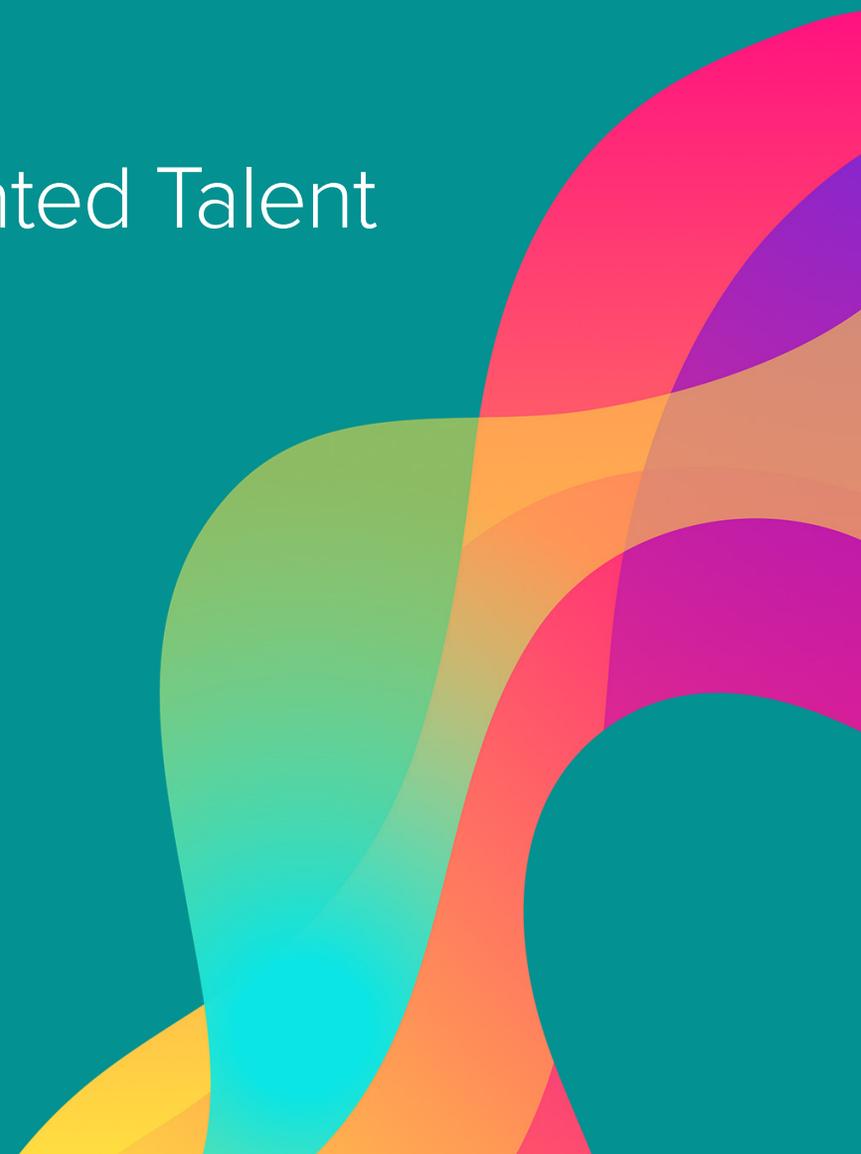


Where to Find Underrepresented Talent

Diversity Sourcing at the Top of the Funnel



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Introduction

Why Did We Write This?

Top talent is self-identifying long before they enter your funnel—through the groups they belong to, the organizations they support, the events they participate in, and more. For sourcers, this means learning to seek out and identify those “virtual breadcrumbs” prospects leave online that point toward their demographics.

Talent sourcers on the front lines of an organization’s diversity initiatives can sometimes feel like they’re in an awkward position: They’re asked to guess at prospective candidates’ demographics long before those prospects have a chance to self-identify. During interviewing and hiring processes, candidates *can* self-identify; and the best practice for diversity initiatives at the *middle* of the funnel is to have them do so. These self-declarations of demographic data—race, gender, veteran status, etc.—are typically formalized in Applicant Tracking Systems, after the candidate has applied.

But it’s unreasonable to wait to track diversity until the middle of the funnel and expect this will have a positive impact on your hires at the bottom. So what do sourcers *do* in those earliest stages of the funnel—before they’ve even connected with prospects, let alone given them the opportunity to self-identify? After all, talent acquisition teams are engaging with passive talent months, and sometimes years, before they’re ready to interview. And they want to be sure they’re sending the right nurture campaigns to the right demographics in the meantime.

The best sourcers we know follow a similar playbook: making an educated guess using apparent “identity markers” (LinkedIn photos, first and last names) to infer race and gender, and holding themselves accountable to reaching out to what seems like a broad range of prospective candidates. After all, inferences based on apparent “cues” are far better than knowing nothing at all about the prospects at the top of your funnel.

Still, sourcing by observation is a deeply imperfect strategy—not least because the vast majority of demographic data you can collect on someone isn’t “observable”: think sexual orientation, gender identity, physical disability, and ethnicity. So how to eliminate some of that guesswork? From a recruiting standpoint, the deck can be stacked through thoughtful consideration of where job descriptions get posted or what demographics get targeted with job ads.

For sourcers in particular, though, it's worth remembering that top talent is self-identifying long before they enter your hiring funnel. They self-identify through the groups they belong to, the organizations they support, and the events they participate in. They self-identify through whom they follow and the content they share on social media. They self-identify on their LinkedIn profiles when they mention whom they've mentored and where they've volunteered. People are sharing more about themselves publicly than ever before; and your prospects are leaving virtual breadcrumbs that point toward their demographics. Identifying these breadcrumbs increases the likelihood that the talent you're sourcing will diversify the organization and move the needle on the goals hiring managers have set for their respective teams.

In this content, we'll cover:

- Strategic keyword searches you can perform on LinkedIn to find talent that's a more likely match for your diversity targets
- Other ways to use LinkedIn for diversity sourcing
- Other places—both online and offline—to seek out qualified, underrepresented talent

This is part 2 of a three-part series on diversity sourcing called *The Ultimate Guide to Sourcing and Nurturing Diverse Talent Pools*. Below, we cover best practices for sourcing the talent that's underrepresented in your organization. Or rather, we cover *better* practices. The conversation is still new enough that there isn't a categorical set of "Best Practices for Diversity Sourcing" yet—if there ever will be. We're all experimenting, conferring, consulting, and working to be as conscientious as possible in our various industries; and we're bound to get it wrong sometimes—ourselves at Gem included. But we've written this content for talent sourcers because diversity is too important for us to sit on our hands until we've got it "just right."

