Diversity in Early-Career Tech Policy Roles

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Surveying Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities in the Field

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

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Contents

Executive Summary

In 2021, Public Knowledge published the first iteration of this study, led by Tsion Tesfaye, which identified structural barriers to diversity in early-career technology policy roles: reliance on narrow networks, exclusionary job descriptions, inequities in compensation, and the absence of robust demographic data collection. These findings informed Public Knowledge's own Equity Council, partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and adjustments to hiring practices.

In 2025, amid heightened political scrutiny and dismantling of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, this updated study expands the scope and methodology. We surveyed 13 technology policy organizations and convened 17 early-career technology policy professionals. Key insights include:

- **Recruitment remains narrow.** Job opportunities remain largely circulated within organizational websites and established networks, with limited outreach to Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), affinity groups, or community-based organizations, which continues to restrict access for underrepresented candidates.

- **On-ramps are improving but remain inequitable.** Paid internships are now the dominant early-career on-ramp, but few organizations offer externships or other pathways, and financial barriers still shape who can participate.

- **Bias-reduction is partial.** Structured interviews are widely used to reduce bias, yet practices such as blind resume reviews, scoring rubrics, and diverse interview panels are inconsistently adopted across organizations.

- **Policies outpace practice.** Most organizations report having formal inclusivity policies, but the effectiveness of these policies in improving diverse hiring is mixed, and demographic data collection remains uneven.

Tinuola Bisola Adebukola

- **Retention depends on clarity.** Mentorship and sponsorship programs are the most common strategies for retention, though early-career professionals emphasized the need for clear promotion pathways, stronger onboarding processes, and opportunities to build policy-writing skills.

- **Leadership representation lags.** Diversity in leadership and decision-making spaces remains limited, with many early-career professionals reporting that their lived experiences are only sometimes recognized or valued.

- **The external climate is chilling.** Organizations report mixed effects from the external political climate, with most seeing little impact but some noting that federal and state-level legal and regulatory backlash of DEI has created hesitancy around data collection and public commitments.

This study reaffirms that diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts targeted specifically at early-career roles such as internships, fellowships, entry-level hiring, and first-stage promotion pathways are foundational to shaping long-term leadership pipelines in the technology policy field. When access, support, and advancement are equitable at the point of entry, the field is more likely to produce future leaders who reflect the communities their policies affect. To that end, this report introduces the Workplace Pulse Survey: a short, equity-focused tool designed to help organizations regularly assess belonging, fairness, and growth opportunities. It proposes actionable recommendations for expanding recruitment beyond traditional networks, embedding bias safeguards into hiring processes, designing equitable retention and promotion structures, and establishing ongoing accountability mechanisms to ensure progress is measured, sustained, and responsive over time.

This research arrives at a pivotal moment. As political backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion intensifies, the future of technology policy will be shaped by who is allowed to enter, remain, and advance in the field. Equity at the point of entry is equity in leadership decades from now. While recent years have brought progress in access and infrastructure, these gains remain fragile without sustained accountability and institutional courage. Embedding equity into early-career pathways is not a matter of compliance or trend-following—it is an investment in the legitimacy, effectiveness, and democratic credibility of technology policy itself.

External Climate

The current external climate shaping diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts is rooted in a broader political backlash against perceived social and racial progress. In recent years, a resurgence of right-wing and reactionary political movements has targeted DEI initiatives across public, private, and nonprofit sectors, framing them as legally risky, ideologically driven, or incompatible with merit-based systems. This environment has been amplified by federal and state-level actions, litigation threats, and shareholder pressure, creating tangible constraints on how organizations articulate, measure, and sustain equity commitments.

Organizations are operating in a fraught policy environment for DEI that hinders them from enforcing and embedding equity, justice, and liberation into institutional structures. In 2024–2025, multiple large technology companies reduced or reframed DEI programs, removed targets, and scrubbed diversity language from filings under legal and shareholder pressure; others defended or expanded commitments (Hyrynsalmi et al., 2025). The broader political backlash against DEI is also shaping hiring. As Tafesse (2025) and Hyrynsalmi et al. (2025) document, many organizations are retreating from explicit diversity targets or data collection out of fear of legal or shareholder scrutiny. One consequence is the quiet abandonment of structured DEI safeguards.

Tafesse (2025) also warns that, “Moves that appear calibrated to comply with the Trump administration’s war on DEI will ultimately hurt the tech industry in the long run.” The practical effect is a chilling of demographic data collection and transparency which are crucial mechanisms that enable accountability. The strategic risk runs beyond ethics: “homogeneous teams are more likely to fail” at building artificial intelligence, platforms, and policies that must serve diverse users across cultures and abilities (Tafesse, 2025). At the same time, some leaders have shown credible resistance. Apple shareholders, for example, overwhelmingly rejected proposals to dismantle DEI, signaling that, “In a world that requires understanding and a grasp of complexity, DEI is a competitive necessity” (Tafesse, 2025). For mission-driven technology policy organizations, funder cover, smart communications, and annualized accountability can help preserve substance even when public branding becomes risk-averse (de Souza Santos et al., 2025; Hyrynsalmi et al., 2025).

Background & Context

The first iteration of this research was authored by Tsion Tesfaye, Communications Justice Fellow at Public Knowledge, and released in 2021. That baseline study provided the first systematic insight into the experiences of early-career professionals in technology policy, particularly as they related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Findings highlighted how job opportunities were shared primarily within narrow policy networks, how job descriptions often inadvertently excluded candidates without traditional technical or legal backgrounds, how inequities in compensation created barriers to entry, and how a lack of demographic data limited transparency and accountability.

These insights spurred organizational change within Public Knowledge itself. Public Knowledge strengthened existing partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and redesigned its fellowship program to improve accessibility. In response to the report's findings, the Equity Council was subsequently established to advance internal DEI practice and institutional change. Public Knowledge then revamped its recruitment/hiring policies, expanded recruitment/hiring practices, and created structures that support sustainable, wide-scale transformation that advances equity. Public Knowledge also launched the Privileged Conversations monthly event series to provide students and recent graduates of color with exposure to a network of tech policy leaders and career pathways in the field. The original study also resonated across the technology policy field, informing dialogue on how nonprofits and advocacy groups might expand their hiring pipelines.

This 2025 study builds on that baseline to measure progress and capture emerging challenges. Unlike the first study, which was centered mostly on D.C.-based nonprofits, this iteration broadened the scope to include more organizations, and incorporated the voices of early-career professionals through a survey. We also engaged an institutional and systemic change consultant to refine our methodology, and closely partnered with the Public Knowledge Equity Council and the MAP Foundation to ensure rigor and accountability. This expansion reflects both the opportunity and the urgency of measuring DEI progress at a time when political challenges to DEI initiatives have intensified.

Methodology & Study Design

To assess the state of diversity in early-career technology policy roles, we designed a mixed-methods approach that combined an organizational survey with a focus group of early-career professionals. The survey instrument was updated from the 2019–2021 study, modernized to include new DEI language, and framed to balance accuracy with sensitivity given the current political climate. Questions were hosted on SurveyMonkey and were anonymized.

The survey was distributed to 30 technology policy organizations across diverse geographies and missions. Thirteen organizations responded. Questions covered hiring and recruitment practices, DEI policies, workplace culture, retention strategies, demographic data collection, and the impact of federal policies. Where possible, responses were compared to baseline findings from 2019–2021.

To complement the survey, we also included a group of 17 early-career professionals working in technology policy. The questions explored their lived experiences, perceptions of preparedness, role clarity, leadership culture, psychological safety, confidence engaging in the workplace, access to mentorship, and perceptions of diversity and culture in their organizations. These qualitative data points provide rich context for the quantitative survey findings.

Advisory support was integral. Public Knowledge's Equity Council provided iterative feedback; the MAP Foundation contributed through its Mind Meld, a collaborative input process, to refine methodology; and Strategic Change Solutions served as an institutional and systemic change consultant to ensure alignment with best practices in DEI research. A clear project timeline was established with milestones for survey launch, focus group facilitation, data analysis, and publication.

Limitations include a modest sample size and potential non-response bias. The political climate may also have discouraged some organizations from participating or disclosing sensitive demographic information.

Findings & Emerging Themes

This section synthesizes findings from both the organizational survey (main group) and the focus group survey (early-career professionals in technology policy). It presents results by group, followed by common themes across both data sources.

