



Addressing the Supplier Diversity Awareness Deficit: The Role of Higher Education Procurement Websites

College of Professional Studies

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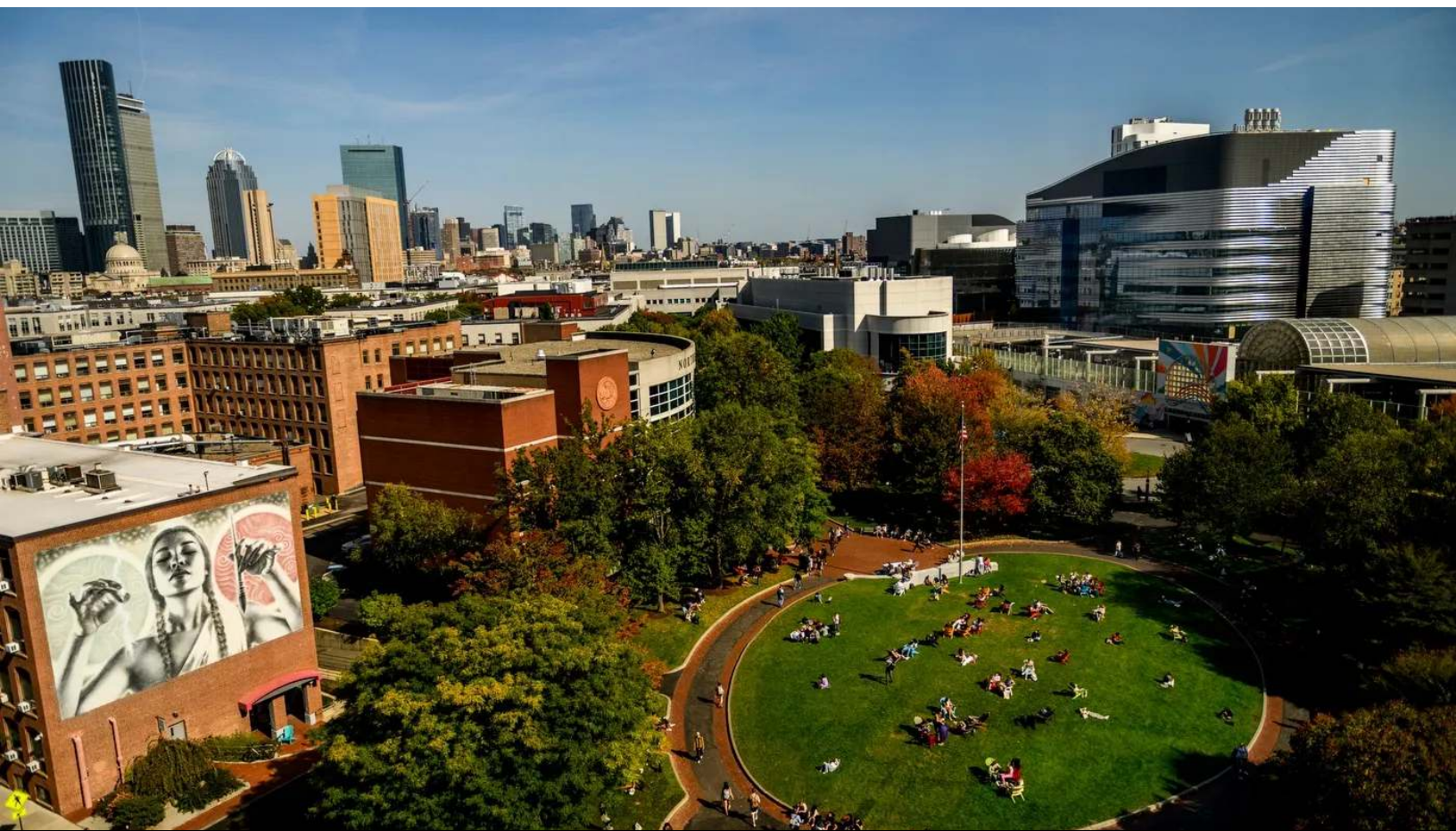
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ABOUT THE NORTHEASTERN LAB FOR INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The mission of the Northeastern Lab for Inclusive Entrepreneurship (NL4IE) is to contribute to economic development and community resilience by promoting inclusive, equitable innovation and entrepreneurship and assisting small businesses address their technical and managerial challenges. With funding from a 5-year grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the Lab sponsors an Inclusive Entrepreneur Fellowship program for diverse small business owners in Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. The Lab also conducts research and makes policy recommendations in support of supplier diversity in higher education.

Learn more at:
nl4ie.sites.northeastern.edu/



SPONSOR ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY TAKEAWAYS

It is often said that a website is a window into an organization. What it stands for; the services or products it provides; and most importantly, how it engages with stakeholders. The websites of higher education institutions (HEIs) are often very elaborate windows for students and their parents, faculty/staff, alumni, donors, and other stakeholders (including community members).