The first half of this guide is specific to LinkedIn, since it's the platform the majority of sourcers use thanks to its unparalleled database of professional talent. We'll dive into strategic keyword searches you can perform, using the "unique identifiers" prospects use that suggest they might be a match for your diversity targets. We're talking about a fundamental reevaluation of the search terms you're probably used to using—school, years of experience—to source candidates. These query-based approaches will require some critical thinking on your part: What terms might surface on the profiles of talent pools that would fill the demographic gaps in your organization?

Of course, there are other ways to use LinkedIn for diversity sourcing; and we'll cover those as well. We'll then move off of LinkedIn—and in some cases, offline altogether—and consider the places you're most likely to find top underrepresented talent for your organization: "fishing where the fish are," so to speak. Some of these will require longer-term strategies; but that's part-and-parcel of the sourcing game these days. In some cases, you'll need to earn the trust of the organizations you're sourcing from. But those organizations may ultimately turn out to be your greatest allies.

Before you Begin: Two Crucial Mental Paradigm Shifts

First steps:

1. If you haven't, put yourself through an unconscious bias training. This will help surface the ideas you hold about what makes a "good" candidate, and understand how those ideas have played out in your sourcing.
2. Reconsider the metrics you've been using as indicators of success—elite schools, management experience, uninterrupted work histories, and so on. These metrics are often unintentionally used to the detriment of women and underrepresented talent.

Sourcing for underrepresented talent may require you to shift some fundamental ideas you have, including what a "good" candidate looks like, what they've accomplished, and what their journey to get there entailed. In other words, you'll want to become acutely aware of your unconscious biases and how they play out in your sourcing. For example, in Part 1 we reminded you of what data from as recently as 2017 revealed: that when recruiters source candidates on LinkedIn—regardless of the gender of the sourcer—they're more likely to click into male profiles. LinkedIn's 2018 Gender Insights Report bolstered this with its own data point: Recruiters are 13% less likely to click on a woman's profile when she shows up in a search.

The takeaway from that data is that unconscious bias exists *even* for URMs in sourcing positions. (Indeed, it exists for all of us.) So if you haven't already, we recommend you commit to putting yourself through an unconscious bias training—whether through [Facebook](#), [Grovo](#), [Catalyst](#), [Paradigm](#), or elsewhere. Most of these you can do in an afternoon—and while they won't eliminate your biases, they'll surface them to your consciousness so you can be aware of them as you move through LinkedIn, and respond accordingly.

The second mental paradigm you may have to adjust concerns the metrics you've come to use as indicators of success, or the traditional boxes you've learned to check: elite schools, management experience, or work histories at certain companies. "Required" management or leadership experience will invariably alienate women, Black, and Hispanic talent, who statistically see fewer promotions than their White, male counterparts. Skipping over a prospect because the work history on their LinkedIn profile shows a lapse in employment means alienating parents (typically mothers), caretakers (again, often women), transgender persons who took time off for reassignment surgery, veterans who served time in the military, and other underrepresented groups. Privileging keywords as indicators of past success has its own problems: Female talent lists, on average, 16% fewer keywords in their profiles than does male talent with the same experience in the same roles. So a strategy that relies on "achievement-based" keyword searches is inherently biased toward male prospects, and will serve you up far fewer female profiles.

Paradigm-shifting may include:

- **Learning to value non-linear experiences**
- **Spotting (or inferring) skills acquired in non-traditional ways**
- **Employing a “distance traveled” metric, which takes into account how much harder underrepresented talent may have had to work to get where they are, based on privileges they did not have**

In fact, studies show that some of the very factors you may frequently consider—lapses in employment, college attendance, even years of experience—are some of the *worst* predictors of employee performance and quality of hire. So start privileging the skills *themselves* as opposed to where those skills were learned. Start privileging performance itself as opposed to time-spent-performing.

Ultimately, the more you can open your mind in this process, the better. Underrepresented talent is developing skills in alternative learning environments and through non-traditional means. This may mean searching for candidates in industries you don't typically recruit from. (This is Google's approach to hiring for its People Operations department: It takes a “three-thirds” approach, in which $\frac{1}{3}$ of the department comes from traditional HR backgrounds, $\frac{1}{3}$ from strategy consulting, and $\frac{1}{3}$ from academic fields from organizational psychology to physics. Laszlo Bock, former head of HR, said Google takes this approach because each of these groups “brings something different to the party.”) It will probably mean learning to value non-linear experiences, spotting (or inferring) skills acquired in non-traditional journeys, and employing what the folks at Project Include call a “distance traveled” metric: Where did the prospect's journey begin? How much harder might they have had to work to get where they are than their “majority” counterparts did? Which of their achievements may have been linked to privilege? Which were clearly earned in a meritocratic way? And so on.

With those things in mind, let's dive in.

Diversifying Your Keyword Searches on LinkedIn

What to search for:

- [Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#)
- [Hispanic Serving Institutions](#)
- [Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)
- [Women's colleges](#)
- [Historically Black sororities and fraternities](#)
- [LGBTQIA+ sororities and fraternities](#)

Search for Prospects who Attended Schools that Predominantly Serve Minority Populations

We know how easy it is to keep returning to the same schools you've sourced candidates from in the past: After all, they've already proven their ROI. But when you source from schools that predominantly serve underrepresented students and minority populations, you're statistically more likely to come across underrepresented and minority talent. Consider [Historically Black Colleges and Universities \(HBCUs\)](#), [Hispanic Serving Institutions \(HSIs\)](#), [Tribal Colleges and Universities \(TCUs\)](#), and [women's colleges](#). You can also seek out schools with high diversity indexes: U.S. News & World Report, for example, releases a list of [Campus Ethnic Diversity Rankings](#) annually. Don't limit yourself to talent from "the most prestigious" schools on these lists. High-achieving talent is enrolled at every institution. And if you're using LinkedIn Recruiter or Recruiter Lite, there's no limit to the number of Boolean operators you can use in a single search query.