Organizational Survey Findings

Attracting Talent

Where organizations look for candidates

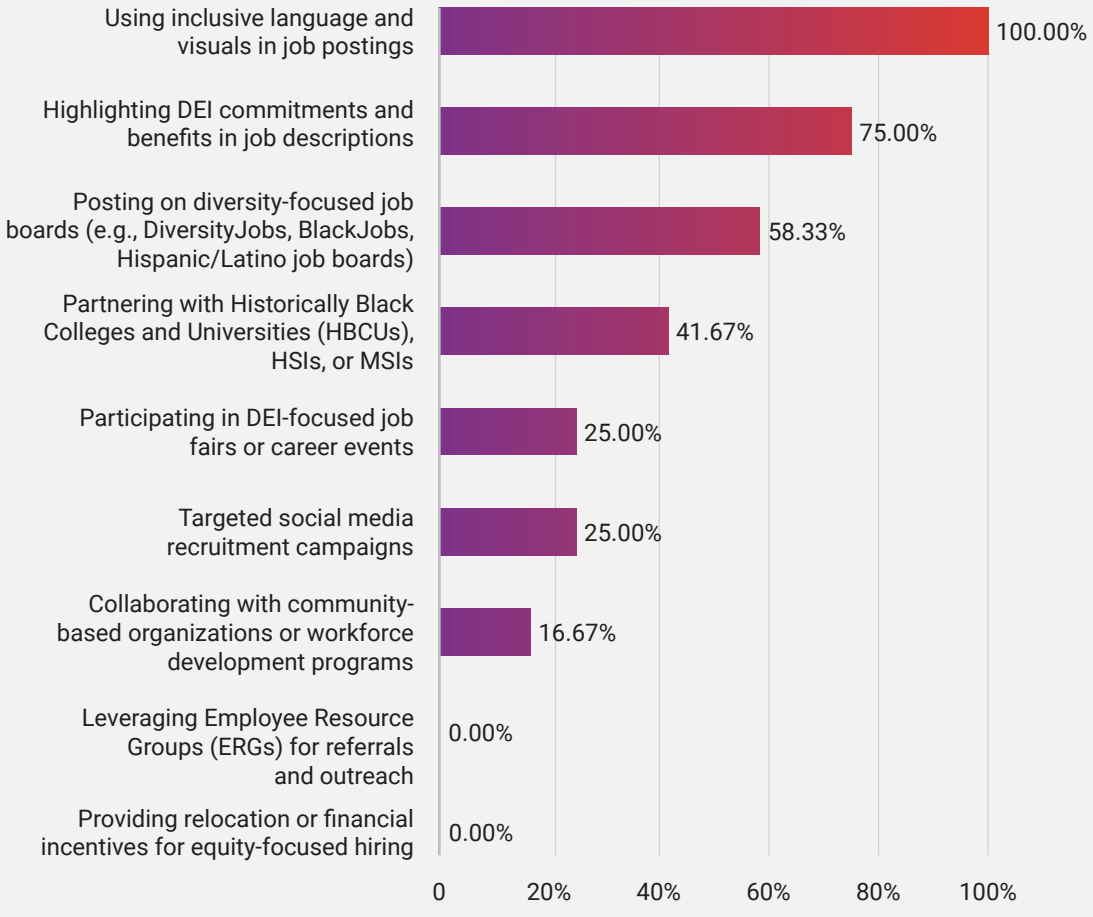
The organizational survey data revealed that most organizations rely heavily on traditional recruitment methods, particularly posting opportunities on their websites. This practice was universal among respondents, with 100% reporting website postings as their primary channel. All organizations in our sample reported posting openings on their own websites, and most also used large, general job boards (e.g., LinkedIn, Idealist). Beyond these mainstream channels, outreach practices varied widely.

Only a few described outreach to Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), affinity/alumni networks, or community-based organizations; most said they engage these channels "sometimes" or "as capacity allows." Survey participants emphasized networking reliance in job candidacy. One response said, "Much of policy networking relies on faculty with signifiers of wealth and success." This pattern largely mirrors the pipeline dynamics flagged in the 2019–2021 baseline and in public-sector research: opportunities tend to circulate inside the same well-trodden networks, which reward those who are well-networked and inadvertently screen out capable candidates with fewer insider ties (Goldman et al., 2021; Tesfaye, 2021). While diversity-focused job boards are occasionally used, they remain underleveraged, and very few organizations reported sustained partnerships with universities that serve historically underrepresented groups. These gaps highlight a structural weakness in broadening participation: talent exists, but it is not being intentionally reached.

How roles are framed to the market

Respondents routinely highlighted features that resonate with early-career candidates such as mission, impact, and policy learning opportunities in job posts. Significantly, 100% of respondents reported using inclusive language in postings and 75% highlighted DEI commitments. However, none of the organizations reported proactively auditing postings for exclusionary phrasing, credential creep, or unnecessary experience requirements. This aligns with scholarship warning that headcount-focused "broadening participation" rhetoric can mask deeper structural filters in how jobs are defined and signaled (Alegria, 2020).

Figure 1. What strategies does your organization use to attract candidates from underrepresented backgrounds?



Survey participants also noticed that several said technology policy job postings still over-emphasize elite degrees or prior D.C. policy experience, making otherwise qualified applicants self-select out. One participant noted: "You generally need… a higher degree – to advance. It took me too long to get my Master's degree, and only after did career opportunities become much more plentiful (I received more job offers, higher pay ranges, etc)."

Who actually hears about the jobs

Early-career tech professionals repeatedly described learning about roles via their network. One participant summarized:"Much [of] policy networking relies on faculty with signifiers of wealth and success." These anecdotes track with literature findings that awareness and access is often the barrier for underrepresented groups, especially when communications is siloed (Goldman et al., 2021). Furthermore, only 41% of organizations reported partnering engagements with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, or affinity groups. To address this gap, research has shown that visibility is the binding constraint, and visibility increases when institutions invest in sustained relationships rather than episodic outreach (Alegria, 2020; Tesfaye, 2021).

What changed since 2021 and what didn't

Compared to the baseline, we see incremental movement: more cross-posting on national boards; more mention of mission and skills development; and modest growth in informal connections to diverse student groups. But the center of gravity still sits with organizational websites and major platforms, with limited evidence of field-wide, coordinated pipelines into MSIs, community colleges, regional universities, or civic/community organizations. That asymmetry is precisely what the baseline cautioned would persist without structural investment (Tesfaye, 2021).

External climate effects on outreach

A few respondents stated that the current backlash against DEI has made them more cautious about how and where they describe diversity commitments in outward-facing materials. None reported stopping outreach altogether, but several described "neutral" language choices or a preference to emphasize "fairness," "team performance," or "belonging" over explicit "DEI" framing; preserving practices while changing labels to reduce political exposure (de Souza Santos et al., 2025; Hyrynsalmi et al., 2025). The risk, as those studies note, is that if measurement and accountability also go quiet, the pipeline narrows further even when intent remains.

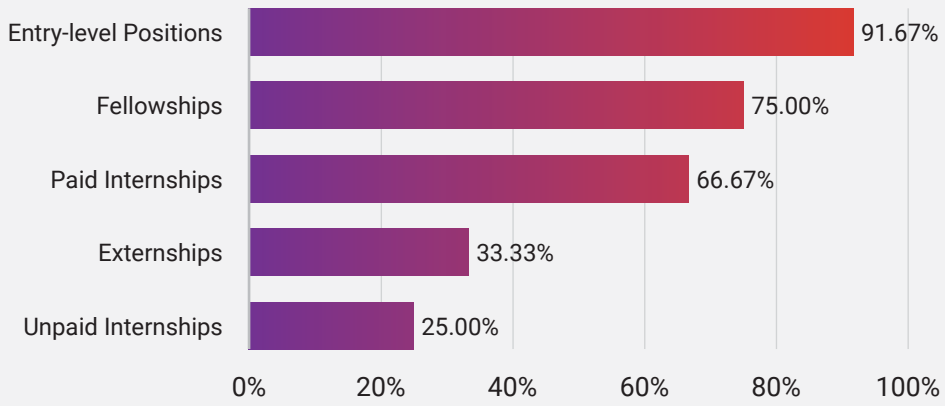
Why this matters for long-term representation

Career-lifecycle research shows that identity, information access, and inclusion jointly shape career choice (Roberson et al., 2024). If discovery is network-bound and signals discourage non-traditional applicants, fewer underrepresented candidates even enter the consideration set. That is a solvable problem, but only with proactive, repeatable outreach systems that make opportunity visible where talent already lives.

On-Ramps to the Field

Technology policy organizations reported that internships are the most common on-ramps into the field followed by fellowships. Externships remain virtually absent despite their potential to connect students to policy organizations without creating financial burdens. About 66% of respondents indicated offering paid internships, which marks some progress since the earlier study where unpaid or low-paid internships were widespread. The organizational emphasis on internships suggests a growing recognition of the financial barriers that unpaid opportunities pose. Survey participants stressed that financial support was essential for staying in the field. The RAND's study of Southern California public-sector careers found unpaid internships were a major bottleneck for low-income and minority candidates, reinforcing inequities in who can access public service pipelines (Goldman et al., 2021). Several said they would not have been able to continue without stipends or wage support, echoing critiques in the 2019 study that racial wealth gaps make unpaid internships exclusionary.

Figure 2. What types of early-career roles does your organization offer?



Equity implications and broader context

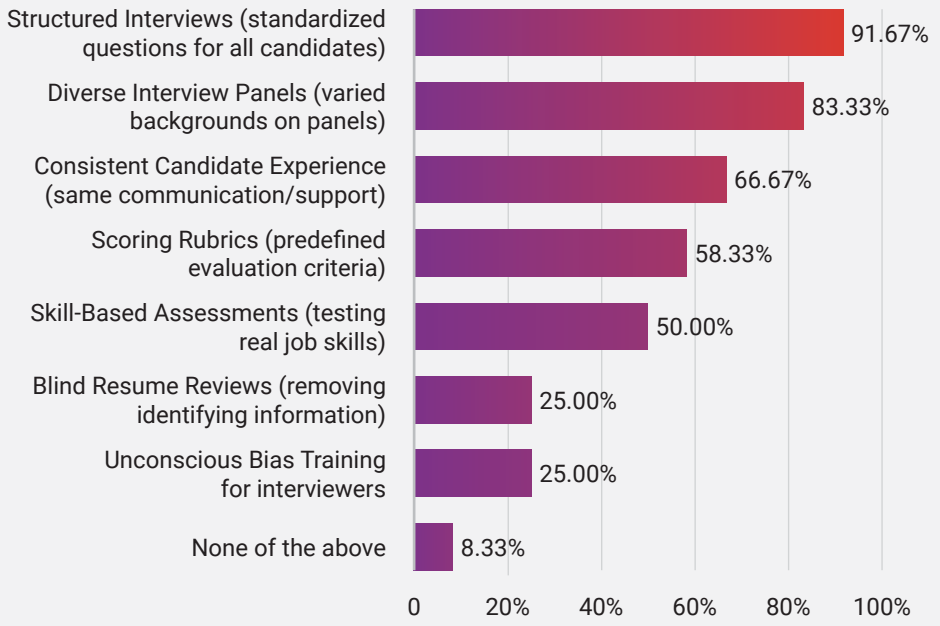
The observed pattern is that while progress has been made on pay, compensation often remains misaligned with local living costs, allowing exclusionary dynamics to persist. Research on women of color in IT emphasizes that recruitment is only effective when on-ramps are both accessible and equitable (Trahan, 2023). Without systemic redesign, internships risk perpetuating privilege: candidates who can afford to live in high-cost-of-living policy and technology hubs benefit disproportionately, as many federally focused and technology policy organizations remain concentrated in cities such as Washington, D.C. In the long run, this dynamic undermines diversity in leadership pipelines; as Tafesse (2025) argues, short-term "savings" on entry programs create long-term innovation risk. Career-lifecycle research further shows that equitable on-ramps shape not only entry, but also how candidates adjust, persist, and eventually advance into leadership (Roberson et al., 2024).