Within an institution's website, procurement webpages can provide critical information to existing and potential vendors in the local community. Such webpages provide a degree of transparency about the procurement process, which in many HEIs is decentralized and sometimes difficult to navigate. For instance, an interested vendor might be able to learn about current business opportunities, specific procurement procedures, and FAQs.

As part of a research initiative funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Northeastern Lab for Inclusive Entrepreneurship examined what sort of online 'windows' are available to diverse small businesses (DSBs)^[1] seeking to engage in business with colleges and universities. The survey results described in our May 2022 report **Promoting Supplier Diversity in Higher Education: Barriers and Opportunities** showed that DSBs consider websites an important source of procurement information.

After analyzing the websites of 114 higher education institutions (HEIs) in New England, we discovered that there is a lack of information available to the public regarding how these institutions acquire goods or products and services. Despite professed commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion and support for local communities, colleges and universities can do much more to address what we are calling a *supplier diversity awareness deficit*.

Key takeaways:

- Despite widespread institutional commitment to diversity, most New England HEIs do very little to promote supplier diversity on their websites.
- Diverse small businesses often have difficulty learning how to engage with HEIs and do not know where to look for opportunities.
- The most informative HEI supplier diversity web pages include a range of resources to help DSBs navigate the procurement process.
- Supplier diversity web pages can significantly strengthen an institution's outreach to DSBs, as well as promote the benefits of supplier diversity to internal stakeholders.
- There is an opportunity for HEIs to prioritize transparency in their procurement processes and provide DSBs with a clear window into their practices. This will not only ensure ethical practices, but also build trust and confidence in the institution among stakeholders.

^[1] We include in the category Diverse Small Businesses (DSB) the following enterprises: Women Business Enterprises (WBEs), Service-Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (SDVOBEs), Veteran Business Enterprises (VBEs), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Business Enterprises (LGBTBEs), and Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBEs).