That means nothing is stopping you from creating a Boolean OR string of every women's college in the U.S., putting parentheses around the list, and adding other search terms with the operator AND to source female talent for that position: ("Agnes Scott College" OR "Alverno College" OR "Barnard College"...) AND "software engineer." Same with HBCUs: ("Alabama A&M University" OR "Alabama State University" OR "Albany State University"...) AND "developer." In fact, Boolean Search Master Glen Cathey already created these two search strings for you in his article "[Diversity Sourcing: Boolean Search Strings for LinkedIn](#)."

You can also perform searches for [historically black sororities and fraternities](#) within these institutions. Swap out the college name for the Greek name, and you'll get a list of college-educated prospects from chapters across the country. Wikipedia also has a list of "[LGBT and LGBT-friendly fraternities and sororities](#)" for everyone from trans-identified, to non-binary, to "masculine-of-center-identified lesbian women." Use it to your advantage.

Of course, if you're sourcing outside the U.S., choose academic institutions (and their respective organizations) in that country where diversity thrives. Once you've entered your search string into LinkedIn, save it and set a search alert to get automatically notified each time a new or updated profile matches that query.

Why search for bootcamps and vocational training programs?

They offer the same training without the systemic barriers that often exist in collegiate programs.

They attract students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

They attract talent (mothers, caretakers) who didn't have the privilege of taking college courses during the day.

Think (and Search) Beyond Traditional Degrees

Stellar engineers come from colleges other than MIT; but they also come from organizations other than 4-year colleges and universities: coding camps, nanodegree programs, community colleges, and vocational training programs—the new wave of which includes organizations like [Holberton School](#), a 2-year project-based alternative to college that, according to LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner, is “producing remarkable, Ivy League-caliber graduates” in coding. Similarly, designers, product managers, and talent for many other roles you're looking to fill have received degrees or certifications in non-traditional learning environments. Consider bootcamps. These are technical training programs that teach the same skills a university does. But because they offer the same training without the systemic barriers that often exist in collegiate programs (programs with their own pipeline problems), they tend to attract students from non-traditional backgrounds.

There's the [Startup Institute](#), which has partnered with New England College to offer an MBA in Digital Marketing. Or [General Assembly](#), which offers courses in everything from product management to web and mobile development to data science and analytics. Or [Product School](#), which offers part-time product management training courses. Or The [Recurse Center](#), which offers free, self-directed, project-based programming retreats in New York City. Or [Always Hired](#) and [Sales Bootcamp](#), which offer training in tech sales. You can find lists of bootcamps for [product management](#), [UX design](#), [cyber security](#), [data science](#), [digital marketing & sales](#), and more at [CourseReport.com](#). (Course Report also provides a list of merit-based bootcamp scholarships, some of which are specifically diversity and minority scholarships. The list was compiled for students; but you can use it to create another Boolean search string for LinkedIn.) These organizations attract students from diverse financial backgrounds; they also attract talent—mothers or caretakers, for instance—who don't (or didn't) have the privilege of taking college courses at all hours of the day.

What's more, search for programs that explicitly serve underrepresented groups. [The Grace Hopper Program](#) at Fullstack Academy is a coding program for women that doesn't charge tuition up-front. [Hackbright Academy](#) is the leading engineering school for women in the Bay Area. [CodePath.org](#) offers coding courses to underrepresented minorities and underserved college students. There's [Black Girls Code](#). There's [Hack the Hood](#), which “introduces

How to find professional and community organizations:

Start with the organizations we've given you here. Create a list of the ones that look promising given the role you're looking to fill.

Use Google to augment your list, making sure your keywords are a combination of role- or skill-specific and URM-specific.

Don't forget to think (and search) local; new groups and organizations are popping up all the time.

Ask your female-identified and URM employees about organizations they belong to or know of.

under-resourced youth of color to tech careers by hiring and training them to build mobile-responsive websites for small, local businesses.” There’s [Code Platoon](#), which offers coding bootcamps for military veterans. These are just a few organizations offering education on the technical side; but there are bootcamps out there for URMs across roles and skill sets. Do your research—or ask employees in your organization with roles similar to the ones you’re looking to fill. Younger employees especially may have a sense of the parallel tracks talent is currently taking to learn those same skill sets.

Look for Professional Organizations that Serve URMs

We’ve already mentioned social (college) fraternities and sororities; but consider professional fraternities and sororities as well. [Alpha Omega Epsilon](#) and [Epsilon Gamma Iota](#), for example, are professional sororities for women and Black people, respectively, in engineering and engineering technology. If you’re sourcing for technical roles, there’s the [National Society of Black Engineers](#), the [Society of Women Engineers](#), [Women Tech Council](#), the [Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers](#), [Vets who Code](#), [Girls who Code](#), and [Code2040](#), “the largest racial equity community in tech.” Search, too, for professional organizations that support LGBTQIA+ folks in tech, like [Lesbians who Tech](#), [Out in Tech](#), and [TransTech Social](#).

For non-tech roles, there’s the [National Sales Network](#), the [Association of Latino Professionals for America](#), [Prospanica](#) (formerly the [National Society of Hispanic MBAs](#)), the [National Association of Black Accountants](#), [Black Product Managers](#), the [African American Marketing Association](#), the [National Black MBA Association](#), the [Executive Leadership Council](#), and more. Many of these organizations are local—[Bay Area Black Designers](#) is one that comes to mind—so don’t forget to think regionally as well. (Note: Many of these will be newer organizations, which means you may not uncover many prospective candidates affiliated with them on LinkedIn right away. But it’s worth saving a search and setting an alert so you can be notified as new talent joins. What’s more, these organizations may be worth reaching out to and forming personal relationships with. This part will take time and trust; so when you find an organization that feels like a right match for you, initiate that conversation sooner than later.)

Remember, we’re offering lists *not* to limit you to what’s here, but rather to give you a sense of how much (more) is out there. Uncovering more organizations will take some creative research on your part, and will be more or less complex depending on the role you’re looking to fill and what your diversity initiatives look like; but the time it

Use Google to compile lists of organizations for Boolean search.

For LGBTQIA+ talent, that might include:

- [The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation](#)
- [the Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [the Gender Justice League](#)
- [local LGBT centers](#)
- [gay men's choruses](#)
- [and more](#)

Do this with whatever identity group your organization is lacking.

takes will be worth it. Think critically about what phrases for organizations for underrepresented groups would look like. Even searches that include keyphrases such as “Society of Women,” “Association of Female,” “Women’s Association,” “Military Veterans,” “LGBT Professionals,” etc. should give you some ground to start on. Do people who belong to those groups necessarily identify as such? Not at all... but they’re statistically likely to feel a sense of personal responsibility toward fostering relationships with them. And that’s an important starting place.

