

# Encouraging Recruitment of Diverse Talent in the Biopharma Industry

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By **Tunde Bello**

I am a Black British man with an African name living in the United States. There are many times when I feel that I alone represent a whole group of people. I felt the weight of that responsibility every day when I started my career in drug development because in most meetings, I was the only person of color.

People tend to surround themselves with personal and professional networks that are very similar to themselves. Tapping into those same well-established networks for recruitment will not produce new results. Instead of repeatedly turning to the Ivy Leagues and Stanfords of the world, the biopharma industry should be broadening its search to include historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to raise awareness of our industry and the multitude of growth opportunities in the Black community.

That is only a short-term solution. To make long-term changes, funding and resources are needed to help these institutions develop facilities that will ignite and nurture students' curiosity and interest in the life sciences. Additionally, investing in STEM

education for Black students at an early age is an imperative goal. Have scientists reach out to these communities, visit middle and high schools and speak to students about the industry and the benefits of medicine. This can foster stronger relationships within the communities and create an enduring impact that may, one day, benefit our workforce.

### **Supporting STEM education**

Currently, we provide grants to organizations such as Kits Cubed, which introduces children at a young age to scientific concepts through fun, interactive and affordable programming. That investment continues with initiatives like the Calculus Roundtable, a program of classes and workshops for students from historically excluded populations in grades K-12 that has proven to help improve students' test scores in science and math subjects. This type of outreach is a gateway to establishing solid support systems for cultivating talent. If we enrich STEM curricula in a meaningful way, we can encourage more people in historically excluded communities to choose a career in STEM, thereby building a better, more diverse workforce.

Beyond education, we as an industry also need to invest considerable time and resources into Black communities. In the past, the industry has partnered with influential churches, patient organizations and even celebrities to raise awareness of healthcare issues that disproportionately affect their communities. As drug developers and researchers, we have a limited viewpoint in understanding the issues that impact these communities. That makes it critical for us to build relationships with Black doctors and local organizations on the front lines of improving the healthcare provided in these communities. This will allow us to expand and deepen our investments in the Black community and create genuine connections and sustain long-term trust with current and future generations.

During my 25+ years in this industry, I've seen the beginnings of this transformation. Companies employ a more diverse workforce and are focusing on addressing diseases and other health issues that disproportionately impact minority communities. If we continue to recruit diverse talent so that our workforce reflects the diversity of the people who take our medicines, then we can make more informed decisions on which therapeutic areas and conditions to research.

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### **Racial diversity in the workplace**

This year, Bristol Myers Squibb released a **Global Diversity and Inclusion report** to show the racial demographics of our workforce. Our commitment to diversity is unwavering, but as our D&I report showed, we still have work to do. Bristol Myers Squibb is taking accountability and promoting transparency regarding our current employee workforce. By the end of 2022, we aim to double executive representation of Black and Hispanic/Latino employees in the U.S.

To diversify our future talent pool, we are providing scholarships and mentorship to Black students at HBCUs, as well as **collaborating with five leading HBCUs** to launch Tomorrow's Innovators, a program that creates custom biopharma educational programming designed to prepare undergraduate students for a career in the industry. Bristol Myers Squibb also is partnering with United Negro College Fund to sponsor the **Ernest E. Just Postgraduate Fellowship Program** in the Life Sciences, which is dedicated to Black scientists.

Building a diverse pipeline of talent will help us evolve beyond our ways of doing business and find creative, meaningful ways to impact Black communities. Already we are significantly expanding our partnerships with diverse suppliers to help them transform their businesses, create new jobs and generate an overall positive economic impact in their communities.

As a member of the company's Black Organization for Leadership and Development (BOLD) employee group, which fosters an inclusive environment, promotes bold leadership, encourages involvement in the community and increases cultural awareness across the company, I have seen firsthand these initiatives grow, but there is much more work to be done.

Hiring diverse talent is critical, but we cannot stop there. People's capabilities are only as limited as the opportunities they receive, and I want our industry to provide as many as possible in the form of long-term investments. If we do, change will be made, one day at a time.

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