

COMMENTARY

## Igniting progress: SIOP's role in advocating DEI policy change

Rebecca Harmata<sup>1</sup>, Nohelia Argote<sup>2</sup>, Reggie Romain<sup>3</sup>, and Jennifer Feitosa<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Georgia, Athens, USA, <sup>2</sup>Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, USA, <sup>3</sup>Accenture New York, New York, USA and <sup>4</sup>Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, USA

**Corresponding author:** Rebecca Harmata; Email: [rebeccaharmata@gmail.com](mailto:rebeccaharmata@gmail.com)

In their focal article, Follmer et al. (2024) present a multitude of legislation related to changes that affect diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and provide strategies for individuals and organizations to show their support toward DEI. Missing from this list are professional associations, such as the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP). SIOP is well positioned to be an industry leader in DEI advocacy, as the majority of SIOP's value statements directly align with Follmer et al.'s calls to action, including (a) "promote the highest ethical standards in research, education, and evidence-based practice of I-O psychology," (b) "serve as the trusted authority for the science of psychology applied to the workplace," (c) "create and nurture an inclusive and collegial community through intentional action," (d) "encourage and embrace more diversity within our profession," and (e) "respond in a timely and meaningful way to real-world problems" ("SIOP Vision, Mission, Values, and Goals," n.d.). Indeed, George Floyd's murder was a wake-up call for SIOP, catalyzing numerous DEI initiatives such as the SIOP Stands Against Racism and a partnership with the National Academy of Human Resources. Since then, however, SIOP's commitment to DEI has not been as proactive, transformative, and accessible as it should be.

Now more than ever, SIOP should leverage its expertise and influence to drive significant change, advocating tirelessly for a future where every workplace is inclusive and equitable. SIOP's unwavering commitment to building effective organizations and enhancing worker well-being already positions SIOP as the pinnacle of science and practice in industrial-organizational psychology. As DEI efforts face increasing legal challenges, SIOP must also be a reliable beacon of ethical standards and truth, boldly championing all aspects of DEI. By taking a stand and leading with conviction, SIOP can champion decision making that is both innovative and well grounded, leading to impactful and meaningful progress in the DEI landscape. In the following commentary, we argue DEI advocacy directly aligns with SIOP's strategic goals and objectives and outline actionable steps SIOP can take to fulfill these promises. The stakes are high, and the time for SIOP to lead is now.

### Partnering with policymakers to confront real-world challenges

A critical component of SIOP's Strategic Goal 1 is the collaboration with policymakers to address pertinent real-world issues by (a) identifying critical real-world challenges, (b) developing concise communication resources of said real-world challenges, (c) empowering individuals through

training and resources, and (d) establishing SIOP as an authority. Although SIOP has successfully taken the lead in defining rigorous standards for selection processes (e.g., *Standards*) and is at the forefront of shaping legislation concerning artificial intelligence, SIOP's approach to DEI legislation has been reactive.

This is in stark comparison to other professional organizations such as the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP), and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). For instance, SHRM has taken a strong public position on various legislative matters, including opposing California's recent right-to-disconnect bill by writing a public opposing letter to assembly member Matt Haney (SHRM, 2024). The Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) consistently participates in Social Science Advocacy Day in partnership with the Consortium of Social Science Associations to advocate for federal funding for social and behavioral research science. Similarly, SPSSI (2024) published a resource guide on the current violence happening in Gaza, providing historical and analytical context on the current events and providing a guideline for psychologists to understand and respond to these violent events through policy advocacy and support.

At the individual level, Follmer et al. encouraged individuals to be engaged in legal proceedings (e.g., awareness of new laws, signing petitions) and general allyship behaviors and nobly called for individuals to increase their political involvement through "tracking new legislative proposals," "signing and sharing petitions through one's social networks," and holding organizations accountable through protest and boycotts (p. 31–32). SIOP can empower individuals by providing clear, insightful interpretations, empowering individuals to critically engage with legislative issues, form informed opinions, and advocate effectively for policies that promote organizational health, worker well-being, and societal effectiveness. At the organizational level, Follmer et al. suggested conducting an audit of policies and programs to ensure legal compliance and equitable access, developing support programs (e.g., employee resource groups), and creating DEI mission statements. SIOP can help facilitate these efforts by providing critical resources such as DEI mission statement templates, internal and public DEI communication guidelines, and best practices on how to support marginalized employees when real-world challenges occur.

### **Diversity, inclusivity, and agility**

SIOP is also committed to building a "diverse, inclusive, and agile SIOP" (Strategic Goal 2) through an effective online presence. SIOP's website has various DEI resources, but they are hard to identify; the immediate value of these resources is unclear and outdated. For example, SIOP has a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Guide for Organizations and Professionals nested within Business Resources. To access this page, one has to hover over the navigation bar, for the resource is not even linked on the main Business Resources page. When you find the page, there are only five articles, one article each for selection, interviewing, compensation, training, and leadership and development, the latest of which was published in 2021. To show how underresourced this is, we compared it to the remote work business resources, which showed 29 articles available.