Look for Community Organizations that Serve URMs

We can’t say with certainty that there’s a professional organization for every underrepresented group out there. But there are plenty of community organizations that support URMs; and searching for these groups—or the URMs they seek to support—along with the role you’re trying to fill may reveal a whole new body of prospective candidates. Searching LinkedIn for “LGBT” AND “engineer,” for example, will serve you up results of professionals who also belong to, or have done community work for, LGBTQIA+ organizations. You’ll get more granular with your keywords depending on your role.

(Indeed, we just tried that search now. One of the first prospective candidates LinkedIn served up was an engineer who managed a team that created a web app for LGBTQ+ and PoCs. When we replaced “LGBT” with “transgender,” we found an engineer who works for [Techtonica](#), a non-profit organization that “provides aspirational Bay Area women and non-binary adults with low incomes a pathway to careers in software engineering.” We had no idea Techtonica existed; and now we have another organization with a pulse to keep a finger on. Again, do these results mean that these prospects self-identify as LGBT, trans, or PoC? By no means! But it *does* mean that they’re doing groundwork to support minorities in other spheres.)

Use Google to compile lists of LGBT organizations for your Boolean search string. It could include everything from the [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation](#) to the [Human Rights Campaign](#) to local LGBT centers and gay men’s choruses to the [Gender Justice League](#). Lists can be compiled for any identity group you come up with: veterans, people of color, people with disabilities, Latinx, and so on.

Additional keyword strategies:

- Pronouns and surnames
- Misspellings of roles
- Skill synonyms

Additional Tips for Diversity Sourcing on LinkedIn

Think about pronouns and surnames.

Remember that feminine pronouns (she/her) will return predominantly female results on LinkedIn. Non-binary pronouns (they/them, zie/zim, etc.) will return the profiles of gender-nonconforming talent. Pair these pronouns with the skills or the role you're looking to fill. For female talent, consider Boolean strings of the most popular first names—though note this will serve you up predominantly White talent. For other minority groups, try surnames. Use the U.S. Census Bureau to identify the most common surnames for people who identify as [Black](#), [Hispanic](#), [Asian & Pacific Islander](#), and more.

Don't jump to conclusions about prospective candidates based on the amount of text on their LinkedIn profiles.

There's a lot of great talent out there that simply hasn't bothered to fill out their profiles—often because they're already perfectly happy in their careers. Just because profiles are text-poor doesn't mean that talent is experience-poor. Reach out anyway if something sparks your interest. Talent with bare-bones profiles is less likely to be contacted by recruiters, which may increase your chances of getting a response from them.

Remember that some of the best talent is trying *not* to be found.

This includes talent with text-poor profiles; it also includes professionals who purposely spell words wrong. For instance, a LinkedIn search for an “engineeer” (with an extra “e”) serves up over 16,000 results; “software engineer” (one “e”) over 3,000. Talent in engineering roles in particular tend to strategically misspell so as not to get discovered and bombarded with InMails—but you can also uncover “marketrs,” “designrs,” and more with a little creative misspelling. Again, since this talent isn't likely to be found otherwise, you may be the only one reaching out—which is all the better for your likelihood of seeing a response.

Start searching from the final page of results.

Remember, any time you enter a query into LinkedIn, you're looking at nearly the same set of results every *other* recruiter is seeing when they search for that same set of keywords. And if everyone is only looking at the first few pages of results, everyone is sourcing the same talent. But just because these folks show up *first* doesn't mean

they're the best. And as Glen Cathey has noted, the habit of starting at the top reveals a form of unconscious bias. So start with prospects on the final page. We bet you'll find some strong talent there.

Use the Boolean OR operator for “skill synonyms.”

Some software engineers call themselves software engineers. Others call themselves programmers, developers, coders, technologists, hackers... you get where we're going here. Talent in “marketing” might talk about “lead generation,” “demand generation” or “growth hacking”—indeed, they might not use the word “marketing” *at all*. The point is to ask yourself at the start of every search: Is my list of keywords inclusive of what *all* qualified talent would use in their profiles? If you're not sure, work backwards: Start with a basic keyword search (“digital marketer”), and look at the resumes that surface to see what *other* terms talent is using to describe what they do. Placing the OR operator between terms ensures you're served up all candidates who use *at least one* of those terms in their profiles. This broadens your search and reveals otherwise-hidden candidates—including the ones who don't “speak like” the rest of your team. You can also use the NOT operator to exclude the most commonly-used titles or skill sets. This surfaces qualified talent who doesn't use those “traditional” terms—because those who use them are now invisible to you.

Taking a bottoms-up approach to LinkedIn searches:

“[We] have an unconscious bias toward starting at the top [of the search results]. If you're not getting to the bottom, then you're actually not looking at some of the best candidates.”

– **Glen Cathey**

Recruiting Strategy Leader
& Boolean Search Master

“

Two of the most important things we've done at Heap are defining diversity for ourselves and broadening our understanding of what data can do. Before anything, we created proper diversity nomenclatures for the company. What did we mean, collectively, when we said, “underrepresented minority”? Who do we consider “underrepresented genders”? We don't see them often in tech. It was and still is a useful exercise, both for internal communication and for recruiting. It's very easy for sourcers and recruiters to overthink how to best recruit underrepresented talent. It's not rocket science. Even a Boolean with the term “woman” will yield a lot of results. If you're interested in diversity recruiting, I'd start with simple search strings and drill down from there.

At Heap, we love data and pay close attention to new sets of metrics. One is candidate experience: Did candidates experience belonging or micro-aggressions in their onsite? Could they see themselves thriving here? We are just starting to gather this information now, instead of relying on anecdotes or Glassdoor reviews. The other is cultivation, which is as important a metric as conversion: Am I nurturing the underrepresented talent I've searched out in our CRM for the next role? Am I actively cultivating those relationships?

Kevin Ith
Technical Sourcer



Other Ways to Use LinkedIn for Diversity Sourcing

Getting active on LinkedIn groups

Once your request to join a group has been accepted, be an active community member! Introduce yourself, engage other members, ask questions, share information. The more valuable you are as a group member, the more value people will expect you can bring to their careers when it's time to mention open roles at your org.