Selection and Bias Reduction

Organizations reported widespread adoption of structured interviews, with over 90% indicating use of standardized questions for all candidates. This represents meaningful progress since the 2019–2021 baseline, where interviews were more ad hoc and prone to subjectivity. Structured interviews are a proven mechanism to reduce bias by creating consistency across applicants (Goldman et al., 2021). However, other bias-mitigating strategies were far less common. Blind resume reviews, use of scoring rubrics, and diverse interview panels were underutilized, suggesting that most organizations rely on one tool while leaving other best practices underutilized. Research shows blind reviews can mitigate implicit bias by removing names, schools, and demographic cues from initial screening (Rivera, 2015). Similarly, rubrics ensure candidates are evaluated on core skills rather than subjective impressions or "fit."

Roberson et al. (2024) argue that inclusion processes–feeling valued as an insider–begin as early as selection. If candidates see no one with shared lived experience on the panel, or sense that their perspectives are being evaluated through a narrow cultural lens, they internalize the message that their identity may not belong in that organization long-term. While structured interviews provide some protection, bias still emerges when panels lack diversity or when job postings are framed in ways that inadvertently exclude candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. A multi-layered approach (rubrics + panel diversity + anonymized screens where feasible) is what research ties to fairer outcomes (Goldman et al., 2021).

Figure 3. What interviewing strategies do you use to reduce bias?



The literature is clear: without robust, multi-layered bias-reduction practices, organizations risk reproducing the same narrow pipelines they claim to address. Goldman et al. (2021) and Rivera (2015) emphasize that structured interventions like rubrics, blind screening, and diverse panels are among the only legally durable ways to ensure fairness. Roberson et al. (2024) add that selection bias not only affects entry but it also cascades across the career lifecycle, shaping adjustment and exit decisions as candidates navigate whether they feel valued or tokenized.

Selection practices in technology policy organizations show progress. However, true bias reduction requires embedding equity mechanisms across the entire selection process, not relying on a single tool.

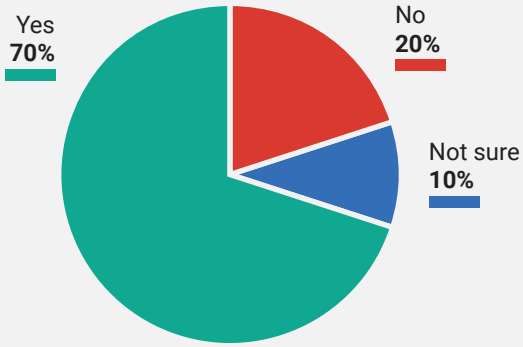
Policies, Feedback, and Measurement

Formal policies exist, but practice lags

Out of the organizations surveyed, 70% reported having a formal policy for fostering inclusivity, while 20% reported having no formal policy and 10% were unsure. Among organizations without a codified policy, some emphasized that inclusion was embedded informally in organizational culture and others stated that it is articulated through written commitments. As one respondent noted, “While we don’t currently have a formal, codified DEI policy, our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is reflected in our day-to-day practices and organizational culture.”

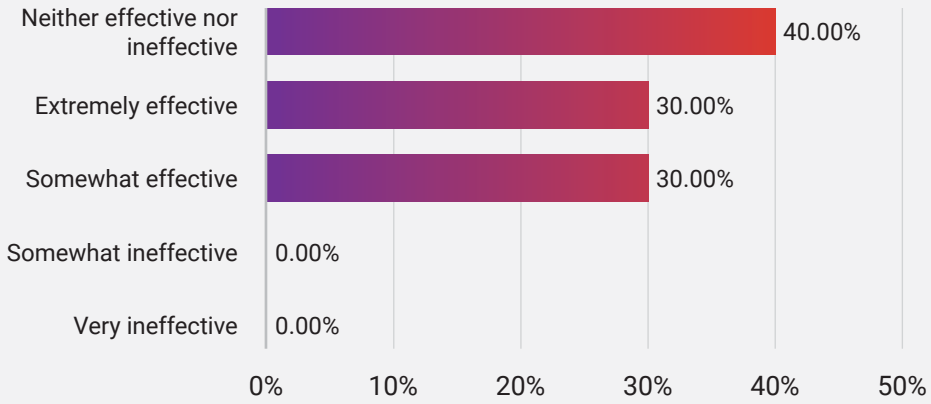
However, the absence of formalization appears to have concrete implications for prioritization and accountability. When asked specifically about increasing diversity in early-career technology policy roles, another organization without a formal policy stated, “We do not prioritize it specifically in early-careers (rather [we] try to keep it general to all hires).” This distinction matters: without explicit focus on early-career roles, inclusion efforts risk overlooking the very entry points that shape long-term workforce and leadership pipelines. In practice, reliance on informal norms or generalized commitments limits transparency, makes progress difficult to measure, and weakens accountability for equitable outcomes.

Figure 4. Does your organization have a formal policy for fostering inclusivity?



About 60% rated their formal equity policy as being either “extremely effective” or “somewhat effective” in helping hire candidates from underrepresented backgrounds; the other 40% rated it as being neither effective or ineffective. One organization mentioned, “We recently implemented our DEI statement so it’s too early to tell whether or not it has impacted hiring a candidate from an underrepresented background.” On paper, our findings signal significant progress since Tesfaye’s 2019–2021 baseline, where only a handful of groups reported codified policies. Yet, the policies described in our survey responses often lacked operational detail: few included explicit accountability measures, timelines, or designated leadership responsibility. As one respondent put it: “We have a broadly worded DEI statement and general guidance of different situations in which the organization can incorporate or consider DEI.” This reflects a wider pattern across sectors. Hyrynsalmi et al. (2025) observe that many companies are renaming or reframing DEI under neutral terms like “fairness” or “team performance” while reducing visibility of concrete actions. Such rebranding may preserve rhetoric but risks hollowing out structural change. In our study, this disconnect was palpable. Organizations claim to value inclusivity, but employees often perceive such claims as symbolic.

Figure 5. How effective has the formal equity policy been in helping hire candidates from underrepresented backgrounds?



Feedback mechanisms

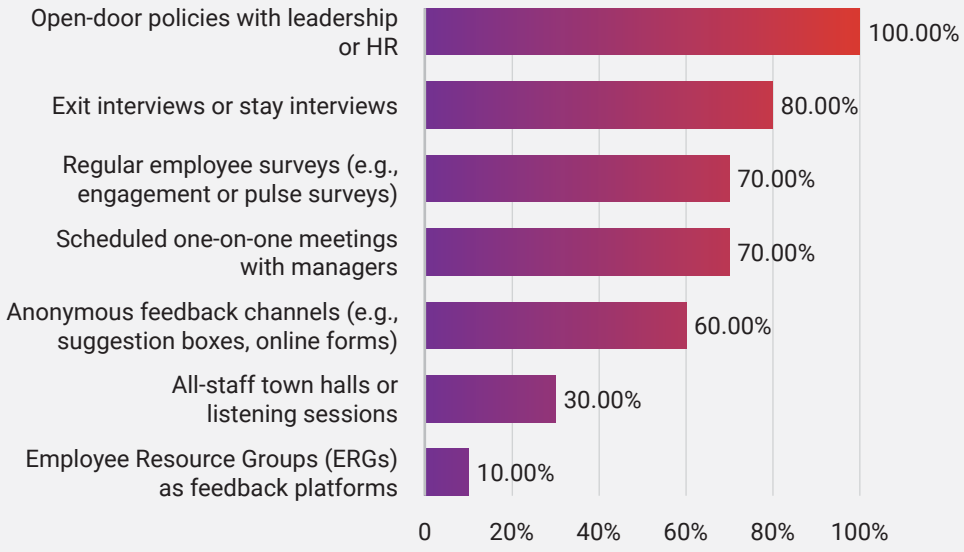
Open-door policies and informal feedback followed by employee engagement surveys were the most commonly cited tool for assessing inclusivity. Goldman et al. (2021) document that feedback without follow-through undermines trust and discourages underrepresented employees from raising concerns. Roberson et al. (2024) further highlight that inclusion–the feeling of being both valued and safe–is not achieved through surveys alone, but through demonstrated responsiveness and cultural change.