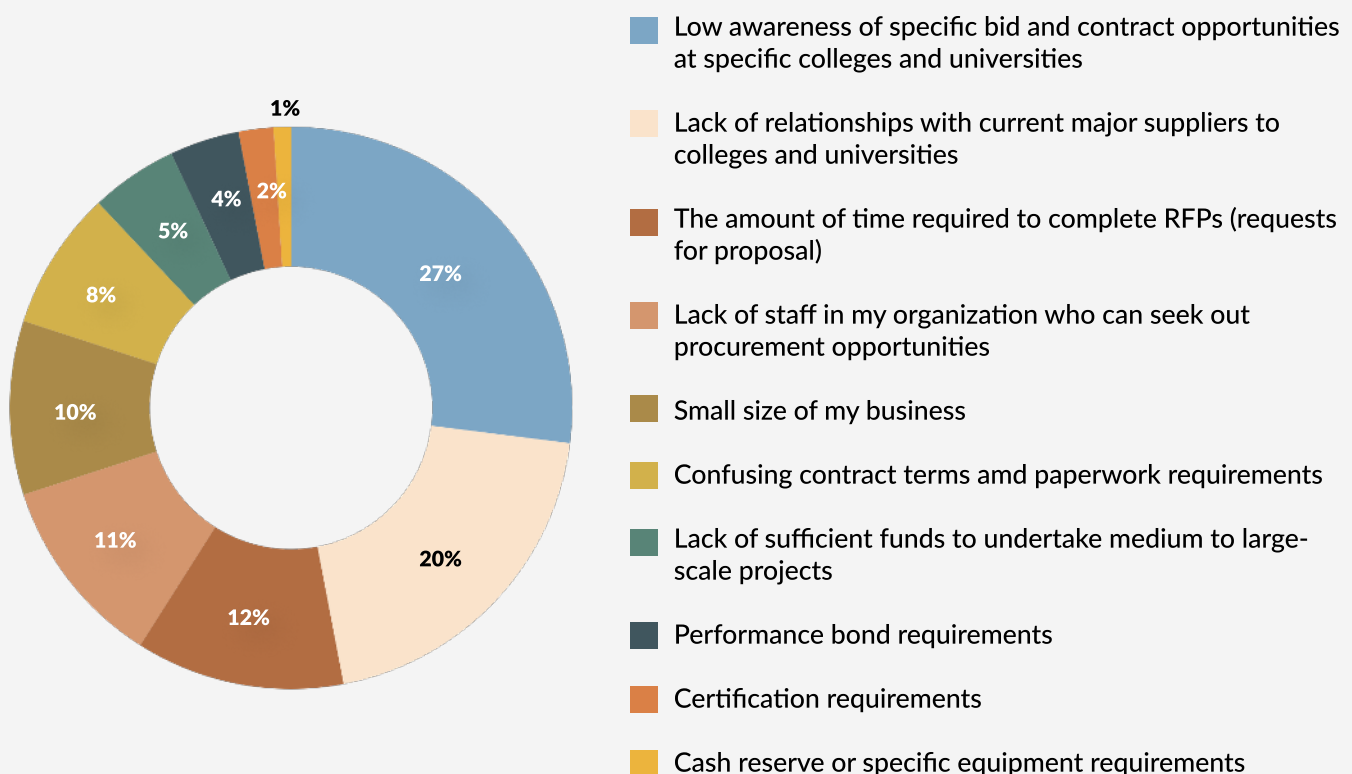
THE DIVERSE SUPPLIER PERSPECTIVE

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2018 and 2019, the spending of HEIs in the U.S. reached \$632 billion (in current dollars), two-thirds of which was spent by public institutions and the remaining one thirds by private institutions. Yet, a majority of HEI spending was associated with a limited number of large businesses, which dwarfed the participation of DSBs.

Research has revealed that organizations that prioritize supplier diversity not only benefit from a more inclusive and equitable procurement process, but also from increased innovation, improved supplier relationships, and enhanced trust and reputation in the community. By embracing supplier diversity, HEIs can create a more sustainable and socially responsible business model that benefits both the institution and the wider community.

Our 2022 report **Promoting Supplier Diversity in Higher Education: Barriers and Opportunities**, based on a survey of 359 diverse small businesses, underscores what might be called an awareness deficit. Survey respondents cited the complexity of the request for proposal (RFP) process as a major barrier to doing business with colleges and universities.

Figure 1. Major barriers in doing business with higher education institutions



Not only do procurement guidelines vary from institution to institution, but it is also difficult to locate information about them. One survey respondent put it this way: “We don’t even attempt to bid for business because the process seems so daunting.” A real estate advisory firm owner noted that “it’s hard to even know where to start in terms of relationship building and understanding what contracting opportunities might be available.”

Many respondents emphasized how difficult it was to learn about business opportunities at colleges and universities, or even where to look. For the most part, they reported that HEI websites were of little help in describing the institution’s procurement practices.

One business owner described their experience this way:

“Something needs to be published on the website...how to look for contracts, register as a supplier and/or other information would be helpful. A quick browse of the university website doesn't make the information easily available, as it is tailored for students and admissions. I am not even sure how I could do business...by looking through the website.”



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

To evaluate the current state of higher education procurement websites, we reviewed the websites of 114 academic institutions in New England that had at least an accredited bachelor's degree program. As an example of best practices, we also looked at the sites of colleges and universities receiving the “Jesse L. Moore 2021” and “2022 Supplier Diversity Awards” from the **INSIGHT Into Diversity** magazine.

New England Context:

As a testbed for exploring HEI procurement websites, we selected the New England region composed of six states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) operated by the US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, the region has 338 HEIs, which account for 5.38% of all academic institutions in the US and its territories. They include both public and private universities/colleges. Our objective was to gain insight into the most effective strategies employed by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in promoting supplier diversity. While both public and private universities and colleges may recognize the importance of promoting diversity and inclusivity in their procurement processes, we set to examine the differences between a “have-to” approach that makes it mandatory for state universities to comply with state policies, and a “love-to” approach, where universities are intrinsically motivated to implement supplier diversity programs in their institutions.

Out of 338 HEIs, we screened 114 HEIs that offer bachelor’s degrees or above. To classify those HEIs, we referred to the Carnegie Classifications. This system assigns codes to HEIs based on their level of research and degree offerings. HEIs with codes 15 and 16 are classified as doctoral/research universities, while codes 21 and 22 indicate master’s colleges and universities. Codes 31, 32, and 33 are assigned to baccalaureate colleges. Degree-wise, doctoral/research universities, master’s colleges and universities, and baccalaureate colleges account for 20%, 48%, and 38%, respectively. State-wise, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont account for 17%, 45%, 12%, 11%, 7%, and 9%, respectively. Table 1 shows the composition of our study subjects.

Table 1. Classification of Higher Education Institutions in our study

| State | Doctoral/Research Universities | Master’s Colleges and Universities | Baccalaureate Colleges | Total |
|---------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Connecticut | 4 | 9 | 6 | 19 (17%) |
| Massachusetts | 12 | 21 | 18 | 51 (45%) |
| Maine | 1 | 4 | 9 | 14 (12%) |
| New Hampshire | 3 | 3 | 6 | 12 (11%) |
| Rhode Island | 2 | 5 | 1 | 8 (7%) |
| Vermont | 1 | 6 | 3 | 10 (9%) |
| Total | 23 (20%) | 48 (42%) | 43 (38%) | 114 (100%) |

Source: Organized by the authors based on IPEDS and Carnegie Classifications.