Follow Organizations and Join LinkedIn Groups Relevant to Your Diversity Targets

While you'll primarily be using LinkedIn's search feature for your sourcing efforts, there are other ways to use it for your longer-term strategy. After all, now that you've done all this research, you've got an impressive list of organizations your target talent is affiliated with. You've used these names to search for people on LinkedIn... but why not follow the organizations themselves? Pay attention to the comments made on posts to those organizations' pages. Who is engaging thoughtfully and intelligently? They might be your next best passive talent.

What's more, there are more than 2 million groups on LinkedIn. (We just searched for "Women in Tech" groups and LinkedIn returned 491 results—that's the number of *groups*, not the number of members!) Once your request to join the group has been approved, keep up with the conversations taking place there. Who is sharing insightful content? Again, who is engaging thoughtfully and intelligently?

We're talking about sourcing passive candidates right now; but keep in mind that establishing relationships with these organizations and groups opens you up to a world of collaborative opportunities. So even if you can only hop in a couple of times a week for a few minutes at a time, take the time to build relationships with group administrators, members, and page followers. You'll need to earn the right to eventually spread the word about opportunities at your organization.

Build Your Own Branded LinkedIn Career Page

LinkedIn's Career Pages will let you share your company story and showcase your culture. From the perspective of your diversity initiatives, this will mean telling your company's "diversity story," sharing your D&I goals, and highlighting the honors you've been awarded in the D&I space. What's so great about LinkedIn's Career Pages is that they're tailored to the user: Visitors will see the content that's likely most relevant to them based on your target audience

settings. We won't dig in too deeply here as these pages are more likely to attract active than passive talent. But a branded page that highlights diversity in your organization is collateral you'll want to point to in your outreach to underrepresented talent.

LinkedIn's "Similar Profiles" feature is available to users of LinkedIn Recruiter and Recruiter Lite.

Using a proprietary algorithm, it serves up profiles with similar:

- Experience
- Job function
- Individual social graph

The latter in particular will be valuable for your diversity efforts.

Use the "People Also Viewed" Feature to Discover Similar Profiles

When you find a terrific prospective candidate, click into "People Also Viewed" or "Similar Profiles." Using matching algorithms, LinkedIn will serve up 100 more profiles of qualified talent like the one you've discovered. This feature essentially allows you to reverse-engineer a search: Think of the most talented, highest-performing employees in your organization—or your dream hires, or talent who didn't accept your offer, or stellar talent you had to pass on in the last round of hiring. Look them up, and then dive into similar profiles. You can also look at their connections: You know as well as we do that top talent's networks are typically comprised of more top talent with similar backgrounds. This is one instance in which our human impulse to homogeneity will serve you well.

Rethinking Referrals

- White women are 12% less likely, men of color are 26% less likely, and women of color are 35% less likely to receive a referral than White men are
- To counter this tendency, reach out to minority employees past and present, or search their connections on LinkedIn
- You might also consider a diversity referral program—though carefully weigh employee maturity as it pertains to D&I before you implement one
- Friendly competitions are another way of scoring a lot of referrals at once—and even of having employees do the outreach for you

Looking Beyond LinkedIn

With 630 million members and counting, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network. There's not a single recruiter we speak with that doesn't spend the majority of their time on LinkedIn; and because so much information lives there, it will likely remain the most vital tool in your sourcing toolbox for years to come. But while the strongest diversity sourcing strategies will always *include* LinkedIn, they won't necessarily be *limited* to it.

This might mean using LinkedIn as your starting point, narrowing down your prospect pool by entering baseline requirements into advanced search, and then moving to different platforms (or out into the world) to engage. After all, talent is likely to share more about certain aspects of their lives than others on different platforms; so you can learn a lot more about them, and the things they're passionate about, in those other places. What's more, this additional intelligence means more personalization for your outreach.

Conversely, the sourcers and recruiters we talk to say that when they discover talent outside of LinkedIn, they nearly always return to the platform to learn more about the prospect's work and achievements. The greater your variety of sources, the more diverse talent you'll discover, and the more dynamic your pipeline will ultimately be. So we suggest keeping one hand in LinkedIn, and the other creatively moving through the other spaces where underrepresented, qualified talent lives. Here are some strategies:

Ask For Diverse Referrals

As a recruiter, you know what a gift a referral is: Employee referrals have the highest applicant-to-hire conversion rate, onboard more quickly—and with less expense—than applicants found elsewhere, have greater job satisfaction, and remain longer at their respective companies. This makes sense: The employee “vets” the candidate for you, and has good reason to believe there's a match. And the new employee has an acquaintance—and the beginnings of a community—even before onboarding.

The trouble is that relying on referrals can complicate diversity initiatives. Because employees are more likely to refer talent who is demographically similar to themselves, referrals tend to benefit White men more than men of color or women of any race. Indeed, according to a report from PayScale, White women are 12% less likely, men of color are

Be attentive to language when asking majority employees for referrals.

“We found that people tend to refer job candidates who look like themselves, so we decided to ask people for loose connections and leads instead of referrals.”

– Candice Morgan
Head of Diversity at Pinterest

26% less likely, and women of color are 35% less likely to receive a referral than White men are. That means a lot of majority talent is organically coming your way.

It doesn't have to be like this; but the alternative is to take a more active approach to employee referrals and put strategies in place that prioritize underrepresented talent. Here's how:

Leverage Your Employee Resource Groups or Minority Employees

If our social and professional networks tend to be made up of people who are demographically similar to us, then the best sources for diverse referrals will be your company's Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), affinity groups, or minority employees. (Former employees that fall into these identity groups are also great referral sources; consider reaching out to them as well.) Leveraging the “similarity effect” with underrepresented employees lets you see all the benefits of referral hiring while simultaneously diversifying your workforce.

What's more, search the connections of minority employees at your organization. (See? We're back to LinkedIn again.) These are connections employees might not think to refer. Employees often refer people they know are looking for work, rather than the best person they know who's doing that job. And *you* want the best person they know who's doing that job. When you uncover strong prospects connected with an employee, send that employee a link to their profile and simply ask them if they'd refer that person. If you get a “yes,” you know what to do next.

Enhance Your Referral Program

Asking for referrals from majority employees doesn't *have* to mean problems with monoculture and homogeneity over time: You just have to qualify what you're asking for. Our customer Pinterest discovered one trick to moving the needle on their diversity hiring initiatives by changing the language of their ask. “We found that people tend to refer job candidates who look like themselves,” said Candice Morgan, Head of Diversity at Pinterest, “so we decided to ask people for loose connections and leads instead of referrals.”

