



# PRO BONO + INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Harnessing the power of pro bono to cultivate inclusive leaders

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## Inclusive Leadership Imperative

In an ever-changing and increasingly globalized economy, what constitutes effective leadership in business is changing, too.

In addition to traditional leadership skills, inclusion-focused values and traits are critical for leaders navigating a diverse corporate landscape. Deloitte has done significant research in this area and created a framework called [the Six Signature Traits of Inclusive Leadership](#) to help leaders engage with and contribute to the diversity of markets, customers, ideas, and talent that characterize global commerce in the 21st century. The framework defines inclusive leadership through six traits: commitment, courage, cognizance of bias, curiosity, cultural intelligence, and collaboration. While companies experiment with many different methods to develop these characteristics, pro bono service is emerging as an impactful growth opportunity for cultivating inclusive leaders—and we know why. From a corporate perspective, pro bono service is a win on many levels: nonprofits benefit from access to employees' unique experiences and commitment to social impact, while companies benefit by strengthening community ties and developing an adaptable workforce. Everyone can thrive when we develop a culture of inclusion.

Dr. Terri Cooper, Vice Chair, External Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Deloitte, has pinpointed inclusive leadership as one of the most significant elements of a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy. As part of the 2019 Taproot webinar [Pro Bono + The Inclusive Leader](#), Cooper shared that companies whose leaders create an inclusive culture “are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, three times as likely to be high-performing, and six times more likely to be innovative and agile.” These statistics underscore the fact that a company's promotion of inclusive leadership can have a significant bearing on its ability to compete in the global marketplace, prepare employees for the future of work, and acquire and retain diverse talent.

Companies have a chance to engage in this business imperative by embedding inclusive leadership principles across their workforce. Pro bono service is a powerful tool for helping develop leaders through accelerated, experiential learning that has a real-world impact. This piece examines how Deloitte leverages pro bono as one way to help develop these inclusive leadership traits. A series of profiles showcases the ways in which their professionals connect these experiences to their own leadership development. By bringing this concept to life, this piece aims to illustrate the exciting opportunity DEI, learning and development (L&D), and corporate social responsibility (CSR) professionals have to work together in driving meaningful employee development and engagement.

# Deloitte: A Case Study in Inclusive Leadership and Pro Bono

Deloitte focuses on fostering an environment where everyone can connect, belong, and grow. The organization's broad portfolio of pro bono service programs has emerged as a key driver in those efforts. Pro bono service is the centerpiece of Deloitte's community impact strategy; the organization offers professionals the opportunity to participate in an array of offerings, ranging from an annual day of service to multi-week, team-based engagements to immersive international projects. Many of Deloitte's pro bono initiatives align with broader employee development, engagement, and inclusion priorities at the organization, like bridging the veteran-civilian divide and diversifying workforce pipelines.

Deloitte has strategically aligned leadership roles at the organization to connect talent development, inclusion, and pro bono service. Patrick O'Donnell, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and principal for Deloitte & Touche LLP, and Dr. Kwasi Mitchell, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and principal for Deloitte Consulting LLP, each lead both DEI and pro bono efforts. "It's been exciting to explore how this alignment between DEI and Corporate Citizenship can help us support more organizations that are building leaders from diverse backgrounds and build more empathetic, inclusive leaders within Deloitte," Mitchell says.

Through this internal alignment, Deloitte targets the development of specific inclusive competencies among emerging leaders within their pro bono service programming—all while giving these professionals the chance to have a meaningful impact in the community. From the perspective of Deloitte's Corporate Citizenship team, this linkage is crucial to maximizing shared value. "Pro bono uniquely complements corporate inclusion strategies, and if we explicitly cultivate that partnership, we're not guessing about what value we drive—we're working together to determine what it looks like," says Doug Marshall, Managing Director of Corporate Citizenship for Deloitte Services LP. Empowering diverse voices to contribute their unique perspectives strengthens the organization by unearthing opportunities for decision-making and innovation. O'Donnell and Mitchell have both seen that partnership pay off, observing how pro bono service can build [inclusive leadership traits](#). "Pro bono and skills-based volunteering projects provide Deloitte professionals with hands-on learning experiences that also amplify the inclusive leadership competencies they can—and do—bring to their work at the organization," notes O'Donnell.