Methodology:

We aimed to gain insight into the perspective of vendors when they search for academic institutions to collaborate with. To achieve this, we adopted a strategic approach that emulated the vendor's perspective. Our methodology involved the following steps:

1. We searched on Google the university name + “supplier diversity”, e.g. we searched for “Northeastern University supplier diversity”.
2. If the academic institution had a website, then we would classify it into one of 5 categories:
 - a) supplier diversity specific webpage
 - b) supplier diversity mentioned on the main page
 - c) website with external sources
 - d) procurement page only
 - e) no information for vendors on website
3. If the website was not found, we proceeded to the subsequent step.
4. We searched on Google the university name + “procurement” e.g. we searched for “Northeastern University procurement”.
5. Same as step 2, If a website existed we classified it into one of 5 categories above. If the website was not found, we proceeded to the subsequent step.
6. We searched on Google the university name + “purchasing” e.g. we searched for “Northeastern University purchasing”.
7. Same as step 2. If a website existed, we classified it into one of 5 categories above. If the website was not found, it entered a sixth category of “not having a website”.

The following shows the results of our research.

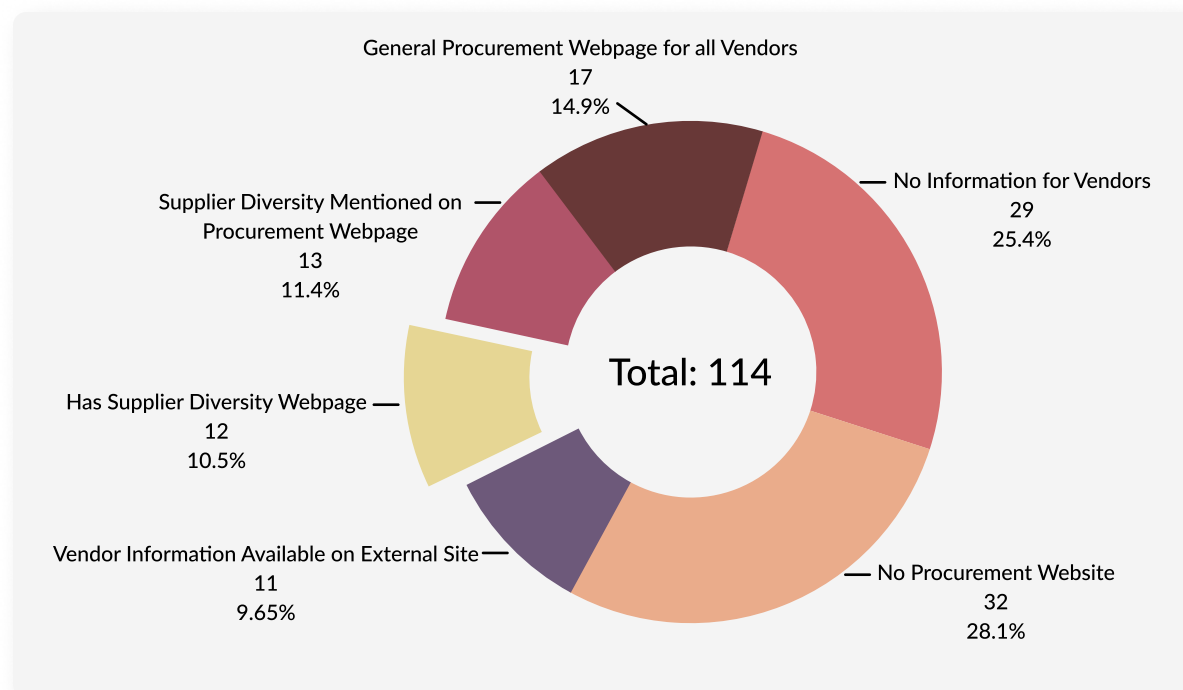


Figure 2. Category of HEI Procurement Websites

We classified the 114 websites into five categories, based on the degree of information offered to potential and current diverse suppliers:

1. Supplier Diversity Pages

- These are webpages that are specifically built for and strictly devoted to supplier diversity. Webpages typically titled as 'Supplier Diversity' were included in this category.

2. Supplier Diversity Mentioned on Webpage

- These include schools' websites that have expressed an interest in supplier diversity, but do not have a separate webpage or other information for diverse suppliers. These include websites that mention supplier diversity in their mission statement, have supplier diversity sections on their procurement pages, or ask for companies to classify themselves as "diverse small businesses" on their public applications.

3. External Sites

- These websites have links to "state specific sites" or are part of a "shared state network" in which case vendors must look at external sources in order to understand the specific school's supplier diversity policy.

4. Procurement Specific Webpages

- These webpages have general information for vendors or are bid websites. However, they do not have any specific mention of supplier diversity.