Some research suggests that another way to diversify is through a referral bonus. Findings from the Kapor Center, for example, suggest that offering an employee bonus for referring URMs moves the needle on diversity initiatives more than other strategies do. We'd advise you to think carefully about whether your company is ready for such a program: If implemented carelessly, it might feed into perceptions that URMs are “special” in an undeserving way, and can contribute to regrettable power dynamics and values systems (“caring” about diversity for money's sake). The strategy

If employees raise concerns about the legal implications of these incentives, remind them that the EEOC prohibits employers “from using neutral employment policies and practices that have a disproportionately negative effect on applicants” of a protected class. The data shows that employee referral programs disproportionately benefit majority talent. Your diversity referral strategies are there to offset a problematic “neutral” practice already at work in the organization: If your ask is inclusive of everyone, but nearly everyone in the organization is a White male, it’s a less impartial ask than it might appear. Ultimately, the question is: What are the forces at work on a structural level that make it more or less difficult for underrepresented folks to get in?

works best when employee maturity levels are high, and when you can communicate intentional messaging—about the business case for having a diverse organization, and about the importance your company places on D&I from both business and ethics perspectives.

Then challenge your employees—especially your White, male employees—to think beyond those first three friends that come to mind. Remind them that you’re looking beyond “traditional” profiles. While you’re at it, be explicit about your goals. Employees like to know the objectives they’re being asked to work toward.

Organize a Source-a-thon or Referral-a-thon

Not getting the quantity of referrals you’d like with these gentle asks? Then make an event out of it. These events are exactly what they sound like: social gatherings with your team that involve friendly competition to see who can refer (or source) the most prospects in a given amount of time. (Okay; maybe they also involve pizza.) If you’ve chosen to host a source-a-thon, kick off the event by educating everyone—from employees to hiring managers—on best practices for searching and sourcing, equip them with templates for their outreach, and let them craft and send the outreach themselves. You can also use these sessions to have them reach out to personal connections they think would be a good fit for your company.

Emphasize that the purpose of the event is to source a diverse pool of prospects from a wide variety of backgrounds. Depending on employee maturity levels, you may decide to make these one-on-one or smaller group sessions so that employees can feel more comfortable asking questions about the initiative or about best practices. Company-wide events, on the other hand, not only spread the word about your D&I efforts more quickly; they’re also great for showing new or younger hires how important company values are to managers and leadership. When SDRs watch the VP of Sales help source underrepresented talent, it sends a powerful message about what the organization really cares about.

Leverage Other Social Networks

Note: We don’t cover some of the more obvious engineering platforms below because they have their own diversity issues. A 2017 GitHub survey of talent on its own repositories discovered that “the gender imbalance in open source remains profound: 95% of respondents are men; just 3% are women and 1% are non-binary.” That same year, respondents to Stack Overflow’s survey found that 88.6% of users identified as male. Only 7.6% identified as female,

Hashtag starters for tech roles:

[#womeninengineering](#)

[#womenintech](#)

[#womenwhocode](#)

[#girlswocode](#)

[#womeninstem](#)

[#queerengineer](#)

[#outinSTEM](#)

[#latinxintech](#)

[#latinxengineers](#)

[#ilooklikeanengineer](#)

0.9% as gender-nonconforming, 0.5% as transgender, and 1.2% as “other.” Of course, that’s not to say you can’t find URM talent here. (See [Women of OpenStack](#)). But you may have to find roundabout ways of doing so.

Facebook

Search, find, and join Facebook Groups where the URM talent you’re looking for hangs out. [San Francisco Women in Tech](#), [Sista Circle: Black Women in Tech](#), and [Bay Area Blacks in Tech](#) are just a few that came up for us in initial local searches... but we bet there are many that will serve you. These are similar to LinkedIn groups insofar as they’re spaces in which members are willing to share more personal information—especially if they’re closed groups that require moderator permission to join. They’re also where ideas, interests, and advice get shared... and you’ll discover pretty quickly who the most dedicated members are. Involve yourself, and work on developing relationships with those in the community. Want to take it a step further? Start your own Facebook group that attracts your target prospects. It’s a great way to nurture the talent that lives there.

Instagram

Hashtags will be your best friend when it comes to seeking out passive talent here. We’ve talked at length about finding organizations that cater to the minority talent you’re looking for. [#blackgirlscodes](#), [#gracehoppercelebration](#), [#gracehopperconference](#), and [#lesbianswhotech](#) are great starter-hashtags for your tech roles. Think, too, about the kinds of hashtags individuals would use to celebrate their career decisions and their identities: [#latinxintech](#), [#latinxengineers](#), [#womeninengineering](#), [#queerengineer](#), [#ilooklikeanengineer](#). As you search, you’ll discover additional hashtags in talent’s profiles; add these to your list. Who is attending these conferences and celebrations? Who is speaking at them? Who is regularly posting with these hashtags? Your answers to these questions may point you to prospective candidates. When you find a good hashtag, follow it.

You can also search places on Instagram. Holberton School and Hackbright Academy, for example, both have hundreds—if not thousands—of posts associated with them. Dig in and see who’s showing up at these places regularly (and posting about it). Finally, go into the feeds of the organizations themselves. Who is following them, tagging them, commenting on their posts, and engaging with their other followers? As you discover those people, reach out.

Twitter

Twitter’s advanced search feature allows you to create complex searches that include both hashtags and keywords—so you can search for multiple criteria like job role, skillset, and location, along with URM or other identifying

keywords. What's more, you can filter results by tweet, account, photo, video, and news. Note that Twitter's advanced search only searches tweets; it won't pick up keywords in bios, where some of the best professional information (titles, skills, technologies) is found. You can get around this with a Google search (site:twitter.com backend AND developer AND lgbt -jobs -hiring).

You can also search Twitter for mentions of other users. We just searched for mentions of Grace Hopper (@ghc) and found tweets from former co-presenters, tweets about mentoring circles—with mentors' names included—and tweets from talent who are stoked about the organization's upcoming conference. When you discover a valuable query, convert that search into an RSS feed.

Finally, some Twitter directories exist that have already done the work for you. Check out [Blacks who Design](#), [Women who Design](#), and [Latinxs who Design](#), for example. You can filter down by role, and jump on a person's feed from there.