Demographic data

One of the most striking gaps is the uneven collection of demographic data. Only 60% of organizations collect demographic data on early career hires. Some reported limited tracking (e.g., voluntary disclosure at onboarding), while others admitted they did not collect any demographic information at all. This absence of data undermines accountability, making it impossible to evaluate whether inclusivity policies are translating into equitable outcomes.

The reluctance is political. As Tafesse (2025) and de Souza Santos et al. (2025) document, the chilling effect of anti-DEI rhetoric has made organizations wary of collecting demographic data or publishing diversity reports. One survey respondent hinted at this climate: “We’d like to collect better data, but it feels risky to ask right now.” This climate risk means that the very transparency tools needed to sustain progress are under attack, leaving organizations with blind spots about their workforce composition.

Figure 6. How does your organization encourage employees to share honest feedback?



Policies, feedback, and measurement are the backbone of sustainable DEI. Our study shows that while most organizations now have formal inclusivity policies, they remain unevenly operationalized, inconsistently measured, and fragile under political pressure. Without stronger accountability structures, standardized data collection, anti-retaliation protections, and transparent reporting, policies risk being symbolic rather than transformative.

Figure 7. Does your organization collect demographic data on early-career hires?

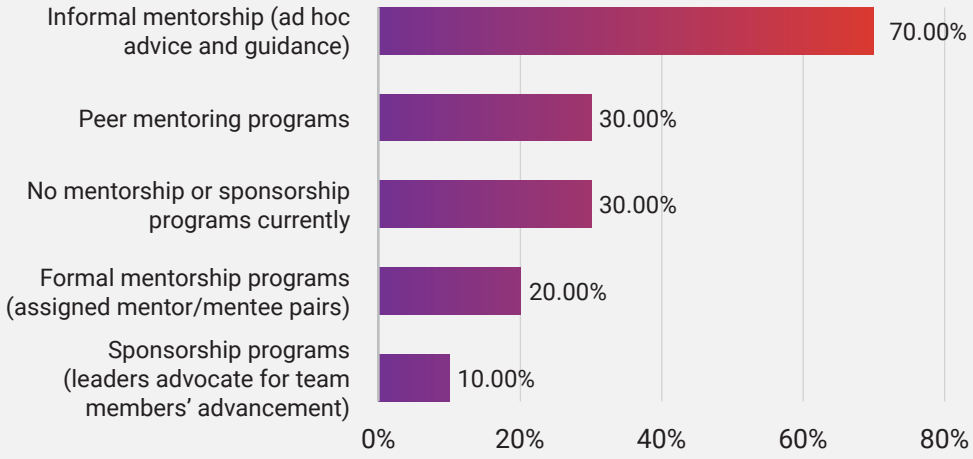
Retention and Advancement

About 60% of the organizations stated that they have been “successful” or “very successful” in retaining talent from underrepresented communities. Organizations highlighted professional development opportunities and regular salary and promotion reviews as the most common strategies for retaining talent from underrepresented groups. Mentorship or sponsorship programs were also cited as supportive mechanisms.

Figure 8. Which strategies has your organization used to retain talent from underrepresented communities? (Select all that apply)

Half of the respondents reported offering some form of mentorship, with a smaller subset pointing to sponsorship, where senior leaders actively advocate for protégés. Research consistently shows that mentorship alone does not guarantee equitable advancement. Trahan (2023) emphasizes that structured mentorship and sponsorship programs, not informal arrangements, are critical for retaining women of color in tech and IT fields. Sponsorship in particular creates measurable advancement outcomes because it ties career mobility to leadership advocacy. Without it, mentorship risks being advice without action.

Figure 9. Which mentorship or sponsorship programs has your organization implemented to enhance access to opportunities for team members from underrepresented groups? (Select all that apply)

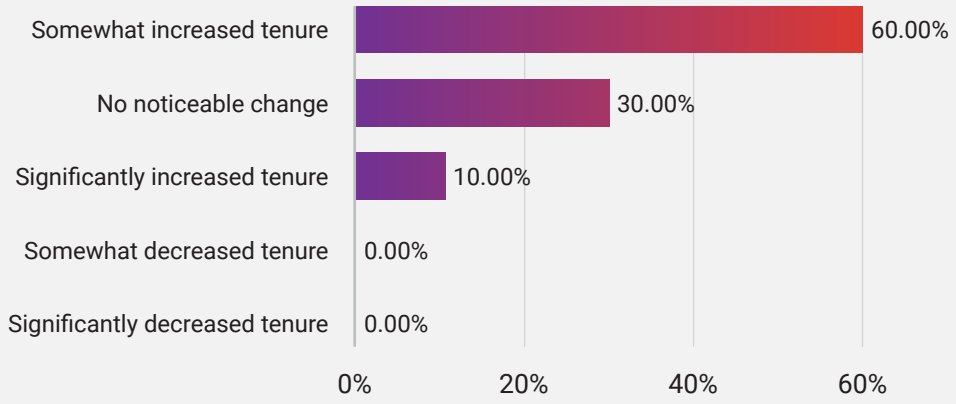


Retention as innovation strategy

Beyond equity, retention matters for organizational performance. Tafesse (2025) and McKinsey data show that diverse teams outperform homogenous ones in innovation and financial returns. Losing early-career professionals of color, women, or first-generation professionals is not only a moral failure but also a strategic liability. Homogenous leadership teams are less able to design policies and technologies that serve diverse populations.

Our findings show that retention and advancement remain fragile in early-career technology policy roles. As one early-career participant put it, "There [are] no set career paths and things are always in flux," underscoring how ambiguity about progression dampens commitment and planning. About 60% of respondents stated that their organization's retention strategies only "somewhat increased tenure" of team members from underrepresented groups. While mentorship is common, it is inconsistent and often lacks the sponsorship needed to move protégés into leadership. Literature across sectors reinforces these patterns: retention requires not just presence, but clear pathways, structured support, and leadership accountability. Without deliberate investment, organizations risk losing the very talent they aim to cultivate and with it, the innovation and legitimacy needed in the technology policy field.

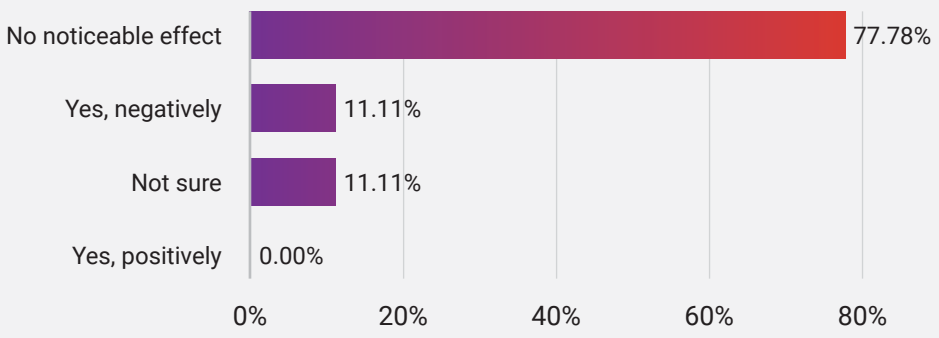
Figure 10. To what degree have your organization's retention strategies increased the tenure of team members from underrepresented groups?



External Climate

Organizations were also asked about the effects of recent federal actions and political shifts on their DEI efforts. Respondents reported mixed experiences with the external environment. While most indicated that recent federal actions had "no noticeable effect," 11% explicitly reported negative impacts. Respondents acknowledged the broader chilling effect of anti-DEI rhetoric, which has made organizations hesitant to collect demographic data, issue public commitments, or even use the language of "diversity, equity, and inclusion" in external materials. This is consistent with Tafesse (2025), who documents how major tech firms are retreating from DEI under the Trump administration's executive orders, often citing legal risks or shareholder pressure as justification.

Figure 11. Have recent federal actions or policies led to noticeable shifts in your organization's DEI efforts?



Short-term compliance, long-term risk

As Tafesse (2025) warns, “Moves that appear calibrated to comply with the Trump administration’s war on DEI will ultimately hurt the tech industry in the long run.” While risk-averse organizations may see withdrawal as protective, the long-term costs include weaker innovation pipelines, reduced credibility in global markets, and diminished morale among diverse employees.

Fragility of progress and chilling effect on individuals

This climate reinforces the fragility of DEI gains in technology policy organizations. Even modest advances, such as broader adoption of structured interviews or more paid internships, can be undermined if political pressure discourages transparency. Research in software engineering shows similar trends: de Souza Santos et al. (2025) found that companies under pressure often rebrand DEI (e.g., renaming it “inclusion” or “team performance”) while cutting budgets and visibility. Such shifts allow programs to persist quietly but strip them of accountability. One participant noted, “There seems to be an air of concern or fear in regards to how we talk about or promote our DEI practices out of fear for how federal agencies could retaliate. While we have not changed or walked back our practices, we communicate them differently.” The political environment affects not only organizations but also early-career professionals. A respondent echoed this concern, stating, “Because our workforce is so diverse, I think we all feel targeted and stressed by recent hostile federal action against DEI.” This aligns with Roberson et al. (2024), who argue that inclusion processes are central to retention; when employees perceive fragility or tokenism, disengagement and attrition follow.

Resistance and counter-pressure

From our study, several early career tech professionals also offered concrete expectations for organizational action in a hostile climate: “Acknowledge the lack of diversity as an organization and come up with a clear plan to increase diversity that all staff can help to implement … [and] build relationships with diverse organizations who don’t often interact with the tech community.” However, not all responses to the attack on DEI are retreat. Companies like Apple and Salesforce have openly resisted rollback pressures. Apple advised shareholders to reject calls to dismantle

DEI, affirming that, “In a world that requires understanding and a grasp of complexity, DEI is a competitive necessity” (Tafesse, 2025). Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff similarly emphasized that leadership values remain unchanged despite political shifts. These examples highlight that counter-pressure is possible when leaders frame DEI as core to mission and strategy. For technology policy organizations, this underscores the importance of funder cover, public commitments, and values-driven messaging to resist regression.