5. No Information for Vendors

- These websites have no information that is helpful for suppliers. This includes internal sites, fiscal websites, handbooks, and applications that do not consider diverse suppliers.

6. No Procurement Website

- These were schools where no webpage information on procurement exists.

The Bottomline

Only 12 HEIs – i.e. 10.5% of the total 114 schools – have created dedicated supplier diversity pages on their site. Most of these institutions are located in Massachusetts and Connecticut. For the colleges and universities located in Massachusetts, a common thread is their membership in the Boston Consortium for Higher Education.

Website Accessibility

Previous sections have emphasized the significance of HEI procurement websites in promoting supplier diversity. By leveraging these websites, academic institutions can expand their supplier base and tap into a wider pool of talent and expertise. Another pressing concern in supplier diversity is accessibility, especially for suppliers owned by individuals with disabilities, or those who have served in the military and are now living with disabilities, as well as businesses owned by service-disabled veterans. For instance, the Supplier Diversity Office in the State of Massachusetts accepts two relevant certifications: Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Enterprise (SDVOBE) and Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBE).

To evaluate the accessibility of HEI procurement websites, we employed two online tools: [WAVE](#) and [Accessibility Checker](#). Both tools allowed us to check whether those websites comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, particularly Section 508) and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines requirements (WCAG, particularly current 2.0). Out of 114 HEIs' websites, we found that only 5 universities/colleges (or 4%) comply fully with accessibility requirements, while 45 (or 40%) are semi-compliant and 7 (or 6%) do not comply.