Slack

Slack isn't just for internal communication among business teams anymore. Slack "communities" are composed of like-minded professionals who share a common interest, and have joined the group to network, share and discover resources, and engage around what's happening in their respective fields. You can search for Slack communities at [slofile.com](#) and elsewhere. Some of our favorites are [Women in Technology](#), [Womxn in Technology](#), [#FemaleFounders](#), [LGBTQ in Technology](#), [Tecqueria \(Latinx in Tech\)](#), [Blacks in Technology](#), and [Product School](#).

“

There are three elements I think of as crucial to building a diverse team. The first is evangelizing to a variety of networks—whether that means posting videos on social of your team doing what they love, or publishing articles about your culture on Medium. You reach a broader swath of communities this way; and because the content is about your team, it’s authentic. The second is getting your hands dirty by getting out there and going to events. The third is joining communities—whether online or offline.

Slack channels have been a powerful resource for me when it comes to sourcing. It takes time—you can’t just show up one day and post a role as a stranger—but it’s very rich. All the channels I’m on now I’ve been invited to because of conversations I’ve had in the “real” world. I’ve shared something with someone, and they’ve said, “Hey, there’s this community you would really thrive in.” Once I’m there, I work very hard not to be a fly on the wall. I give myself a week, at most, to observe the stream and cadence of conversation. But I always introduce myself within the week. Slack is now part of my daily workflow: 30 minutes, 5 days a week. I spend 10 minutes on each channel, reviewing information, digesting what’s going on, and engaging. That’s where you build trust. Eventually, folks on the channel will start sharing your roles with others in their network. Just this week, someone reached out to me from a company that’s closing and said he wanted to highlight our roles. I’d never spoken to him, but he reached out. That couldn’t have happened without consistent, genuine engagement on my part.

Mawulom Nennonene
Recruiter

BetterUp

Taking Your Sourcing Strategy Offline

Don't approach URM organizations with a hiring-first mentality. Instead, arrive at events with the intention of learning what drives community members, and look for common ground or organic spaces of overlap. Demonstrate what you stand for and what your organization cares about before you mention anything about open roles.

Here's where the longer-term strategies begin: building relationships with groups and organizations that might contribute to your diversity efforts—and your talent pool—in a big way, over time. As we've mentioned, in some cases it will take time to earn trust among—and access to—the communities you want to engage. Those communities will need to see that your organization truly values D&I, and that you want to *support* them rather than leverage them for token talent. As such, don't approach them with a hiring-first mentality. Show up at events with the intention of learning what drives the community and seek out common ground or organic spaces of overlap. This isn't about inventing affinities that don't exist. Focus on teaching them about your organization, demonstrating what you stand for, describing the problems you're trying to solve and the ways you're working to become more inclusive. Over time, you can move into the “by the way, we're hiring” conversation.

Involve Everyone

We've written this content for sourcers; but we think every employee should be constantly “recruiting” for your organization. Talent acquisition doesn't have a monopoly on networking; employees across teams and at every level of the organization have been building relationships with talent elsewhere for years—if not decades. Encourage everyone in the company to make networking a priority whenever possible. This may mean explaining to managers the importance of allotting time for team members to participate in groups and attend events. Building those considerations into your company DNA will eventually ensure that bringing diverse talent into your pipeline is the result of an assemblage of organic, day-to-day processes that have become second nature for everyone in your organization.

Meetups

Like LinkedIn groups, meetups are ready-made social hubs where underrepresented talent with shared interests is already spending time. [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) is a great platform to search for community and professional events happening near you that would likely attract your target prospects. [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com) is another.

Meetup.com's search feature isn't great, so you may have to be willing to search for basic keywords and scroll. (You can also use Google.) But if you're willing to give it some time, you'll find groups near you. We just performed a basic

Remember: Talent Acquisition doesn't have a monopoly on networking

We can't stress enough the importance of reminding everyone in your company that they're part of the broader "recruiting org." Employees' willingness to keep eyes and ears open in every encounter they have in the world is invaluable to your diversity sourcing strategy. Encourage everyone to prioritize networking—for the sake of your team, your company culture, and your product offering. (We all know by now that more diverse teams make better products and stronger businesses.)

search using the “Tech” tag for events happening within 25 miles of San Francisco and took a minute to scroll down. We found a “Women in AI Ethics Networking Meetup,” a “Devs with Disabilities” event, and two groups that are now on our radar: [Women who Code East Bay](#) and [Bay Area Women in Machine Learning and Data Science](#). Meetup.com also allows you to search globally for groups that meet around specific topics: [Product Management](#) or [Social Media Marketing](#), for instance. Take time to get to know the administrator and members of the groups you choose to learn *about* and *from*. Go to their events, or send someone from your team to participate and network *for* you. Many of these groups meet regularly, giving you the opportunity to gradually build those relationships.

On Eventbrite (which has a better search feature), a basic search for “women in tech” surfaced events from “Persian Women in Tech” to “Women Who Code Cloud Summit” to the “Vets in Tech Veteran’s Day Gala”—and this was just on page 1 of 49 pages of results. Depending on your search results, you might have plenty of room to get granular.

Host Your Own Networking Events

Over time, you may start hosting your own offline events for underrepresented talent in your community. These events will give attendees the chance to see what’s behind-the-scenes of your company (assuming you host them onsite). They’ll also make it easier for employees to attend—which means prospective talent can get a firsthand experience of what interpersonal dynamics, and your culture as a whole, feels like. Of course, attending external events for underrepresented communities first—and paying attention to how they’re run—will give you a sense of what makes a successful event. And the more talent you know from having attended other events, the bigger your invite list will be.

Make sure your event title addresses the interests—and your speakers represent the communities—you hope to engage. Even if you don’t advertise your tech talk as an event for “women who code” or “queers who code,” if two out of the four people on the panel you put together are women, and one is openly gay, you’ll probably end up with an audience that’s skewed in your favor. Maybe these turn into quarterly or biannual events. The relationships you build at these hosted events will ripple out far beyond the conversations you have with attendees.

Partner with Organizations that Represent the Communities You Want to Reach

“Partnership” can take many forms: You’ll be limited only by your creativity here. Think about how you can strategically partner with the organizations you feel most aligned with to build your employer brand. Maybe this means offering to

“Five years after a company implements a college recruitment program targeting female employees, the share of White women, Black women, Hispanic women, and Asian-American women in its management rises by about 10% on average.”

