

Title **PRSA Buffalo Niagara Chapter**

Chapter Size 101–200

How does your Chapter define diversity, equity and inclusion?

Our chapter's definition of DEI is the same definition as PRSA national. It states:

The most obvious contexts of diversity include race, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, country of origin, culture, and diversity of thought. However, in a rapidly changing society, diversity continues to evolve and can include class, socioeconomic status, life experiences, learning and working styles, personality types and intellectual traditions and perspectives, in addition to cultural, political, religious, and other beliefs.

These defining attributes impact how we approach our work, connect with others and move through the world.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the term “equity” refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and adjust imbalances. The process is ongoing, requiring us to identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures.

Inclusion, according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), is defined as “the achievement of a work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization’s success.”

Inclusion is not just about having that “seat at the table” but is about ensuring everyone’s voice is heard and fully considered.

Diversity, equity and inclusion are proactive behaviors.

Respecting, embracing, celebrating and validating those behaviors are integral to PRSA’s DNA. Diversity, equity and inclusion are vital to the success of our profession, our members, and the communities in which we live and work. It is essential and is our responsibility as members of PRSA to carry this forward.

Does your Chapter include diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in your strategic plan?

Yes

Using the RPIE model, describe your Chapter's diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and achievements during the past year. --

RESEARCH: What research did you conduct to identify opportunities to address or promote DEI by and within the Chapter?

In early 2025, the Buffalo Niagara Chapter identified a critical gap in local engagement regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, particularly as national discourse marked a retreat from DEI commitments. This shift was affecting communications professionals who were left navigating unclear or disappearing internal strategies within their organizations.

Primary research included:

- Feedback from chapter members expressing concern over diminishing DEI support in their workplaces.
- A review of attendance and engagement metrics from prior DEI events which indicated a strong appetite for continued DEI-focused programming.
- Conversations with local DEI consultants, HR professionals, and C-suite communicators to identify emerging challenges and opportunities in sustaining meaningful DEI work.
- National secondary research on corporate pullbacks from DEI, and the implications for communicators (e.g., coverage in PR Week, Harvard Business Review, Retail Dive, and insights from PRSA's own Diverse Dialogues series).

This research clarified an opportunity; Buffalo Niagara's Chapter could step in as a regional thought leader, supporter, and convener around DEI in communications.

PLANNING -- Goals: What did your Chapter seek to accomplish with your 2024–2025 DEI initiatives?

Buffalo Niagara Chapter sought to create inclusive, community-based programming that reinforces the importance of DEI in the public relations industry while increasing chapter visibility and engagement across underrepresented groups. Our objectives were to:

- Educate and equip communications professionals with tools and information to navigate shifting DEI landscapes.
- Deepen the chapter's presence in underrepresented communities in Western New York.
- Recruit new members from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds.
- Engage at least 200 individuals across three DEI-focused initiatives in 2025.

PLANNING – Who was/were the target audience(s)?

Our target audiences were:

- Communications professionals impacted by internal DEI changes
- Diverse and underrepresented talent in Western New York
- C-suite leaders and DEI/HR professionals
- Members of the Buffalo PRSA Chapter and potential members

PLANNING – What were your measurable objectives?

Our measurable objectives were to:

- Secure at least 50 registrations for a Q1 DEI panel event
- Participate in a minimum of two cultural parades/festivals in 2025 to demonstrate public commitment to DEI.
- Engage at least 15 Chapter members as active volunteers across DEI programming (planning, marching, moderating, etc.).
- Generate at least 10 inquiries from diverse professionals about PRSA Buffalo Niagara membership by year-end.
- Achieve a combined reach of 200+ people through community touchpoints (attendees, in-person conversations, or social interactions) across all DEI initiatives in 2025.

PLANNING -- Budget: What were the monetary, time and human capital investments?

The Chapter's DEI initiatives were funded through chapter resources with in-kind support.

For virtual DEI Insights event: The DEI and Events department members collaborated to recruit qualified panelists and develop the run of show for February's virtual DEI Insights event. The panel of experts participated in the event free of charge. Local PR agency Ari Parson donated the use of their virtual event software for the event. Both departments collaborated with the chapter's Publicity Director to advertise the event to both chapter members and non-members. The DEI department developed panel questions and topics for discussion.

For cultural events: The DEI Director donated parade supplies and the usage of her SUV for a single parade march. The Chapter president donated parade decorations for the vehicles and bubble guns for the parade march. The Events Director donated the use of her family's truck for a single parade march. The Events department funded the production of 30 new chapter PRSA uniform t-shirts and the two magnetic "PRSA Buffalo

Niagara" signs to go on the vehicles. We wore the shirts and used the magnets for both parades. The Chapter funded the parade registration fees. Chapter members volunteered their time decorating and marching in the parade, as well as engaging with the public at the cultural events. The total time investment was 25 hours. Our budget remained under \$1,000 for the year. Despite the modest spend, efforts prioritized visibility, access, and cultural relevance.