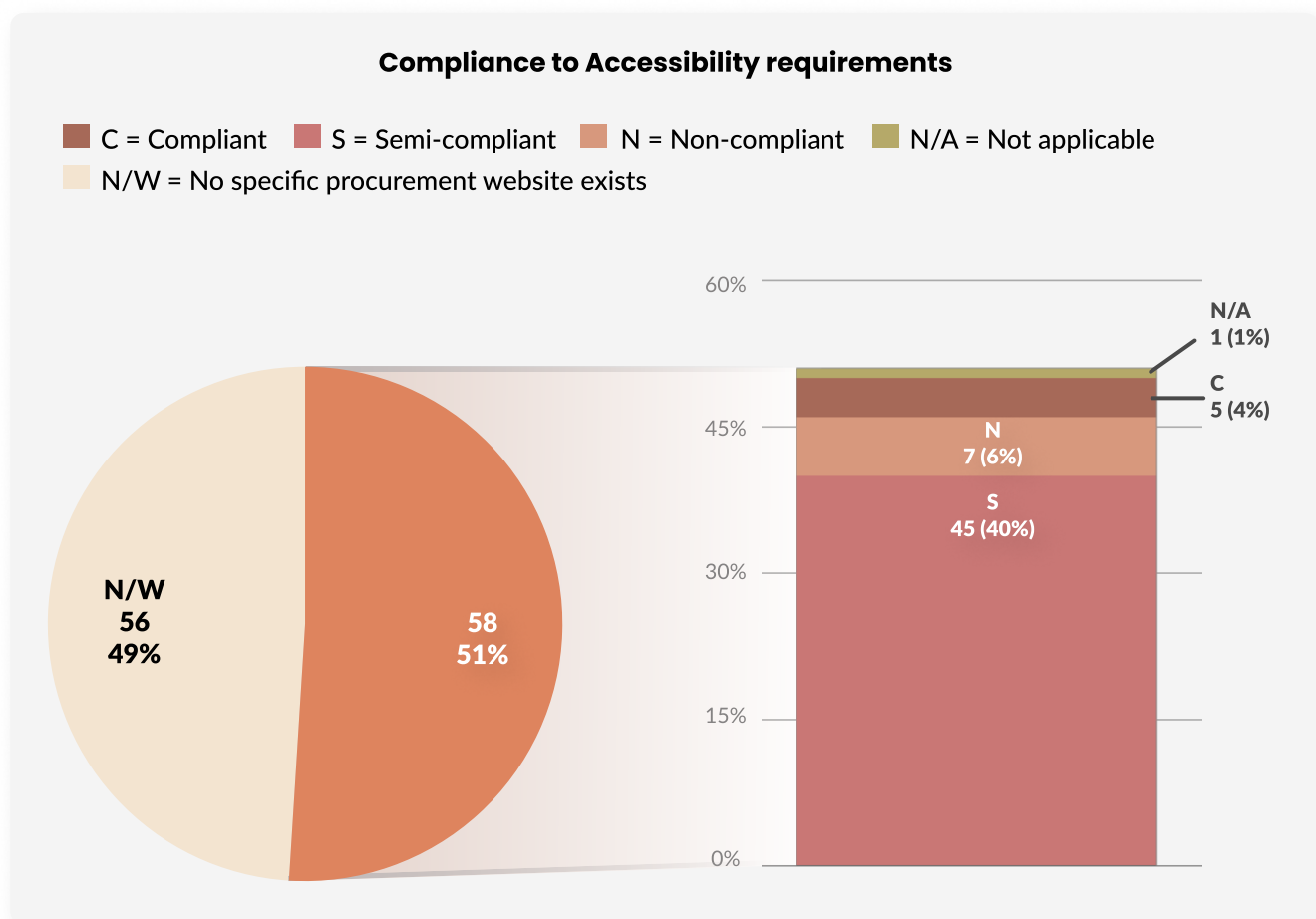


Figure 3. Accessibility Compliance of Procurement Websites

PROCUREMENT INFORMATION ON SUPPLIER DIVERSITY WEBPAGES

While our analysis of HEI websites in New England shows that very few offer any sort of information for DSBs, there are a handful of exceptions. What is type of information that appears on these sites? How is this Based on a review of both New England HEIs' websites and a sampling of the HEI websites of colleges and universities that received the Jesse L. Moore 2021 and 2022 Supplier Diversity Awards from **INSIGHT Into Diversity** magazine, we identified nine types of information designed to help diverse suppliers:

1. Statement of commitment to supplier diversity
2. Information about organizations that certify diverse businesses
3. Step-by-step process: "How to do business with"
4. Contact email or form for diverse small businesses
5. Listing of current contracts and pending contract opportunities
6. Databases of diverse small business information
7. Information for internal departments on the value of supplier diversity
8. List of outreach events
9. Diversity spend dashboard

What follows are descriptions of the nine information categories and some outstanding examples, mainly on the sites of HEIs receiving Supplier Diversity Awards from **INSIGHT Into Diversity** magazine.



Type 1. Statement of institutional commitment to supplier diversity

On a very basic level, HEIs can use their procurement sites to highlight an institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as it relates to suppliers -- and why that commitment is important.

Especially for DSBs that are new to doing business with a college or university, seeing a statement like this creates a positive first impression. As one business owner notes, *"Seeing the commitment statement may make me, as a diverse supplier, feel more comfortable about applying."*

Emory University, for example, uses simple, direct terms to define supplier diversity and inclusion, as the website's screen capture below illustrates. A key point made in a number of these value statements is that supplier diversity should mirror an institution's student diversity and its local communities.

The image is a screenshot of a webpage titled "WHAT IS SUPPLIER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?". The page has a light gray header with the title in blue. Below the header, there are three main sections, each with a bold heading and a paragraph of text. The first section is "Broad Mix of Qualified Suppliers", the second is "Mirrors Our Supplier Base", and the third is "Offers Distinct Opportunities". The third section includes a bulleted list of three items: Competition, Culture Awareness, and Innovation. The page has a clean, professional layout with a white background and blue text for headings and titles.

WHAT IS SUPPLIER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

Broad Mix of Qualified Suppliers

Supplier Diversity and Inclusion is simply a broader mix of qualified suppliers to meet Procurement needs.

It exhibits the way an organization configures opportunity, interaction, communication and decision making in support of diverse suppliers.

Mirrors Our Supplier Base

It includes developing a Procurement process that mirrors our supplier base to the community, our student body and employee body.

Offers Distinct Opportunities

Supply Diversity and Inclusion allows us to bring into play the following opportunities to achieve superior solutions by engaging our local community.

- Competition
- Culture Awareness
- Innovation

Figure 4. Commitment Statement Described on Emory University

Type 2. Information about organizations certifying diverse small businesses

Certification is an absolute requirement for DSBs hoping to do business with colleges and universities. A number of supplier diversity web pages indicate where a business can learn more about certification and how to obtain it. Babson College, for instance, provides a list of links to seven such organizations.

| Preferred Certifying & Supporting Agencies | |
|--|--|
| Abbreviations | |
| Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) | A business that is a for-profit enterprise, regardless of size, physically located in the United States or its trust territories, which is owned, operated managed, and controlled by minority group members. "Minority group members" are United States citizens who are Asian, Black, Hispanic and Native American. Ownership by minority individuals means the business is at least 51% owned by such individuals or, in the case of a publicly-owned business, at least 51% of the stock is owned by one or more such individuals. |
| Women Business Enterprise (WBE) | A business that is a for-profit enterprise, regardless of size, physically located in the United States or its trust territories, which is owned, operated, managed and controlled by one or more women who are United States citizens. Ownership means the business is at least 51% owned by one or more women or, the in the case of a publicly-owned business, at least 51% of the stock is owned by one or more women. |

