographic transition, they may encounter differences in learning preferences, skillsets, and development expectations. Employers should consider educational opportunities that [appeal and are familiar to their audience](#), including digital-first learning, AI-enabled tools, and technology-driven knowledge-sharing platforms. Because [Gen Z has grown up in the digital age](#), these approaches can be particularly effective in accelerating upskilling and preserving institutional knowledge.



TREND 2

Improving Representation in Clinical Trial Enrollment, Design, and Operations

The biopharmaceutical industry remains at a clear inflection point. Regulators, payers, and patient communities are increasingly aligned around a central principle: clinical trials should [reflect the real-world populations they are intended to serve](#).



The question is no longer whether to integrate inclusivity and diverse representation into clinical development, but where, when, and how to do so in an intentional, responsible, and scalable manner while maintaining the scientific rigor and regulatory compliance the industry demands. Any viable approach must be [comprehensive and measurable](#), addressing the needs of patients and clinical teams while supporting the increasingly complex operational realities of global clinical trial portfolios across a wide range of therapeutic areas. What was once viewed as a differentiator is rapidly becoming a baseline expectation.

Diverse representation in clinical trial enrollment, design, and operations has been widely discussed for years, but the issue has now reached a tipping point. Ethical considerations are no longer the sole driver; insufficient representation has direct implications for patient safety, treatment efficacy, and real-world generalizability. Both the FDA and EMA have [consistently signaled that inclusive trial design](#) is becoming a regulatory expectation rather than an optional enhancement.

While this shift raises the bar for all sponsors, it also presents an opportunity: organizations that act decisively can gain a competitive advantage and build lasting trust with the global communities they serve. [Improving representation in clinical trials](#) requires a multifaceted approach. While enhanced recruitment and outreach are necessary, they're not sufficient on their own. True progress depends on intentional trial design and operations that account for the socioeconomic, cultural, and logistical barriers that affect participation and retention.

Common challenges include limited site access, language and health literacy gaps, inflexible work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, and historical mistrust of the healthcare system. [Addressing these barriers](#) requires investment in enabling infrastructure, such as decentralized and hybrid trial models, transportation support, translation services, expanded use of electronic documentation and signatures, and other practical accommodations that make participation feasible.

Leading sponsors are increasingly adopting equity-centered operating models that begin well before trial launch, as well as coordinating efforts across R&D, finance, regulatory affairs, patient engagement, community outreach, analytics, IT, and commercial teams. These efforts include early community engagement, partnerships with trusted local providers, and patient-centered protocol design. Companies such as Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Roche, and GSK are embedding diversity goals into trial planning and advancing patient-centric design approaches, setting new standards for the industry.

TREND 3

Promoting Inclusive Product Design and User Experience

In 2026, [inclusive product design](#) is shifting from well-intentioned to a critical opportunity for differentiation, as we know product offerings should aim to create an equal experience for all users. In practice, this can range from [packaging that is easier to open](#) to experiences that accommodate sensory and mobility differences. By designing products for a wider range of abilities, organizations can not only improve accessibility, but also enhance brand loyalty and expand market share.



When we think about how this looks in practice, brands like Rare Beauty are leading the space. An emerging leader in ergonomic design, Rare Beauty [has been intentional about](#) offering products that are easy to grip, open, and use one-handed. In 2024, Rare Beauty expanded its commitment by launching the Rare Beauty Made Accessible Initiative in partnership with Casa Colina Research Institute, aimed at identifying broader accessibility needs across the [beauty industry](#).

Brands like Procter & Gamble have also established an Accessibility Team focused on [improving inclusive design](#) through research and development. Initial findings have surfaced how customers with differing accessibility needs may struggle to tell the difference between P&G shampoo and conditioner bottles, or struggle to open packages from brands like Pampers. This led the team to experiment more with tactile labeling and diving into their packaging experience with a closer eye.

Similarly, e.l.f. Cosmetics partnered with Paralympic swimmer Anastasia Pagonis, a blind athlete, to improve accessibility for consumers who are visually impaired, launching product bundles with scannable QR codes that link to audio descriptions and tips for application.