IMPLEMENTATION -- Describe the strategies and tactics used.

Our strategies and tactics were as follows:

- Host a high-impact virtual panel addressing real-time challenges in DEI communication.
- Show up in community spaces that reflect diverse cultures and lived experiences (e.g., Juneteenth Parade, Puerto Rican & Hispanic Festival).
- Build cross-committee collaboration to support logistical and engagement needs.
- Develop consistent messaging across social platforms to promote programs and attract new audiences.

IMPLEMENTATION - - Summary: Explain your Chapter's DEI initiatives for July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025.*

The Buffalo Niagara Chapter launched the year with a virtual panel featuring DEI experts, HR leads, and a C-suite executive. The event, DEI Insights, held conversations tackling the pullback in corporate DEI efforts and its impact on communications professionals.

Recognizing the importance of presence, the Chapter joined Buffalo's 49th annual Juneteenth Parade and Festival, the 3rd largest in the country. The DEI Director worked with the Publicity Director to advertise this event within the chapter to gain member participation, encouraging them to invite their friends and families. Members decorated the pickup truck with Juneteenth colors and banners, marched in the parade, and engaged festival-goers, sharing information about the chapter and demonstrating our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. This marked the Buffalo Niagara Chapter's first appearance in a cultural parade, signaling a strategic shift toward public, community-grounded engagement.

Building on June's momentum, the Chapter also joined Buffalo's Puerto Rican and Hispanic Parade in August. This effort expanded visibility within another key demographic in the region. Chapter members celebrated cultural heritage, shared chapter information, and strengthened relationships with festival organizers and attendees.

All initiatives were promoted on PRSA Buffalo Niagara's digital platforms, amplifying their reach and reinforcing the Chapter's commitment to diversity through visible, consistent action.

IMPLEMENTATION -- Describe the elements or components, the techniques used, and the strategies and tactics undertaken, how objectives were met, and how you addressed the audience(s) you targeted.

The Buffalo Niagara Chapter executed a series of three key DEI initiatives in 2025 that combined professional development with visible community engagement.

Elements & Components:

- A virtual educational program (DEI Insights panel)
- Two cultural parade activations (Juneteenth Parade & Puerto Rican and Hispanic Parade)
- Cross-committee collaboration between DEI and Events Committees to ensure alignment and impact

Techniques Used:

- Leveraged expert voices (DEI, HR, and C-suite executives) to provide credibility and relevance.
- Applied storytelling and lived experiences to make DEI content relatable and actionable.
- Used cultural participation (parades, festivals) as a way to “meet people where they are” and increase visibility in underrepresented communities.
- Activated Chapter volunteers to demonstrate authentic allyship and create opportunities for interpersonal engagement.

Strategies and Tactics:

1. Strategy: Position PRSA Buffalo Niagara as a DEI thought leader.
 - o Tactic: Hosted a virtual panel with timely topics such as the corporate pullback from DEI, the evolving role of communicators, and strategies for inclusive organizational culture.
 - o Tactic: Promoted the event widely through chapter email blasts, social media posts and word of mouth.
2. Strategy: Increase visibility in underrepresented communities.
 - o Tactic: Participated in Buffalo’s Juneteenth Parade with the Chapter’s first-ever float, symbolizing solidarity and celebration of black culture and freedom.
 - o Tactic: Engaged directly with parade attendees, providing information about the Chapter and PRSA membership.
3. Strategy: Build authentic cultural connections.

o Tactic: Extended presence into Buffalo's Puerto Rican and Hispanic Parade, celebrating cultural pride while reaching professionals previously unaware of PRSA Buffalo Niagara.

o Tactic: Documented both parades with social media content, extending the reach of engagement and reinforcing alignment with national DEI observances.

How Objectives Were Met:

- Educational Objective: The DEI Insights panel exceeded attendance goals and provided actionable learning, confirmed by positive feedback from attendees.
- Community Visibility Objective: Chapter successfully participated in two major cultural festivals, fulfilling the goal of showing up in diverse spaces.
- Engagement Objective: Over a dozen volunteers represented the chapter in planning and event participation, strengthening internal engagement.
- Recruitment Objective: Both cultural events generated inquiries and introduced PRSA Buffalo Niagara to professionals in the Black, Puerto Rican, and Hispanic communities.