– **Frank Dobbin**
Harvard University

– **Alexandra Kalev**
Tel Aviv University

host events for groups who’ve grown beyond their current venue. Maybe it means setting up a table at their events. Maybe it means sending an “ambassador” from your organization to speak on their panels—an excellent opportunity to share the relevant work your company is doing, gain visibility and credibility, and network with prospective candidates. Maybe it means sponsorship, either of particular events or of the organization as a whole. Maybe it means connecting some of the most promising students at a given bootcamp with mentors at your company. Maybe it even means starting affiliate chapters or sections of organizations like the [Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers](#) or the [Society of Women Engineers](#).

Over time, these partnerships might give you the opportunity to meet more active job-seekers as well, by posting your job openings to their communities. (There are plenty of organizations in the hiring space that are already looking for partners: [Opportunity@Work](#), for example, or [Year Up](#).) Whether active or passive, these relationships will fundamentally change the makeup of your talent pipeline.

Collaborate with Colleges and Universities

Campus recruitment is a terrific way to get underrepresented talent in your pipeline. Indeed, a study of more than 800 U.S. companies by professors at Harvard and Tel Aviv University found that “five years after a company implements a college recruitment program targeting female employees, the share of White women, Black women, Hispanic women, and Asian-American women in its management rises by about 10% on average.” What’s more, “a program focused on minority recruitment increases the proportion of Black male managers by 8% and Black female managers by 9%.” So don’t underestimate the power of college recruitment to your diversity initiatives.

We’ve discussed seeking out Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, women’s colleges, and other schools with high diversity indexes. But remember, schools that *don’t* fall into these categories still have organizations for minority students: LGBTQIA+ groups, multicultural organizations, collegiate chapters of professional organizations for underrepresented talent, and so on. Contact these organizations and see how you might partner with them. Maybe this means nothing more than ensuring they get word out to their members that your organization will be at the college’s next recruiting event. Maybe it means offering internships and scholarships to students from underrepresented groups. Short-term, formal internship programs for minority students whose skills align with your company’s needs allow you to complete outstanding projects, make future employees responsible for real deliverables, give them the opportunity to be mentored by your employees, and earn loyalty from them—as well as from their respective universities.

Some job sites for URM demographics:

- [Jopwell](#)
- [Power to Fly](#)
- [Hirepurpose](#)
- [GettingHired.com](#)
- [Recruit Disability](#)
- [include.io](#)
- [Women who Code](#)

Maybe you partner with campus groups to sponsor hackathons. Maybe you contact professors directly and ask them to put you in touch with their top-performing minority students. Again, let yourself get creative here. You can organize events for underrepresented student groups that aren't even *about* hiring. In 2016, LinkedIn scrapped its traditional college recruitment model and began offering its "Accelerate U" program, inviting students from area schools to day-long events geared toward helping soon-to-be-graduates "build [their] personal brand, network confidently, maximize interview success, and accelerate towards the career of [their] dreams"... even if that career *wasn't* with LinkedIn. The result? A 23% increase in underrepresented minority hiring in their global sales organization.

Don't Forget the Active Job-Seekers

There's more passive than active talent out there these days—but there's still plenty of underrepresented talent that's looking. And while many of those job-seekers are engaging with companies on social media, these aren't the only channels they're turning to. Job sites for underrepresented talent from specific demographics include [Jopwell](#) (for Black, Latinx, and Native American job-seekers), [Power to Fly](#) (for women), [Hirepurpose](#) (for veterans, service members, and military spouses), [GettingHired.com](#) and [Recruit Disability](#) (both for job-seekers with disabilities), [include.io](#) (which helps "underrepresented techies find their dream job"), [Women who Code](#), and more.

Some of them—like [GettingHired.com](#)—also host virtual career fairs: cost-friendly events that allow you to tap into specific talent pools. You might look into the [Bender Virtual Career Fair](#) for talent with disabilities, or [Veteran Recruiting's](#) annual Virtual Career Fair, which has helped hire more than 212,000 veterans and military spouses for 400 of the Fortune 1000 companies, and others. Other organizations that support minority hiring hold in-person career fairs all over the country. [Out Professional Network's](#) career fairs in support of the LGBT community and [Recruit Military's](#) career fairs are two such examples.

The more diverse your channels for active diverse talent, the better. What websites is your target talent pool on? What magazines are they reading? What podcasts are they listening to? What forums are they active on? What social platforms do they live on, and is it worth experimenting with ads that target them? (Note: If you run ads on these platforms, make sure your parameters aren't unintentionally discriminatory.) Ariana Moon, Recruiting Manager for our partner Greenhouse, said that the ATS "saw a huge impact on our pipeline once we began listing jobs on diversity recruiting sites such as NAACP and Ebony."

However you can best combine sourcing passive candidates with getting your job openings in front of the right active candidates, *do* that—and between these two things, you'll be tapping into the best, and most diverse, marketplace talent.

How Gem Can Help

At Gem, we're working hard to constantly expand our diversity reporting capabilities. Sourcers can currently report gender (male/female/non-binary/unknown) by person or in aggregate, so that managers can determine if there's bias in the sourcing process, whether by role or by recruiter. We also offer custom fields for tracking other underrepresented groups that TA teams can customize based on their diversity initiatives. You can track any of these fields throughout the process—from response rates to initial outreach all the way through the interview—with our Pipeline Analytics, to determine where your funnel is leaky and zero in on stages where you're falling short on equitable hiring. Knowing the breakdown of your sourcing efforts helps you move the needle on them over time.

Gem's A/B testing feature allows you to try out new D&I content and discover what prospective candidates most want to hear about. We also want to help you think holistically about your D&I strategy, from events to content; so we've integrated with Splash so you can track prospects that RSVP and/or attend your diversity events, and follow up with them in automated (yet personalized) sequences afterwards. And as we work on our capabilities on the product side, we'll keep offering content on best practices for your diversity sourcing and recruiting initiatives.

To learn more about the Gem recruiting platform and see a demo, visit gem.com





Lauren Shufan, Author

Lauren is a content strategist with a penchant for 16th-century literature. When she's not trying to tap into talent teams' pain points, she's on her yoga mat or hiking the hills of Marin County. Come at her with your favorite Shakespeare quote.

Gem is an all-in-one recruiting platform that integrates with LinkedIn, email, and your Applicant Tracking System (ATS). We enable data-driven, world-class recruiting teams to find, engage, and nurture top talent. With Gem, recruiting teams can manage candidate pipeline with predictability.

To learn more and see a demo, visit
gem.com