Philanthropic and funder roles

Our findings suggest that funders are uniquely positioned to buffer organizations against political headwinds. Tesfaye’s 2021 report also emphasized the importance of structural investment. Several respondents indicated that explicit funder support gave them confidence to maintain DEI commitments. External validation through philanthropy, partner coalitions, or equity councils provides both political cover and accountability.

However, funder endorsement is not sufficient on its own. While philanthropy can provide cover, it is still incumbent upon organizations themselves to build internal structures that institutionalize their commitments. This includes codified equity plans, routine demographic audits, staff-led advisory councils, transparent salary bands, and feedback mechanisms that empower junior staff to surface concerns without fear of retaliation. As one organizational respondent put it in reference to their own internal equity review process, “Our policy is reviewed and updated annually… everyone has input.” This type of recurring accountability loop demonstrates that DEI resilience should not rely solely on external pressure; it must be embedded in governance.

Broader implications

The external climate actively shapes organizational behavior and individual experience. Political retrenchment, legal scrutiny, and shareholder pressure combine to create fragile conditions for DEI, even in mission-driven nonprofits. Without sustained counter-pressure, the risk is regression to symbolic diversity or outright silence. Conversely, when leaders and funders actively defend DEI, organizations can sustain progress even in contested environments.

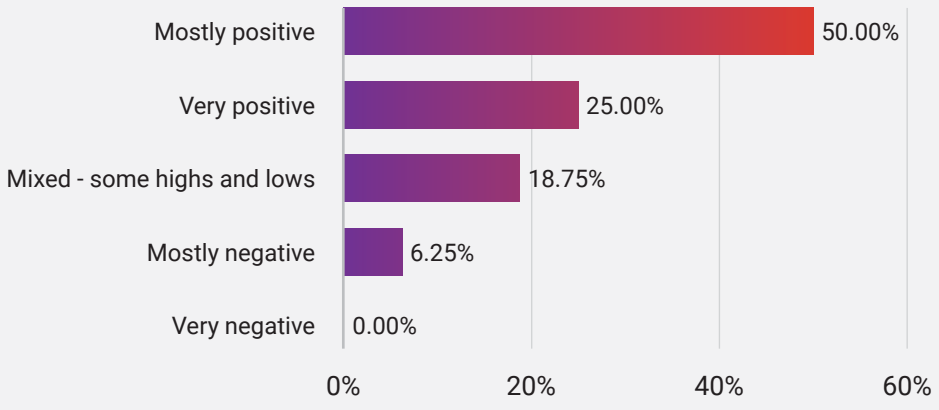
The findings demonstrate that the external climate creates both risks and opportunities. On the one hand, political backlash has produced hesitation, silence, and regression in DEI practices. On the other hand, visible resistance from leaders and explicit support from funders can stabilize fragile progress. For technology policy organizations, the lesson is clear: protect substance even if the language must adapt; sustain accountability even when public commitments are risky; and leverage funder and coalition support to weather political storms.

Focus Group Findings

Overall Experience and Preparedness

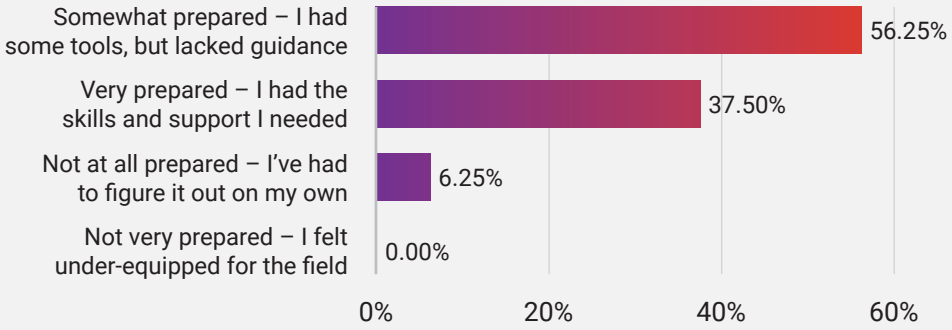
Early-career professionals reported mixed experiences in technology policy. While some participants described their work as "mostly positive," others noted that their pathways into the field were marked by chance encounters, mentorship connections, or personal persistence rather than structured recruitment pipelines. A significant number reported feeling only "somewhat prepared" or "under-prepared" when they first entered the field. Many felt that while they had technical skills, they lacked mentorship, guidance, or clear expectations that would have helped them transition smoothly.

Figure 12. How would you describe your overall experience so far working in the tech policy field?



Preparedness was another theme. While some participants entered the field with strong technical or academic skills, many reported feeling only "somewhat prepared" or "under-prepared" in navigating policy processes, organizational norms, or workplace culture. They cited a lack of structured onboarding, guidance, or role clarity. This aligns with Roberson et al. (2024), who emphasize that inclusion processes, such as mentoring, psychological safety, and onboarding, are crucial in shaping career adjustment. Without these supports, new hires experience uncertainty, lowered confidence, and a diminished sense of belonging.

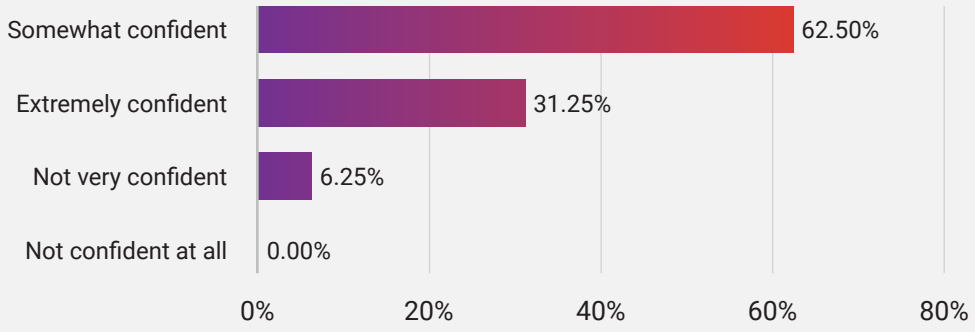
Figure 13. Which of the following best reflects how prepared you felt entering the tech policy field?



Confidence and Workplace Participation

Confidence levels varied widely. Some participants felt empowered to contribute to policy discussions, while others hesitated, noting exclusionary dynamics or unclear expectations. One respondent captured this tension: "It's not just about doing good work, but also understanding the dynamics, relationships, and unwritten rules that significantly impact career progression and project success." Another early-career professional echoed:"I wish I had a better understanding of how to navigate workplace politics." Another reflected, "It's important that in order to retain longevity in the space, young professionals feel like they have opportunities to grow and opportunities to make mistakes in the same way others do. Without having that chance, it is easy for young diverse professionals to leave the field early because they feel unsupported." These experiences reflect what Alegria (2020) calls the "visibility barrier" where underrepresented staff are present but not fully recognized as contributors. The result is uneven participation and a reliance on personal resilience rather than institutional support.

Figure 14. In your current or most recent role, how confident do you feel contributing to tech policy discussions and decisions?



Access to Mentorship and Support Structures

Access to mentorship emerged as one of the most significant gaps shaping early-career experiences in technology policy. While some participants described having informal or ad hoc mentorship through supportive peers or supervisors, most noted the lack of structured, intentional mentorship and sponsorship programs. One participant urged leaders to "encourage and support young professionals with more concrete mentorship and networking opportunities." Another emphasized the importance of proximity and access, reflecting that "making [themselves] available to meet and connect with students and early-career attorneys can help bridge the experience and knowledge gaps for individuals who do not have people in their lives working in the legal and tech policy space."

These insights suggest that mentorship is not merely a professional development perk, but an equity issue. Without intentional structures of support, those without preexisting networks are left to navigate the field alone, widening existing gaps in confidence, retention, and advancement. This aligns with Trahan (2023), who found that women of color in IT faced systemic barriers when mentorship and sponsorship were not institutionalized. The lack of consistent, structured mentorship means that underrepresented professionals often lack the guidance and advocacy needed for advancement, reinforcing what Trahan calls "glass and concrete ceilings."

Figure 15. Have you had access to the kind of support you need to grow in your tech policy career?