Addressing Target Audiences:

- Communications professionals were engaged through the February DEI Insights event, providing tools to navigate uncertain DEI landscapes.
- Black and Hispanic communities in Western New York were directly reached during parades, ensuring PRSA was represented in spaces that matter to those audiences.
- Chapter members and potential members were engaged through volunteer opportunities, leadership visibility, and social media storytelling that extended event impact.

EVALUATION -- What were your results? Explain how the program met or exceeded its original measurement methods when available or appropriate. What worked? What was accomplished? What would you do differently?

We were successful executing all of the events and increasing our engagement efforts. We had hoped for greater parade participation from members, however we did not account for the fact that many were already committed to the same events through their jobs. Many were at parades and festivals representing the companies they work for. We plan to grow the DEI team and create team leads and groups to ensure representation whenever the DEI department facilitates Chapter participation in cultural events around the City of Buffalo/ Niagara Falls.

Further breakdown:

- Attendance & Engagement: Over 99 communications professionals registered for the DEI panel, but 63 participants attended; hundreds more were engaged during both cultural parade events.
- Visibility: Chapter presence at major cultural events led to significant inperson conversations with diverse community groups and garnered attention from professionals previously unaware of PRSA's local presence.
- Recruitment: Following each event, the Chapter saw increased social media engagement and inquiries from prospective members.
- Strategic Integration: DEI was integrated into both educational and community-facing events, establishing a blueprint for future programming.

EVALUATION – How have your Chapter's DEI initiatives impacted attitudes, beliefs or behaviors?

Our Chapter's DEI initiatives helped shift perceptions and actions among both members and the broader community. The DEI Insights panel increased attendees' confidence and awareness in navigating DEI conversations at work, reinforcing the belief that communicators play a critical role in advancing inclusion. Participation in the Juneteenth and Puerto Rican & Hispanic parades signaled authentic allyship, strengthening community trust and belonging while reshaping the belief that PRSA Buffalo

Niagara is an inclusive, welcoming space. Member behavior also changed; more volunteers engaged in DEI programming, and community members unfamiliar with PRSA inquired about joining, demonstrating that our initiatives are inspiring real connection and engagement.

EVALUATION – How have your Chapter's DEI initiatives led the communications industry in your market?

At a time when many organizations were retreating from DEI, PRSA Buffalo Niagara stepped forward. Our DEI Insights panel positioned the Chapter as a thought leader for communicators navigating shifting DEI landscapes. By visibly participating in the Juneteenth and Puerto Rican & Hispanic parades, we modeled what authentic community engagement looks like for the communications field. Member activation and social storytelling amplified our presence, making PRSA Buffalo Niagara the local standardbearer for aligning communications practice with DEI values.

EVALUATION – How have your Chapter's DEI initiatives influenced membership?

Our DEI initiatives have increased awareness of PRSA Buffalo Niagara and attracted interest from professionals previously unfamiliar with the Chapter, particularly during the Juneteenth and Puerto Rican & Hispanic parades. They also strengthened member engagement, with more volunteers participating in planning, events, and outreach, deepening commitment and creating a stronger sense of belonging within the Chapter. We have seen an increase in participation from dormant members, and there have been at minimum 3 new members join the chapter as a result of our DEI initiatives.

EVALUATION – How has your Chapter established sound relationships with diverse publics and/or organizations to gain consensus or help PRSA advance diversity in the profession?

By participating in the Juneteenth and Puerto Rican & Hispanic parades, our Chapter ignited the beginning of authentic connections with diverse communities and cultural organizations. Members attended pre-parade and festival meetings, providing PRSA information to organizers who shared it within their networks, garnering awareness and credibility among community leaders. PRSA Buffalo Niagara information was also read aloud to festival attendees at the halfway point of the parade routes when PRSA chapter participants arrived at the travel mark. These efforts help established trust, deepened visibility, and positioned Buffalo Niagara as a partner in advancing diversity within the communications profession.

EVALUATION – Next Steps: What are your future plans for DEI initiatives?

Looking ahead, PRSA Buffalo Niagara is committed to sustaining and expanding our DEI presence. We plan to continue participating in 2–3 cultural events or parades annually, ensuring consistent visibility and engagement with diverse communities while strengthening member involvement. To deepen professional development, we will expand our DEI Insights series to twice per year, keeping communications professionals equipped to navigate evolving DEI challenges. Additionally, we will place greater emphasis on fostering collaborative relationships with diverse media outlets and organizations, including the Buffalo Association of Black Journalists, local ethnic newspapers, and radio stations. These partnerships will amplify our reach, elevate underrepresented voices, and advance PRSA’s mission of diversity in the profession.