To make DEI more sustainable, SIOP should continue to show how DEI is an integral part of each I-O system and HR function rather than promote DEI as a separate and isolated topic. For example, DEI is a critical component to remote work, as return to office mandates disproportionately disadvantage caregivers, immunocompromised workers, and employees with disabilities. Advances in artificial intelligence should center on DEI, as algorithmic biases have and will continue to create inequitable access to work. The automation of jobs may require intentional top-down skills training for vulnerable populations to successfully respond to the changing nature of work. At every point in our work, we must be thinking about equitable workplace experiences. Yes, the reactive elimination of DEI teams and chief diversity officers in response to recent legislation is devastating, but if SIOP more clearly embeds DEI throughout all organizational processes, DEI as a concept can become more sustainable.

As organizations increasingly prioritize corporate social responsibility (CSR), SIOP has a significant opportunity to provide essential resources. Corporate social responsibility involves organizational commitment to improve societal well-being through ethical business practices, social equity, and environmental commitment (Du et al., 2010). The sustainability of human capital focuses on promoting the well-being of employees ensuring that they have the appropriate skills and environments to succeed (Peiró et al., 2023). By equipping organizations with the knowledge needed to integrate CSR principles into their DEI practices, SIOP can foster ethical decision making and cultivate a culture of continuous learning and development.

### Gathering and energizing for impact

Much of the backlash around DEI is rooted in fear and a lack of understanding. Engaging in critical DEI discourse causes discomfort, invites criticism, and discourages engagement. To make headway, it is crucial to include more people in these efforts and avoid operating in a bubble. For this reason, it is important to lean on allies. SIOP has seen a rise in allyship networks (e.g., SIOP's Women's Inclusion Network, Blacks in I/O, Asians in I/O, Latinos in IO, SIOP Diversifying I-O Psychology Program), educational workshops (e.g., Evidence-Based Strategies for Building Inclusive Workspaces through the SIOP Work Smart Series), and supporting DEI research throughout the annual conference. However, the burden of promoting DEI still falls upon marginalized community members who need allies to step in and help.

Other efforts can include creating a committee for legal and legislative matters to provide analysis and recommendations and public stances on policies. These efforts have the potential not only to benefit members directly but also to influence organizations and society in general. As mentioned prior, Follmer's et al. article did a great job of bringing relevant laws to the forefront. However, Follmer et al. also suggested organizations should take responsibility where federal laws fall short in protecting employees. SIOP can also take up this call by becoming involved with other influential organizations such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), SHRM, and SPSSI, among others, to amplify advocacy efforts. By collaborating with other organizations with similar or different expertise, SIOP can have a larger impact regarding networks, expertise, and resources as well as policy making.

Furthermore, incorporating APA's guidelines for inclusive language into SIOP resources can ensure that communication is respectful, fosters inclusion, and promotes a culture of equity. These resources provide a comprehensive framework focused on eliminating oppressive structures that have harmed minorities through language (APA, 2023).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, SIOP has an ideal opportunity to amplify its resources and advocate for DEI at all levels. As highlighted by Follmer et al., DEI legislative matters are constantly changing, and different agents can support these efforts. However, missing from the list are professional organizations such as SIOP. Throughout this commentary, we demonstrated how SIOP is in an ideal position to lead in this area, aligning its actions with its values and strategic goals. Now more than ever, SIOP should utilize its resources, influence, and expertise to create positive change in the workplace and society. By taking action, SIOP has the potential to become a key influence and leading organization in DEI matters.

### References

- American Psychological Association. (2023). *Inclusive language guide*, 2nd edn. <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/>
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12(1), 8–19.

- Follmer, K., Sabat, I., Jones, K., & King, E.** (2024). Under attack: Why and how I-O psychologists should counteract threats to DEI in education and organizations. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, **17**.
- Peiró, J. M., Svicher, A., & Di Fabio, A.** (2023). Innovative behaviors and eudaimonic well-being: The contribution of human capital sustainability leadership to sustainable career, decent work, decent lives, and healthy lives. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, **32**(3), 215–224.
- Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.** (2024). *Psychologists' response to the violence in Gaza*. Retrieved from <https://www.spsai.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=2943>
- Society of Human Resources Management.** (2024, April 4). *Letter of Opposition: AB 2751 (California Assembly Bill)*. Society for Human Resource Management. [https://devshrmadvocac.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/SHRM\\_CalSHRM\\_Letter-of-Opposition\\_AB2751\\_CA\\_4.4.24.pdf](https://devshrmadvocac.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/SHRM_CalSHRM_Letter-of-Opposition_AB2751_CA_4.4.24.pdf)