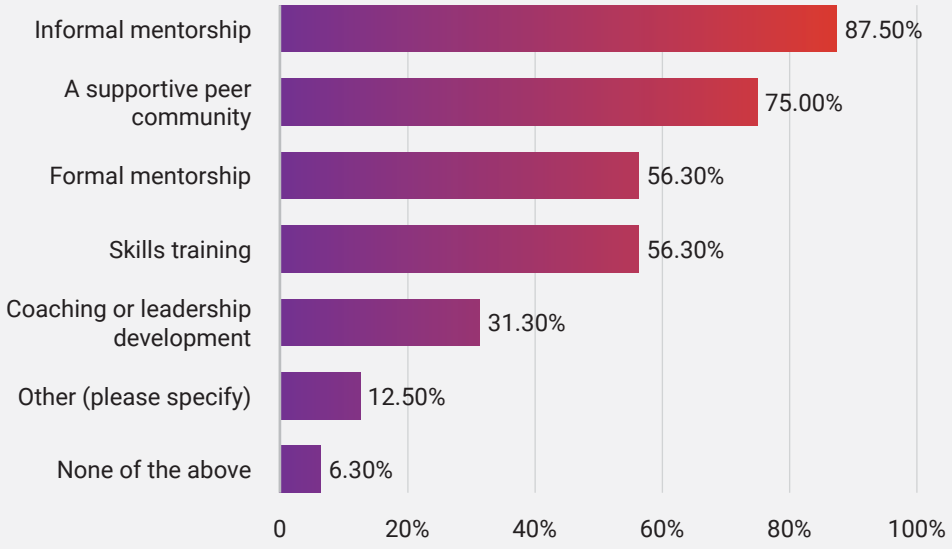
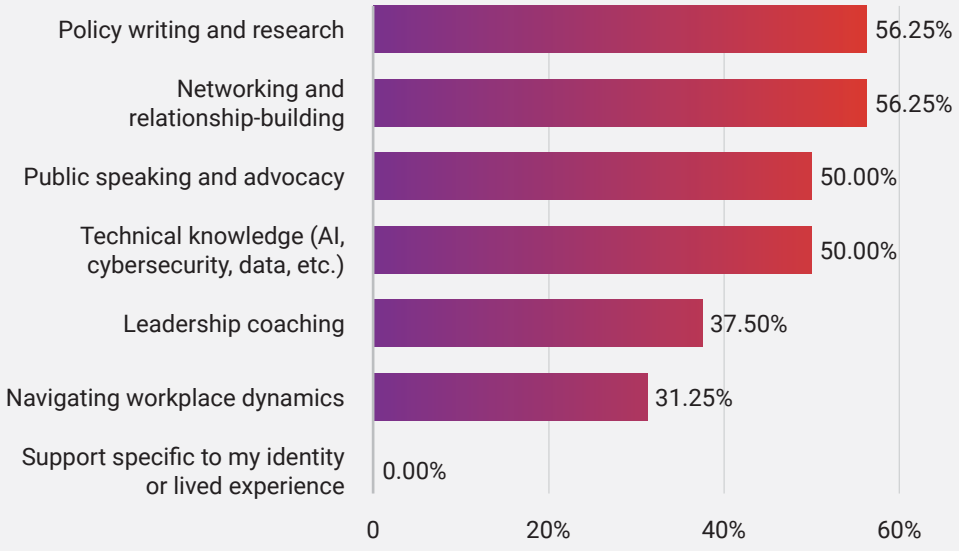


Figure 16. Which areas of development would help you feel more confident and empowered in your career? (Choose up to 3)

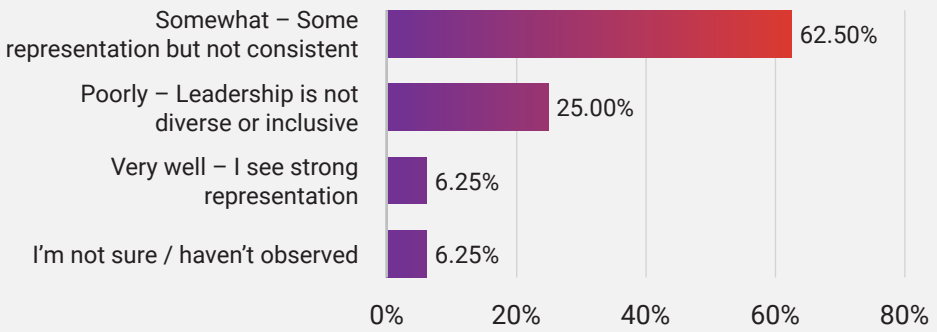


When asked which areas would make them feel more confident and empowered in their careers, early-career professionals overwhelmingly identified core competencies that should ideally be built into organizational training and mentorship systems. The top needs were policy writing and research (56%) and networking and relationship-building (56%), followed closely by public speaking and advocacy (50%) and technical knowledge such as AI, cybersecurity, or data literacy (50%). These responses underscore that early-career staff are asking for foundational tools to participate fully in policy conversations. Notably, 37% requested leadership coaching and 31% wanted support in navigating workplace dynamics, reinforcing the qualitative findings "about uncertainty around office politics and role clarity. Strikingly, none selected "support specific to my identity or lived experience," suggesting that while identity-based affinity spaces may be valuable, what early professionals most urgently want is functional access to skills, networks, and leadership pathways. These are the factors that determine long-term retention and influence.

Perceptions of Diversity in Leadership

Participants consistently described leadership diversity as "somewhat" or "poorly" representative. Many reported being one of the few people of color or women in leadership-adjacent spaces, noting that while entry-level roles have diversified, decision-making remains dominated by white professionals, particularly men. One participant summarized: "It is important [for] leaders [to] understand that careers in technology for diverse individuals can be more challenging than for others because there is less institutional support and it is inherently a less welcoming place." Another participant urged similar sentiments, "To effectively support non-white individuals, organizations need to adopt a multi-faceted approach… [beginning with] leadership staff … educated and sensitive to the unique issues and challenges."

Figure 17. How well do you feel the tech policy field reflects diversity in its leadership and decision-making spaces?

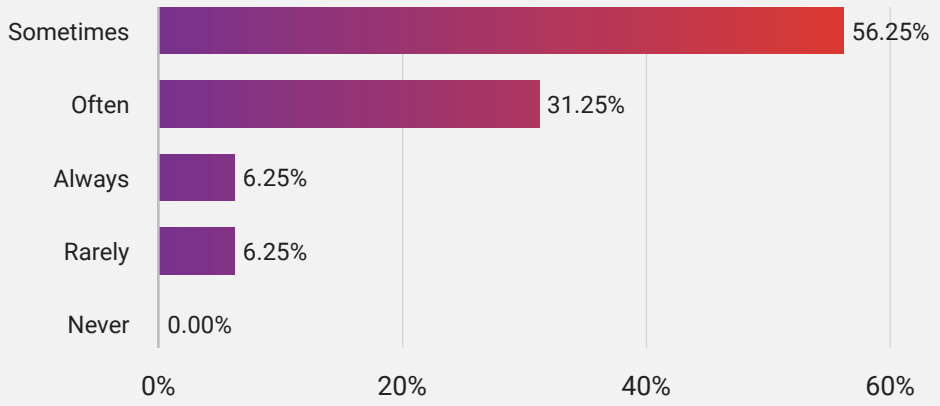


This echoes both the organizational survey and broader scholarship. Alegria (2020) highlights how professionals of color are often excluded from leadership roles despite strong representation at technical levels, and Goldman et al. (2021) document similar stratification in public-sector roles, where diversity exists in mid-level positions but dissipates at the top. Across contexts, the pattern is clear: representation without advancement reinforces tokenism rather than transformation.

Experiences of Bias and Exclusion

In our study, exclusion was not always overt but manifested in everyday interactions. This type of subtle exclusion erodes confidence, discourages participation, and limits long-term retention. Participants described moments of being dismissed, sidelined, or treated as token representatives of their demographic group. As one participant reflected: “There have been instances where I’ve perceived subtle forms of exclusion or felt that my identity or lived experience was not fully understood or valued. While it’s hard to attribute a direct impact to a single instance, these experiences can cumulatively lead to a feeling of being an outsider, which can subtly influence one’s comfort in speaking up, seeking opportunities, or feeling fully integrated into the professional environment. Over time, this can impact professional confidence and the proactive pursuit of career growth within an organization.”

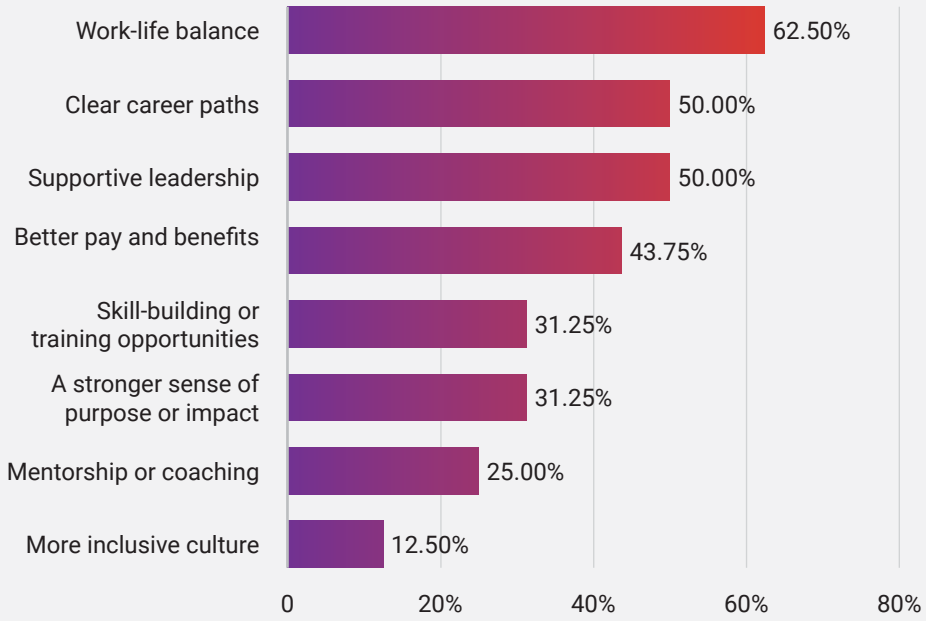
Figure 18. How often do you feel your identity, background, or lived experience is valued in your tech policy work?