## The Six Traits of Inclusive Leadership



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## Using Service to Build Inclusive Leadership Skills

The link between pro bono service and the development of [inclusive leadership traits](#) is clear. Professionals of varying levels and skillsets have cited foundational leadership growth and development as among the benefits of participation in Deloitte's programs.

Following are the stories of six Deloitte professionals who have connected their pro bono experience to key inclusive leadership traits—and then applied those learnings to their day-to-day work at the organization.



# Curiosity

*Highly inclusive leaders have an open mindset, a desire to understand how others view and experience the world, and a tolerance for ambiguity.*

—The Six Traits of Inclusive Leadership

**“By challenging thinking, our conversations always spurred new information or insights that helped us tell an even stronger story in the end.”**

—Robert Bui

## How Pro Bono Supports Curiosity

A nonprofit professional's day—pivoting from addressing the needs of vulnerable populations to problem-solving on a shoestring budget—can be quite different than the day-to-day of a corporate employee. Employees must be curious about and open to learning the realities of their beneficiaries to develop solutions with lasting impact.

### The Story: Robert Bui Senior Consultant, Deloitte Consulting LLP

In his seven years at Deloitte, Robert Bui had never done a pro bono project – until 2020. Excited about the chance to do something meaningful and different, he had the opportunity to help Roca, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit dedicated to serving high-risk young people.

Roca asked Deloitte to help them quantify the impact of its Young Mothers Program through extensive research and stakeholder interviews. While Robert and his team had experience with strategic communications and data analysis, they weren't familiar with Roca's intervention model or the challenges facing the young parents that Roca serves. Robert noted, “Our team had to feel comfortable going into executive-level meetings not knowing all the answers or where the conversation would go. There were times we would completely pivot mid-meeting or leave with more additional questions than answers. But our conversations always spurred new information or insights that helped us tell an even stronger story in the end.”

Robert saw first-hand how powerful curiosity can be. He learned to ask open-ended questions and facilitate conversations that brought together the Deloitte team's expertise and the client's knowledge. This co-creative process helped them articulate Roca's impact in an entirely new way, estimate the size of the population they could serve, and quantify the impact to society of Roca's Young Mothers Program. This collaborative approach became a core part of Robert's leadership style and client interactions.

## Why it Matters

An inclusive environment must also be a curious one. Inclusive leaders constantly ask questions, recognizing that knowledge from others can fill in the gaps in the bigger picture. They create an environment of inquiry to discover where new passions may lie. This openness can create a space for teams to safely push and inspire each other to the highest quality results.

## DESIGN TIP: APPLYING THIS TO YOUR PROGRAM

Continue cultivating curious employees by providing supplemental learning materials and follow-on opportunities. Encouraging teams to stay in touch with their nonprofit client, join a board, or start an issue-area focused learning group can help them maintain the spark of curiosity once the pro bono engagement ends.



# Cultural Intelligence

*Highly inclusive leaders are confident and effective in cross-cultural interactions. —The Six Traits of Inclusive Leadership*

**“We must go into our work extremely humble, understanding that you don’t live someone else’s life day-to-day, and learning from them before anything else.”**

**—Abby Stewart**

## How Pro Bono Supports Cultural Intelligence

Employees working on pro bono projects can develop cultural intelligence by working alongside—and adapting their styles to—a diverse set of stakeholders from their community.

### **The Story: Abby Stewart Senior Consultant, Deloitte Consulting LLP, Government & Public Services**

The D2international (D2i) Social Impact Fellowship has been an important part of Abby Stewart’s career at Deloitte. The program trains fellows in social impact service delivery and pairs them with an international nonprofit organization or social enterprise to help address a critical business challenge. Fellows then spend one week in the host country focusing on cultural exchange and capacity building for the organization. Abby’s D2i fellowship experience in India, and the D2i cohort she later led in Chile, gave her the chance to operate in new cultural contexts. She learned to humbly collaborate with her nonprofit organizations, listen closely to their needs without having predetermined answers, and help build solutions with the communities in mind—all qualities of cultural intelligence.