People with disabilities represent an estimated [~\\$500 billion in collective disposable income in the U.S.](#) Consumer data consistently shows that difficult-to-use products lead to lost sales, while accessible, inclusive design improves brand perception, [increases customer loyalty](#), and expands a product's market share.

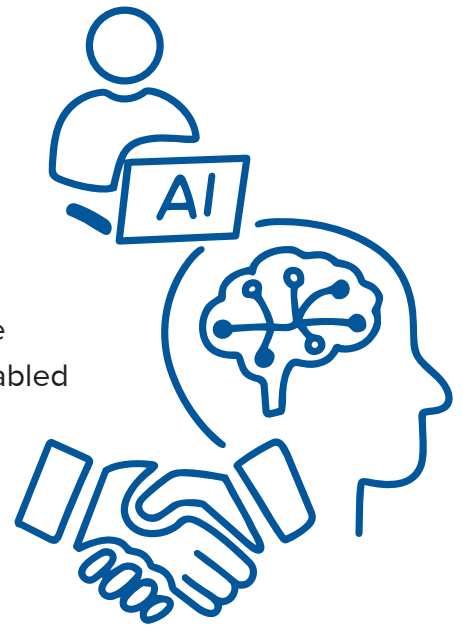
At the same time, the inclusive packaging market is experiencing strong growth as brands respond to rising consumer expectations around ease of use. [Emerging solutions](#) such as augmented reality, which can deliver step-by-step instructions, or enhanced product information to consumers, demonstrate how inclusive design can serve as both a differentiator and a scalable solution. When executed thoughtfully, inclusive design enhances the user experience, creates long-term consumer value, and reinforces brand credibility.



TREND 4

Applying Equity-Centered Approaches to AI and Technology

As the AI boom continues to grow, we have seen excitement build within the technology space around the efficiencies and advancements that will be enabled across many of the tools everyday consumers use. However, it's impossible to ignore the people and culture implications of AI, and consumers are also becoming increasingly aware of the need for ethical and equitable usage and development of AI. As organizations strive to [maintain a thoughtful DEI lens](#) in their 2026 AI strategies, it's imperative to leverage diverse datasets, [keep humans in the loop](#), and remain vigilant about bias—both within AI systems and in human decision-making.



No matter where your organization is on its AI journey, you can and should begin thinking about how to ensure the generative AI models you use provide [equitable answers derived from diverse data sets](#). For organizations building or customizing their own AI tools, this includes intentionally leveraging diverse and representative data sources to reduce the risk of biased or incomplete outputs.

It also requires evaluating how AI-generated content represents different populations and cultural contexts. This is particularly relevant when AI is used for translation, visual content generation, or adapting messaging for different communities, where outputs should authentically reflect people across ages, abilities, cultures, and backgrounds.

Being intentional with your human-in-the-loop strategy and ensuring your organization has [strong education](#) on bias in AI becomes especially important as more technology companies [embed generative AI into their tools](#) to make things easier for consumers. As we have seen so far, AI is not 100% correct all the time, and consumers know that. To build trust, technology companies will need to demonstrate either the accuracy of their generative AI models or the ways they are double-checking the information those models produce within consumer applications, including incorporating human oversight to review outputs and address potential bias in AI-generated responses.

Organizations should also recognize that the people reviewing AI outputs bring their own perspectives and biases, making it important to involve diverse teams in the evaluation and oversight process. Air Canada encountered an issue when [its AI chatbot misled customers](#) about bereavement travel guidelines and was required to honor a refund policy the AI model fabricated, costing the company both money and consumer trust.

As the AI space continues to evolve, organizations should begin leveraging these approaches while increasing transparency around their AI systems. Doing so will resonate with consumers and help build a deep level of trust that can differentiate your organization in the market.

Looking Ahead

In 2026, organizations should continue to have the courage to stay committed to the values they believe in, even as the external landscape continues to shift. Businesses should continue to embed inclusion principles throughout the employee experience, from recruiting and onboarding to development, engagement, and retention. This commitment should also extend to how organizations design research, build products, and leverage technology for increasingly diverse populations.

If you're looking to learn more about how your organization can advance your diversity programs in the complex landscape of 2026, connect with our experts today.

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