Professional Development and Retention Factors

When asked what would increase their likelihood of staying in technology policy, participants highlighted several priorities. Survey participants emphasized that retention in technology policy is closely tied to structural support and organizational culture. Many stressed the need for clear career pathways, noting that the absence of transparent promotion ladders and role definitions made advancement feel uncertain. Alongside advancement clarity, participants consistently pointed to the importance of skill-building opportunities in areas such as policy writing, public speaking, and leadership development support they felt were often missing. An inclusive culture was also highlighted as critical, with several noting that leadership acknowledgment of lived experiences and the creation of safe spaces for feedback would strengthen belonging and retention. Finally, participants described the value of structured onboarding and integration, noting that formal 30/60/90-day plans–clear milestones and expectations of a new hire's first three months–would have reduced the isolation many felt during their first months and better prepared them to contribute effectively.

Figure 19. Have you had access to the kind of support you need to grow in your tech policy career?



These insights align with Roberson et al. (2024), who argue that inclusion processes, especially psychological safety and belonging, are central to retention and exit decisions. They also resonate with Goldman et al. (2021), who found that inequitable mentoring and unclear advancement structures hinder retention in the public sector.

The focus groups reinforce that while progress has been made in creating paid on-ramps and formalizing inclusivity in the technology policy field, the lived experience of early-career professionals remains marked by fragility, uncertainty, and uneven access to support. Participants want not only entry into the field but also sustained investment in their growth, inclusion in decision-making, and recognition of their lived expertise. Without such structural support, retention will remain precarious, and leadership pipelines will remain narrow.

Common Trends Across Both Groups

Across both the organizational survey and the early-career survey responses, a clear pattern emerged: diversity at the point of entry does not guarantee equity across the career journey. This demonstrates that while organizations have made progress on certain DEI practices, structural gaps continue to shape the experiences of early-career professionals. Organizations have made meaningful progress in signaling commitment. Most organizations now use inclusive language in job postings, more internships are paid, and structured interviews have become standard. But early-career professionals describe a reality where progress feels procedural rather than transformative. In essence, the structures that enable access are improving, yet the systems that ensure retention, belonging, and advancement remain inconsistent or underdeveloped.

Across both organizational and individual perspectives, the message is clear: progress is fragile, uneven, and often symbolic. Recruitment remains narrow, internships are still financially exclusionary, bias persists in hiring and advancement, inclusivity policies lack teeth, leadership diversity is stagnant, and political headwinds threaten fragile gains. Yet there is also resilience as early-career professionals continue to push for clearer pathways. Although inconsistent, organizations are adopting some best practices like structured interviews and paid internships. The challenge now is to bridge the gap between aspiration and action, ensuring that diversity efforts are embedded into structures rather than left vulnerable to shifting political winds.

Implications for the Field

The convergence of organizational and individual perspectives underscores that progress has been made in formalizing inclusivity policies and adopting structured interviews, but systemic barriers remain. The persistence of narrow recruitment pipelines, opaque career progression, and tokenistic inclusion suggests that without stronger accountability and structural reform, the pipeline for early-career professionals from underrepresented backgrounds will remain leaky.

The implications of this study are both structural and strategic. At the structural level, organizations must expand recruitment pipelines, embed bias-reduction into every stage of hiring, and publish transparent promotion pathways. At the strategic level, funders and leaders must provide cover against political headwinds and communicate DEI as essential to innovation and governance. Without such steps, the field risks entrenching inequities at precisely the moment when diverse leadership is most needed to shape the ethical and equitable use of technology.

Future interventions must therefore focus on organizational commitments that can translate into meaningful, measurable, and sustainable inclusion for the next generation of technology policy professionals.

Recommendations

The evidence from both the organizational survey and the early-career professionals in technology policy survey makes clear that while progress has been made, systemic gaps remain across recruitment, hiring, retention, and leadership representation. To transform early-career technology policy roles into equitable and enduring pathways, organizations must adopt a set of structural and cultural reforms that go beyond symbolic commitments. These recommendations are organized across six key domains: recruitment, on-ramps, bias reduction, inclusivity policies, retention and advancement, leadership culture, and navigating the external climate.

Broaden Recruitment Pipelines

- Build sustained partnerships with HBCUs, HSIs, Tribal colleges, community colleges, and affinity networks.
- Require job postings to be shared beyond organizational websites, including diversity-focused job boards and trusted community channels.
- Clearly communicate salary ranges, remote options, and relocation support to reduce self-selection among candidates without financial safety nets.

Redesign and Diversify On-Ramps

- Maintain paid internships at or above local living-wage thresholds.
- Introduce externships, academic-credit pathways, and short-term project-based roles for candidates outside D.C. or elite policy networks.
- Clarify distinctions between internships, fellowships, and entry-level jobs to prevent ambiguity and accidental stratification.

Strengthen Bias Reduction in Hiring

- Combine structured interviews with scoring rubrics, anonymized resume screens where possible, and interview panels that reflect demographic and experiential diversity.
- Audit job descriptions for credential inflation and prioritize transferable skills over pedigree.
- Monitor where candidates exit the hiring process to identify bias or structural barriers.

Institutionalize Inclusivity and Accountability

- Standardize demographic data collection for applicants, hires, promotions, and exits even if only reported internally.
- Tie DEI goals to timelines, leadership responsibilities, and annual reporting rather than broad statements of intent.
- Establish anonymous feedback mechanisms with clear follow-up expectations to ensure safety and responsiveness.

Strengthen Retention and Advancement

- Publish promotion pathways and role expectations for early-career staff.
- Pair mentorship with sponsorship to ensure leaders actively advocate for advancement.
- Require structured onboarding plans with 30/60/90-day integration milestones.
- Invest in core skill-building such as policy writing, public speaking, leadership development, and workplace navigation.

Reinforce Leadership Culture and Climate Resilience

- Set representation benchmarks for decision-making bodies, not just entry-level hiring.
- Train managers in inclusive supervision, facilitation, and conflict navigation.
- Reframe DEI commitments under institutional values such as fairness or effectiveness when political language becomes risky without abandoning substance.
- Leverage philanthropy and coalitions as external cover to sustain DEI efforts when internal courage wavers.

Conclusion

Early-career diversity in technology policy roles is not only a matter of equity, as it directly shapes the fairness and inclusivity of the policies that govern our digital lives. Building on the 2019–2021 baseline study, this 2025 report demonstrates both progress and persistent challenges. While more technology policy organizations have adopted inclusivity policies and structured interviews, recruitment pipelines remain narrow, representation in leadership remains limited, and data transparency is weak.

The findings underscore that efforts to improve diversity must go beyond access by ensuring that they encompass culture, retention, and leadership accountability. The recommendations in this report are designed to move the technology policy field toward that goal. By institutionalizing this survey as an annual benchmark, we can build a shared accountability framework for the technology policy sector and ensure that early-career roles truly serve as equitable pathways to leadership.

Advancing equity in early-career technology policy demands sustained attention to the lived experiences of those entering the field. The Workplace Pulse Survey provides a scalable, equity-focused framework for organizations to regularly assess belonging, fairness, and growth opportunities within their internal cultures. By adopting this tool, organizational leaders can embed accountability into DEI commitments, move beyond symbolic inclusion, and create environments where early-career professionals are supported, empowered, and positioned to advance into leadership.

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Looking Ahead: Sustaining the Study

The continuation of this study is critical to establishing benchmarks and track longitudinal trends. Future waves could:

- **Expand geographic scope.** Include technology policy organizations and professionals nationwide.
- **Track career trajectories.** Follow early-career professionals over time to assess retention and advancement.
- **Link organizational and individual data.** Cross-analyzing both perspectives provides a fuller picture of systemic barriers and facilitators.
- **Collaborate with academic and equity partners.** Partnering with universities and consultants can deepen analysis and broaden reach.

Sustained accountability is only possible with recurring measurement. Committing to long-term transparency is key. Evidence from both the organizational survey and focus groups shows progress, but also persistent inequities in recruitment, hiring, retention, and leadership diversity. The recommendations offered here such as broadening recruitment channels, redesigning on-ramps, strengthening bias reduction, institutionalizing inclusivity policies, improving retention and advancement, addressing leadership culture, and navigating external climate challenges are not optional. They are necessary steps if the field seeks to transform diversity from symbolic rhetoric into sustainable practice.

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Appendix

Workplace Pulse Survey

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree · 2 = Disagree · 3 = Neutral · 4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree · 6 = Unsure

1) Access & Discovery: I see our open roles and growth opportunities communicated beyond internal channels (e.g., MSIs/HSIs, community orgs, diverse job boards), not just our website or staff networks.

2) Onboarding & Role Clarity: My onboarding (or most recent role transition) included a clear 30/60/90-day plan, defined responsibilities, and success measures.

3) Mentorship & Sponsorship: I have both mentorship (guidance) and sponsorship (leaders advocating for me in rooms I'm not in) that support my advancement.

4) Bias-Reduction in Hiring & Promotion: Our hiring/promotion processes consistently use rubrics, diverse panels, and structured interviews, not just some of the time.

5) Policies & Practice: Our inclusivity/DEI statements translate into concrete actions with timelines, owners, and regular progress updates.

6) Feedback & Safety: I can share candid feedback (including anonymously) without fear of negative consequences, and I see timely follow-through.

7) Measurement & Trust: When demographic or experience data are collected, I understand how they're used, and I trust our approach to privacy and transparency.

8) Leadership Representation & Voice: Decision-making spaces reflect diverse identities and lived experiences, and those perspectives influence outcomes.

9) Growth & Skills: I have access to skill-building (e.g., policy writing, public speaking, technical upskilling) tied to clear promotion pathways.

10) External Climate Resilience: Even amid external/political scrutiny, our organization protects the substance of equity work (e.g., maintains safeguards, accountability, and fair processes).