Abby’s international pro bono work helped her see that traditional solutions to business problems are not one-size-fits-all. Instead, she saw that human-centered design, combined with empathy, generated the results the nonprofit organizations truly needed. “We must go into our work extremely humble, understanding that you don’t live someone else’s life day-to-day, and learning from them before anything else,” she said. And Abby’s newly cultivated skills are not limited to pro bono: her broadened cultural intelligence has transformed how she scopes projects in her daily work, interacts with clients, and operates in a team. She believes it’s important to be aware of each individual’s unique context and to meet them where they are. As Abby advances in Deloitte and designs more projects, she intentionally incorporates field visits and on-the-ground interviews into the program planning process. She credits D2i for building the cultural intelligence she needs to understand this critical component of client service work. “D2i has completely shaped my professional career here,” notes Abby. “Participants operate above their levels in stretch roles. They bring that back to their Deloitte client service, and we see significant outcomes.”

## Why it Matters

Inclusive leaders take an active interest in learning about other cultures, seek culturally diverse experiences, and constantly search for local contexts. When companies invest in generating cultural intelligence among their employees, they help create an environment where all cultures are recognized, understood, and respected.

### **DESIGN TIP: APPLYING THIS TO YOUR PROGRAM**

Train pro bono professionals to spend time gathering context before jumping into the solution phase of project work. Asking questions early and often, scoping projects focused on root causes, and spending significant discovery time immersing themselves in cultural context can help employees develop effective, tailored solutions for their pro bono clients.



# Collaboration

*Highly inclusive leaders empower individuals as well as create and leverage the thinking of diverse groups.*

—*The Six Traits of Inclusive Leadership*

**“Working directly with many stakeholders helped me appreciate the value of bringing together different points of view to solve tough challenges.”**

—**Jessica Bortolussi**

## How Pro Bono Supports Collaboration

Pro bono projects bring a broad, diverse set of participants to the table—whether across business units, nonprofit leadership, or sectors—and push employees to create a safe, collaborative, and inclusive workplace environment in which everyone can thrive.

### **The Story: Jessica Bortolussi Consultant, Deloitte Consulting LLP, Government & Public Services**

At the end of 2018, Jessica Bortolussi joined a pro bono project team to support the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes initiative and its Veteran Employment Task Force. The Task Force was launched to improve veteran employment outcomes by leveraging relationships in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Deloitte helped by providing recommendations to Hiring Our Heroes on how they can best amplify their impact. The project has exposed her to a new set of experiences and challenges, including working on a large team comprised of a diverse set of stakeholders. During one part of this project, Jessica worked internally across departments and seniority levels, and externally across sectors, to write a white paper comparing private sector veteran transition programs to the government-driven Transition Assistance Program. Through this work, she practiced “harmonizing different perspectives and goals to build stronger recommendations” and added that “working directly with many stakeholders helped me appreciate the value of [bringing together] different points of view to help solve tough challenges.”

Jessica says that this experience has made her a better collaborator and consultant at Deloitte. For example, in her current project, she proactively opens lines of communication across different workstreams. She says, “I’m so much better at reaching out to groups with different perspectives.”

### **Why it Matters**

When inclusive leaders actively and intentionally stretch outside their comfort zone to pursue close connections and outside perspectives, their team members feel valued and heard.

## **DESIGN TIP: APPLYING THIS TO YOUR PROGRAM**

Push collaboration further by establishing cross-business pro bono project teams. Pro bono consultants on teams representing different business units and seniority levels can be empowered to practice delegation, communication, and team management in a new environment.



# Commitment

*Highly inclusive leaders are committed to diversity and inclusion because these objectives align with their personal values and because they believe in the business case. —The Six Traits of Inclusive Leadership*

**“I’ve learned to lift as you climb, and you can’t lift unless you are giving back and paying it forward.”**

**—Janysia Jenkins Smith**

## How Pro Bono Supports Commitment

Working for impact through pro bono service can strengthen an employee’s own values while deepening their connection to their company for sharing those values. Pro bono teams often bring together diverse perspectives to be successful, and that experience reinforces the value of diversity to talent, innovation, and business/social impact.