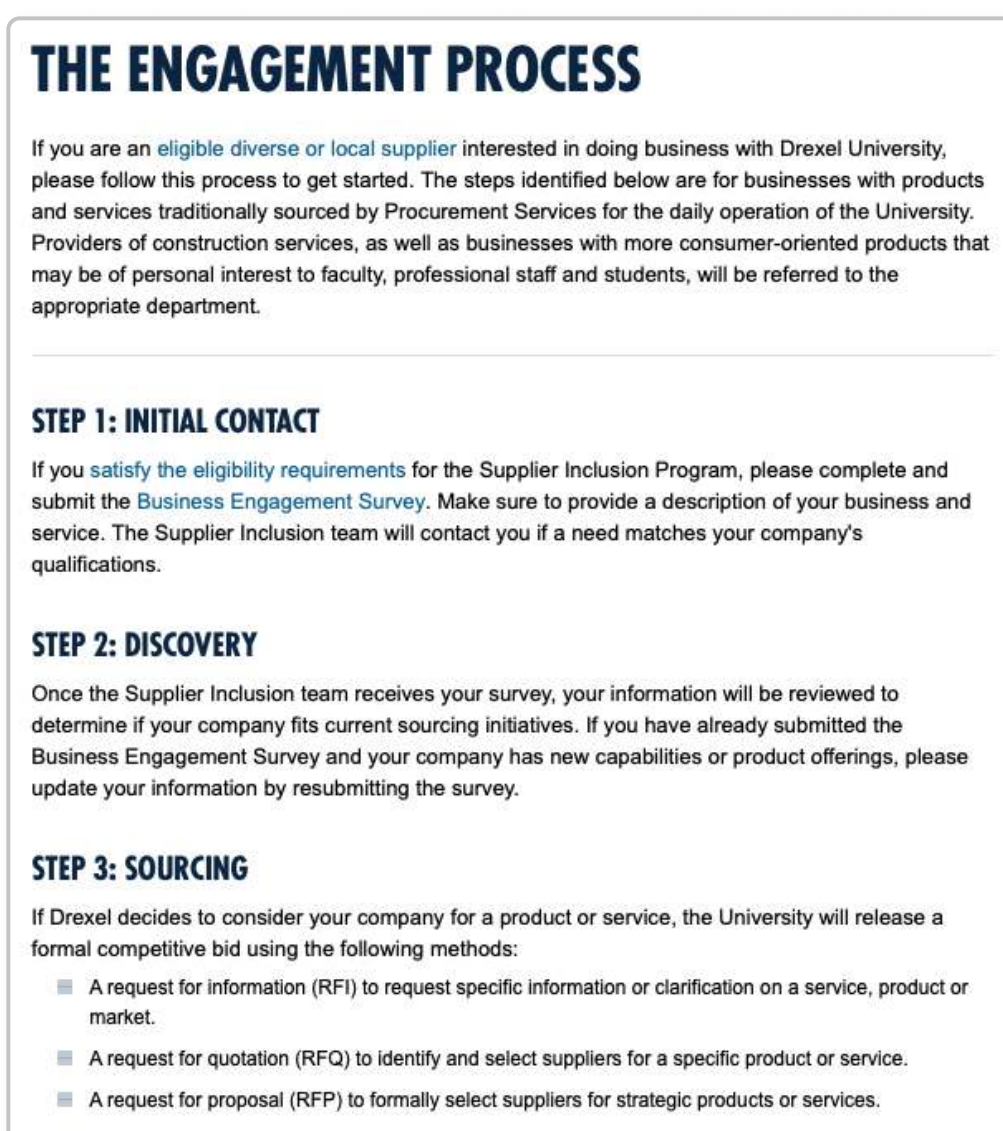
Figure 5. Certifying Organizations Listed on [Babson College](#)

Type 3. Step-by-step explanation of how to do business with the institution

A number of the DSBs surveyed for our report Promoting Supplier Diversity (2022) said very plainly that they had no idea how to engage in the bidding process or where to start. The fact is that procurement procedures vary widely from one HEI to another and within the same institution since procurement functions are often very decentralized.

This variability represents a barrier in itself for many DSBs that lack the resources or knowledge to pursue business opportunities at multiple HEIs. If a website has no information about the steps, or FAQs, a small business will have no idea how to engage with the institution.

Drexel University does an excellent job of mapping out what it calls “engagement process” with links to details relating to initial contact, discovery, and sourcing.



THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

If you are an [eligible diverse or local supplier](#) interested in doing business with Drexel University, please follow this process to get started. The steps identified below are for businesses with products and services traditionally sourced by Procurement Services for the daily operation of the University. Providers of construction services, as well as businesses with more consumer-oriented products that may be of personal interest to faculty, professional staff and students, will be referred to the appropriate department.

STEP 1: INITIAL CONTACT

If you [satisfy the eligibility requirements](#) for the Supplier Inclusion Program, please complete and submit the [Business Engagement Survey](#). Make sure to provide a description of your business and service. The Supplier Inclusion team will contact you if a need matches your company's qualifications.