Organizational Survey Questions

Section 1: Hiring and Recruiting Practices (Attracting Talent)

1. How does your organization share job announcements for early-career roles? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Organization's website or careers page
- ☐ Internal employee referrals
- ☐ University or college job boards
- ☐ Job boards (e.g., Indeed, LinkedIn, Idealist)
- ☐ Professional associations or affinity groups
- ☐ Social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram)
- ☐ Email newsletters or listservs
- ☐ Community-based organizations or workforce development programs
- ☐ Career fairs or recruitment events
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

2. What types of early-career roles does your organization offer? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Internships
- ☐ Externships
- ☐ Fellowships
- ☐ Entry-level Positions
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

3. What strategies does your organization use to attract candidates from underrepresented backgrounds? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Posting on diversity-focused job boards (e.g., DiversityJobs, BlackJobs, Hispanic/Latino job boards)
- ☐ Partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), HSIs, or MSIs
- ☐ Participating in DEI-focused job fairs or career events

- ☐ Collaborating with community-based organizations or workforce development programs
- ☐ Using inclusive language and visuals in job postings
- ☐ Highlighting DEI commitments and benefits in job descriptions
- ☐ Leveraging Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for referrals and outreach
- ☐ Providing relocation or financial incentives for equity-focused hiring
- ☐ Targeted social media recruitment campaigns
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

4. What interviewing strategies do you use to reduce bias? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Structured Interviews (standardized questions for all candidates)
- ☐ Blind Resume Reviews (removing identifying information)
- ☐ Diverse Interview Panels (varied backgrounds on panels)
- ☐ Scoring Rubrics (predefined evaluation criteria)
- ☐ Unconscious Bias Training for interviewers
- ☐ Skill-Based Assessments (testing real job skills)
- ☐ Consistent Candidate Experience (same communication/support)
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section 2: DEI Policies and Workplace Culture (Setting the Environment)

5. Does your organization have a formal policy for fostering inclusivity?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

(Follow-up if Yes: Briefly describe the policy or how it is communicated.)
(Follow-up if No: Share any informal practices or reasons why not.)

6. How effective has the formal equity policy been in helping hire candidates from underrepresented backgrounds?

- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ☐ Somewhat ineffective
- ☐ Very ineffective

7. Does your organization have a formal process for gathering employee feedback about workplace culture?

- ☐ Yes, a formal and consistent process
- ☐ Yes, an informal or occasional process
- ☐ No, but we are planning to develop one
- ☐ No, we do not have a process
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

8. How does your organization encourage employees to share honest feedback? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Regular employee surveys (e.g., engagement or pulse surveys)
- ☐ Anonymous feedback channels (e.g., suggestion boxes, online forms)
- ☐ Open-door policies with leadership or HR
- ☐ Scheduled one-on-one meetings with managers
- ☐ All-staff town halls or listening sessions
- ☐ Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as feedback platforms
- ☐ Exit interviews or stay interviews
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

(Optional: Please share an example of how one of these methods has led to meaningful change.)

9. How does your organization address concerns about negative consequences of giving feedback? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Anonymous reporting tools
- ☐ Anti-retaliation policies communicated clearly
- ☐ Confidentiality in handling sensitive feedback
- ☐ Manager training on receiving and acting on feedback
- ☐ Tracking and following up on employee concerns
- ☐ No formal protections currently in place
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

(Optional: Describe how your organization builds trust around feedback processes.)

Section 3: Inclusivity Assessment (How You Measure Progress)

10. Which methods does your organization use to assess the inclusivity of your workplace? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Employee surveys
- ☐ Focus groups or listening sessions
- ☐ One-on-one interviews or check-ins
- ☐ Review of HR data (e.g., turnover rates, promotion rates)
- ☐ External audits or third-party assessments
- ☐ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committees or advisory groups
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
- ☐ We do not currently assess workplace inclusivity

11. Does your organization collect demographic data on early-career hires?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If Yes: Which racial/ethnic categories do you track? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native American/Alaska Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Two or more races
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

If No: What are the reasons for not collecting this data (e.g., legal concerns, lack of resources, privacy considerations)? Are there plans to start collecting it in the future?

12. How is demographic data used in your organization's decision-making processes? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Identifying gaps in hiring practices
- ☐ Setting DEI goals
- ☐ Reporting to leadership
- ☐ Public reporting or transparency efforts
- ☐ No formal use of demographic data
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section 4: Retention and Advancement (Keeping Talent and Helping Them Grow)

13. How successful has your organization been in retaining talent from underrepresented communities?

- ☐ Very Successful
- ☐ Successful
- ☐ Somewhat Successful
- ☐ Unsuccessful
- ☐ Very Unsuccessful

14. Which strategies has your organization used to retain talent from underrepresented communities? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Mentorship or sponsorship programs
- ☐ Professional development opportunities
- ☐ Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- ☐ Regular salary and promotion reviews
- ☐ Inclusive leadership training
- ☐ Stay interviews and feedback sessions
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

  (Optional: Briefly describe key factors contributing to your success or challenges.)

15. To what degree have your organization's retention strategies increased the longevity of team members from underrepresented groups?

- ☐ Significantly increased longevity
- ☐ Somewhat increased longevity
- ☐ No noticeable change
- ☐ Somewhat decreased longevity
- ☐ Significantly decreased longevity

16. Which mentorship or sponsorship programs has your organization implemented to enhance access to opportunities for team members from underrepresented groups? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Formal mentorship programs (assigned mentor/mentee pairs)
- ☐ Sponsorship programs (leaders advocate for team members' advancement)
- ☐ Peer mentoring programs
- ☐ Informal mentorship (ad hoc advice and guidance)
- ☐ No mentorship or sponsorship programs currently
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

(Optional: Briefly describe the impact these programs have had.)

Section 5: External Environment and Future Outlook

17. Have recent federal actions or policies led to noticeable shifts in your organization's DEI efforts?

- ☐ Yes, positively
- ☐ Yes, negatively
- ☐ No noticeable effect
- ☐ Not sure

If Yes:

Which areas were most affected? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Recruitment
- ☐ Retention
- ☐ Workplace culture
- ☐ DEI training and education
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

18. How does your organization view the importance of increasing diversity in early-career tech policy roles, and what steps (if any) are being taken to support this? (Open-ended)

Early Career Focus Group Survey Questions

Focus Group Survey: Experience as an Early-Career Professional in Tech Policy

Survey Purpose: This survey aims to capture the experiences of early-career professionals in the tech policy field. By understanding your journey, what has supported your growth, what challenges you've faced, and what resources you need we hope to inform future efforts that better support and retain emerging talent in the tech policy space.

1. How many years have you worked in the tech policy field?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–2 years
- ☐ 3–5 years
- ☐ More than 5 years

2. How would you describe your overall experience so far working in the tech policy field?

- ☐ Very positive
- ☐ Mostly positive
- ☐ Mixed – some highs and lows
- ☐ Mostly negative
- ☐ Very negative

3. Which of the following best reflects how prepared you felt entering the tech policy field?

- ☐ Very prepared – I had the skills and support I needed
- ☐ Somewhat prepared – I had some tools, but lacked guidance
- ☐ Not very prepared – I felt under-equipped for the field
- ☐ Not at all prepared – I've had to figure it out on my own

4. In your current or most recent role, how confident do you feel contributing to tech policy discussions and decisions?

- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Not very confident
- ☐ Not confident at all

5. Have you had access to the kind of support you need to grow in your tech policy career? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Formal mentorship
- ☐ Informal mentorship
- ☐ Skills training (e.g., writing, analysis, communication)
- ☐ Coaching or leadership development
- ☐ A supportive peer community
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other: _____

6. How well do you feel the tech policy field reflects diversity in its leadership and decision-making spaces?

- ☐ Very well – I see strong representation
- ☐ Somewhat – Some representation but not consistent
- ☐ Poorly – Leadership is not diverse or inclusive
- ☐ I'm not sure / haven't observed

7. How often do you feel your identity, background, or lived experience is valued in your tech policy work?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

8. Have you ever experienced bias or exclusion at your tech policy organization, based on your identity, background, or lived experience? If so, how did that impact your career?

9. Which areas of development would help you feel more confident and empowered in your career? (Choose up to 3)

- ☐ Policy writing and research
- ☐ Public speaking and advocacy
- ☐ Networking and relationship-building
- ☐ Technical knowledge (AI, cybersecurity, data, etc.)
- ☐ Navigating workplace dynamics
- ☐ Leadership coaching
- ☐ Support specific to my identity or lived experience
- ☐ Other: _____

10. What kind of future do you see for yourself in the tech policy field?

- ☐ I'm committed and plan to grow my career here
- ☐ I'm still exploring whether this is the right fit
- ☐ I enjoy it but may shift into a related field
- ☐ I'm considering leaving the field entirely

11. How would you rate your onboarding experience in your current or most recent tech policy role?

- ☐ Excellent – I was well-prepared and supported
- ☐ Good – Some gaps, but generally helpful
- ☐ Fair – Basic info only, not much support
- ☐ Poor – I felt lost or unsupported
- ☐ I did not receive a formal onboarding
- ☐ Other: _____

12. What would make you more likely to stay long-term in the tech policy field? (Choose up to 3)

- ☐ Clear career paths
- ☐ Supportive leadership
- ☐ More inclusive culture
- ☐ Better pay and benefits
- ☐ Skill-building or training opportunities
- ☐ Mentorship or coaching
- ☐ Work-life balance
- ☐ A stronger sense of purpose or impact
- ☐ Other: _____

13. What do you wish you had known or had more of before entering the field? (Open-ended)

14. What advice would you give to tech leaders who want to better support early career professionals from underrepresented communities? (Open-ended)

15. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience in tech policy? (Open-ended)

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