### The Story: Janysia Jenkins Smith Senior Manager, Deloitte & Touche LLP

For Janysia Smith, pro bono service is as deeply rooted in her personal values as it is in her professional ambitions. She articulates this by sharing a concept she’s adopted from the National Association of Black Accountants, which is to “lift as you climb.” Janysia is keen to note that you can’t lift unless you are giving back and paying it forward.

Over her 13-year Deloitte career, Janysia says, “Giving back to my local community through pro bono and volunteer efforts is really what I love most about what I do. It has allowed me to build what I commonly refer to as my professional family here at Deloitte.” From giving high school level students a week-long experience in the field of accounting with the Accounting Awareness Program (ACAP) of Houston, to helping Goodwill Houston formalize user-centric innovation ideas for their local stores, she is committed to using her skills and experiences to help more people succeed in school and work and life.

Through her pro bono service, Janysia tapped into [Deloitte’s values](#) to take care of each other and foster inclusion - motivating her to think more deeply about diversity and the role of inclusion at Deloitte. Over the past year, Janysia has leaned in on her values and taken a full-time role as the Chief of Staff to the Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and Pro Bono Lead for Deloitte Risk & Financial Advisory within Deloitte & Touche LLP. In this role, she’s focused on DEI efforts for over 16,000 professionals. And the list goes on. Janysia holds leadership roles within Deloitte’s Black Employee Network and the Houston office Inclusion Council. She also serves as a champion for INROADS Houston, which seeks to increase ethnically diverse employees in corporate management in the U.S., and to help change the way these candidates gain entry into the business world.

Living out her personal values within her professional sphere empowers Janysia to not only give back to her community, but to lead by example and promote the well-being of those around her. This is how she makes an impact every day.

## Why it Matters

Not everyone who participates in pro bono will take on an inclusion-focused role, but pro bono service can strengthen employees’ connection to organizational values. And when inclusive leaders lean on those values while managing their team, they can bring out the best in each of their employees by encouraging them to share diverse viewpoints.

## DESIGN TIP: APPLYING THIS TO YOUR PROGRAM

Connect pro bono service back to your company’s cultural values. Making an explicit connection can encourage employees to apply their pro bono experiences to their day-to-day roles and create an inclusive, service-based company culture.



## Courage

*Highly inclusive leaders speak up and respectfully challenge the status quo, and they are humble about their strengths and weaknesses.*

—*The Six Traits of Inclusive Leadership*

**“Stepup—and pro bono—exposed me to new ways of thinking, gave me a newfound confidence, and helped me discover what type of leader I want to be.”**

—Harkiran Kaur Sodhi

### How Pro Bono Supports Courage

Pro bono fosters the development of courage by empowering professionals to speak up and assert themselves with others and within the system they work.

#### **The Story: Harkiran Kaur Sodhi Former Project Delivery Analyst, Deloitte Consulting LLP**

*Stepup*—one of Deloitte’s signature employee-led pro bono service programs—has had a significant impact on Harkiran Kaur Sodhi’s career. Kiran first worked at Deloitte as a backend developer—a non-client facing role. She looked to get involved with *stepup*’s Atlanta chapter, and through her first experience as a team lead in *stepup*, her courage began to soar. For the first time in her career, she had the opportunity to apply her professional skillsets in new, strategy-oriented contexts. After gaining experience in the *stepup* team lead role, within six months, Harkiran was managing all of *stepup*Atlanta’s client relationships. “*Stepup*—and pro bono—exposed me to new ways of thinking, gave me a newfound confidence, and helped me discover what type of leader I want to be.”

With that confidence, Harkiran sought out a larger role as chapter lead for *stepup*Houston and eventually pursued a client-facing role within Deloitte. Harkiran credits exposure to a diverse coalition of *stepup* stakeholders to improving her ability to communicate, manage expectations, and deliver strategic solutions. She isn’t afraid to share her ideas or speak up to address risks. She wants her team members to feel comfortable keeping her accountable as well. Valuing everyone’s voice across the organization is an important way Harkiran supports inclusion at Deloitte.

### Why it Matters

Courageous leaders drive inclusion with their constant pursuit of growth and their willingness to respectfully challenge the status quo. This quality is fundamental in developing truly progressive teams and a welcoming corporate culture.

