

MMAC sets goals for metro Milwaukee employers to boost minorities in management, workforce

By Rich Kirchen
The Business Journal
September 26, 2019



TRISH BORZON

Chris Rowland of ManpowerGroup and Genyne Edwards of P3 Development Group

Metro Milwaukee's largest business advocacy group is throwing its weight behind a plan for major employers to hike by 25% the number of African Americans and Hispanics holding management positions and boost minority employment overall by 15%.

Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce leaders say the organization is responding to its most recent member survey that found racial disparities are the most difficult challenge facing the Milwaukee region. This was the first time the issue topped the list for Milwaukee's business community, MMAC said.

"Diversity is a component of the talent conversation," said [Chris Rowland](#), global diversity officer for ManpowerGroup in Milwaukee. "It's imperative for the region to thrive."

MMAC introduced the initiative Sept. 26 during its annual all-members meeting at Fiserv Forum. The theme is making Milwaukee "a region of choice for diverse talent," MMAC said.

The CEOs at 64 of the largest employers in metro Milwaukee committed to the goal as did the MMAC board. The organization's unification on the issue is authentic and MMAC will measure progress along the way, said Rowland, who serves on the MMAC diversity and inclusion committee.

MMAC ultimately hopes to engage all of its 1,800 business and nonprofit members in the action plan, Rowland said. Most of those employers have no formalized program for recruiting or promoting minority managers, he said.

“This is just the first shot,” he said. “What’s inspiring about this is the top of the house bought in — 60 CEOs.”

The MMAC said the most recent data available shows that 8% of management positions in the area are held by blacks or Hispanics. Whites represented 88% of management employees.

Achieving the goal would result in the percentage of blacks and Hispanics in management increasing to 10%. In real numbers, the MMAC base figure of 3,500 minorities would increase to 4,375.

Rowland said adding less than 1,000 minority managers is attainable and described it as “aspirational and realistic.”

MMAC will measure whether “the needle is moving” on minority managers and minority hiring. The organization will ask employers to report their numbers but MMAC will release the information as an aggregate figure “public scorecard” and not identify specific employer numbers, Rowland said.

Recruiting and promoting more racial minorities is crucial to the metro area’s economy because the area’s white-majority population is aging, Rowland said. Meanwhile, less than 50% of the children ages 5 to 9 in the metro area are white, he said.

MMAC said that for the past year it engaged consultants and forming a task force to conduct comprehensive research on the challenges and opportunities that diverse employees face in metro Milwaukee, focusing particularly on diverse management-level employees.

A survey of black and Hispanic managers found many see career hurdles including a lack of minorities in senior leadership and limited exposure to opportunities. A significant percentage feel discriminated against in the community and the workplace.

“CEOs from the business community asked to hear the voices of their people to understand the challenges they face and collectively take action to drive measurable change,” Rowland said.

MMAC wants to engage employers in changing their corporate cultures and not just setting minority percentage goals, he said.

Employers will need assistance developing strategies to operationalize minority recruitment and promotion, he said. One idea will be to convene workshops or seminars for sharing best practices — “a place companies can share what’s working and what’s not,” Rowland said.

Milwaukee’s business community should focus on retaining local minority talent or encouraging those who left Milwaukee to consider returning, MMAC said.

Milwaukee is not the first metro area to adopt goals for bolstering the number of minorities in management. MMAC has reached out to Cleveland and the Twin Cities “as outstanding examples of metro areas that have done this,” Rowland said.

Most of metro Milwaukee's largest employers pledged to participate. Among them are: WEC Energy Group, Northwestern Mutual, Briggs & Stratton, Aurora Health Care, GE Healthcare, Charter Manufacturing, Froedtert Health, Payne & Dolan, Harley-Davidson, ManpowerGroup, MillerCoors, Quad, Rexnord, Rockwell Automation and Waukesha Metal Products.