### DESIGN TIP: APPLYING THIS TO YOUR PROGRAM

For team-based projects, establish a team lead role to provide select employees with a growth opportunity they might not otherwise have. This can empower employees to courageously stretch outside their comfort zone and discover their own voice as a leader.





## Cognizance of Bias

*Highly inclusive leaders are mindful of personal and organizational blind spots and self-regulate to help encourage “fair play.” —The Six Traits of Inclusive Leadership*

**“I’ve applied the idea of breaking down unconscious biases back to things like ‘business chemistry’ to make sure we bring together people from a variety of age groups, educational backgrounds, and cultural perspectives.”**

**—Alex Hilliker**

### How Pro Bono Supports Cognizance of Bias

Exposing employees to diverse perspectives and challenges—by way of nonprofits and their beneficiaries—can help them be more aware of the assumptions they hold about the world around them.

#### The Story: Alex Hilliker

**Manager, Deloitte Consulting LLP, Government & Public Services**

When Alex Hilliker joined the Deloitte team seven years ago, he received an email inviting him to join a project with a military-related organization. That email—and the two years he spent on the project supporting veterans with disabilities—shaped the entire trajectory of his career. He was so inspired by that work that he took on pro bono projects for the Warrior Games and the Veteran Employment Task Force. His commitment to military and veteran issues has now extended beyond pro bono, through his paid, day-to-day client work with federal government agencies.

Alex’s exposure to the veteran community has transformed his understanding of bias in his personal and professional life. One limiting cultural perception he recognized was the portrayal of veterans as either heroes or victims. By working alongside veterans and gaining more exposure to that community, Alex made personal connections that broke down those biases. “We tend to group all veterans together,” Alex says, “but, of course, there are millions of veterans with different backgrounds and experiences.” Bridging the veteran-civilian gap is also an organization-wide priority at Deloitte, and his work has made great strides in this direction.

Being aware of these biases has helped Alex build programming at work that intentionally brings together differing groups and perspectives. “I’ve applied the idea of breaking down unconscious biases to make sure we bring together people from a variety of age groups, educational backgrounds, and cultural perspectives,” Alex noted, and he staffs projects accordingly. Alex relies on [Business Chemistry®](#), a framework created by Deloitte that draws upon the latest analytics technologies to reveal four scientifically based patterns of behavior. The system is designed to provide insights about individuals and teams based on observable traits and preferences and helps leverage team members’ unique strengths.

#### Why it Matters

Unrecognized biases can often narrow leaders’ perspectives and potentially prevent them from making fair and objective decisions. And those decisions can affect an employee’s sense of belonging at an organization. Leaders who understand their biases and develop strategies to address them are often uniquely positioned to break down barriers and drive an inclusive workplace environment.

### DESIGN TIP: APPLYING THIS TO YOUR PROGRAM

Include training modules that prepare employees to work with new perspectives in unfamiliar situations. Surfacing preconceived biases about the nonprofit sector and inviting employees to question those notions will prepare them to successfully navigate projects that challenge their pre-existing bias.

# Harnessing the Power of Pro Bono to Cultivate Inclusive Leaders at Your Company

*The evidence is clear: inclusive leadership is imperative for modern businesses, and pro bono service can be an effective tool for developing inclusive leaders.*

Corporate L&D and DEI professionals have a unique opportunity to strengthen their own inclusion strategies by collaborating with CSR to implement pro bono initiatives.

While many companies are dedicated to building an inclusive culture, business leaders should consider taking meaningful action to embody that commitment in tangible ways. Professionals who have participated in pro bono service programs report that they built one or more of these six traits identified by Deloitte and are applying those skills to help drive a more inclusive organization culture in their day-to-day roles.

Establishing a pro bono service program can help a company cultivate the leadership that may usher in a more inclusive culture, and it could be an indispensable piece of a comprehensive L&D and DEI strategy. In developing a strategy for the greatest impact, company leaders should thoughtfully engage internal stakeholders in conversations and collaborate with them as champions. As evidenced by Deloitte's experience, close collaboration between CSR and DEI leaders can empower companies to design pro bono service programs aligned with both social impact and inclusion goals and can enhance the experiential learning opportunity for the professionals. Furthermore, companies may also find that joining efforts across other departments, such as talent development, can drive even greater success and impact.

**Ready to get started? Connect with us today!**  
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