STEP 2: DISCOVERY

Once the Supplier Inclusion team receives your survey, your information will be reviewed to determine if your company fits current sourcing initiatives. If you have already submitted the Business Engagement Survey and your company has new capabilities or product offerings, please update your information by resubmitting the survey.

STEP 3: SOURCING

If Drexel decides to consider your company for a product or service, the University will release a formal competitive bid using the following methods:

- A request for information (RFI) to request specific information or clarification on a service, product or market.
- A request for quotation (RFQ) to identify and select suppliers for a specific product or service.
- A request for proposal (RFP) to formally select suppliers for strategic products or services.

Figure 6. Specific Steps for Diverse Suppliers Described on [Drexel University](#)

Type 4. Contact email address for diverse small businesses

A basic type of information that a supplier diversity page can provide is how or whom to contact for more information. A few sites provide the name of a specific procurement professional to contact or at least a dedicated email address for diverse suppliers. As one small business owner noted, *“I want to work with organizations that are small business friendly, that provide a direct contact/resource to go to while being ushered through the process.”*

Type 5. Listing of current contracts and pending contract opportunities

Only a handful of the websites we reviewed included a list of current contracts and contracts open for bidding. Especially for certified DSBs with a track record of selling products or services to colleges and universities, such a listing can accelerate the process of bidding for business.

One business owner had this to say: *“If I've had experience working with an institution, then I'm on the website looking for opportunities and it's the first thing I'll check. Having a very specific list of contracts helps to even the playing field for all vendors whether they are return suppliers or new suppliers.”*

An example is provided by the University of South Florida that incorporates a “public solicitation portal” on its supplier diversity site.

The screenshot displays the 'University of South Florida Public Solicitation Portal'. At the top, it says 'Welcome to the University of South Florida Public Solicitation Portal!'. Below this, it explains that users can see upcoming, closed, awarded, and open events, and provides instructions on how to register as a supplier. A navigation guide is also mentioned. The main section is titled 'Business Opportunities' and features a filter bar with tabs for 'Open for Bid', 'Upcoming', 'Closed', 'Awarded', and 'All'. A search bar is present with a 'Search' button. Below the search bar, there's a 'Sort by' dropdown set to 'Close date descending'. The main content area shows a list of opportunities. The first entry is 'Hazardous AND Biomedical waste removal', marked as 'Open'. It includes details about the services, a 'Respond Now' button, and a table with key information: Open date (3/17/2023 8:01 AM EDT), Type (ITN), Close date (5/11/2023 3:00 PM EDT), Number (2023-074-ITN-PRO), Contact (Louis Curry, curry11@usf.edu), and a 'View as PDF' link.

| Status | Details |
|---------|---|
| Open | Hazardous AND Biomedical waste removal Provide hazardous and Biomedical waste disposal services for Environmental Health & Safety. Two separate Lots awarded. |
| Open | 3/17/2023 8:01 AM EDT |
| Type | ITN |
| Close | 5/11/2023 3:00 PM EDT |
| Number | 2023-074-ITN-PRO |
| Contact | Louis Curry curry11@usf.edu |
| Details | View as PDF |

Figure 7. Contract Opportunities Listed on the University of South Florida

Type 6. Databases of diverse small business information

Another type of information that appeared on a handful of sites enables DSBs to input profile information about their businesses into an HEI's search database. One example is Harvard University's Supplier Information Form.

Supplier Information Form

By completing this form you agree that you are providing information to Strategic Procurement (SP) that may be distributed to the Harvard community if there is a request for a commodity or service that your company sells. This does not imply an endorsement by SP of your company, product or service and does not obligate Harvard in any way. The School or unit will be solely responsible for determining if your offering meets their business needs.

The information you submit will be added to a database for diverse, minority, and women- owned (and other) business that is categorized by commodity area and will be made available to purchasers through our internal website. Harvard is decentralized and purchasing decisions are made locally by the Schools and business units. For more on [Doing Business with Harvard](#) press the link.

Figure 8. Supplier Information Database Established on Harvard University



Type 7. Information for internal departments on the value of supplier diversity

While procurement organizations typically manage large contracts, in many colleges and universities academic and operational departments are the primary purchasers of lower cost products and services. P-Card holders in many colleges and universities represent a multimillion-dollar market. With more than 70% of organizations within the US using P-Cards, the annual P-Card spend is projected at \$400 billion by the end of 2021 ([NAPCP report, 2020](#))

A few of the websites in our sam

ple make the effort to illustrate the benefits of supplier diversity to these internal stakeholders. For instance, the University of Connecticut's website does an exceptional job of focusing on these customers, describing the business case for purchasing products and services from DSBs and, importantly, enabling departments to create a list of potential suppliers.

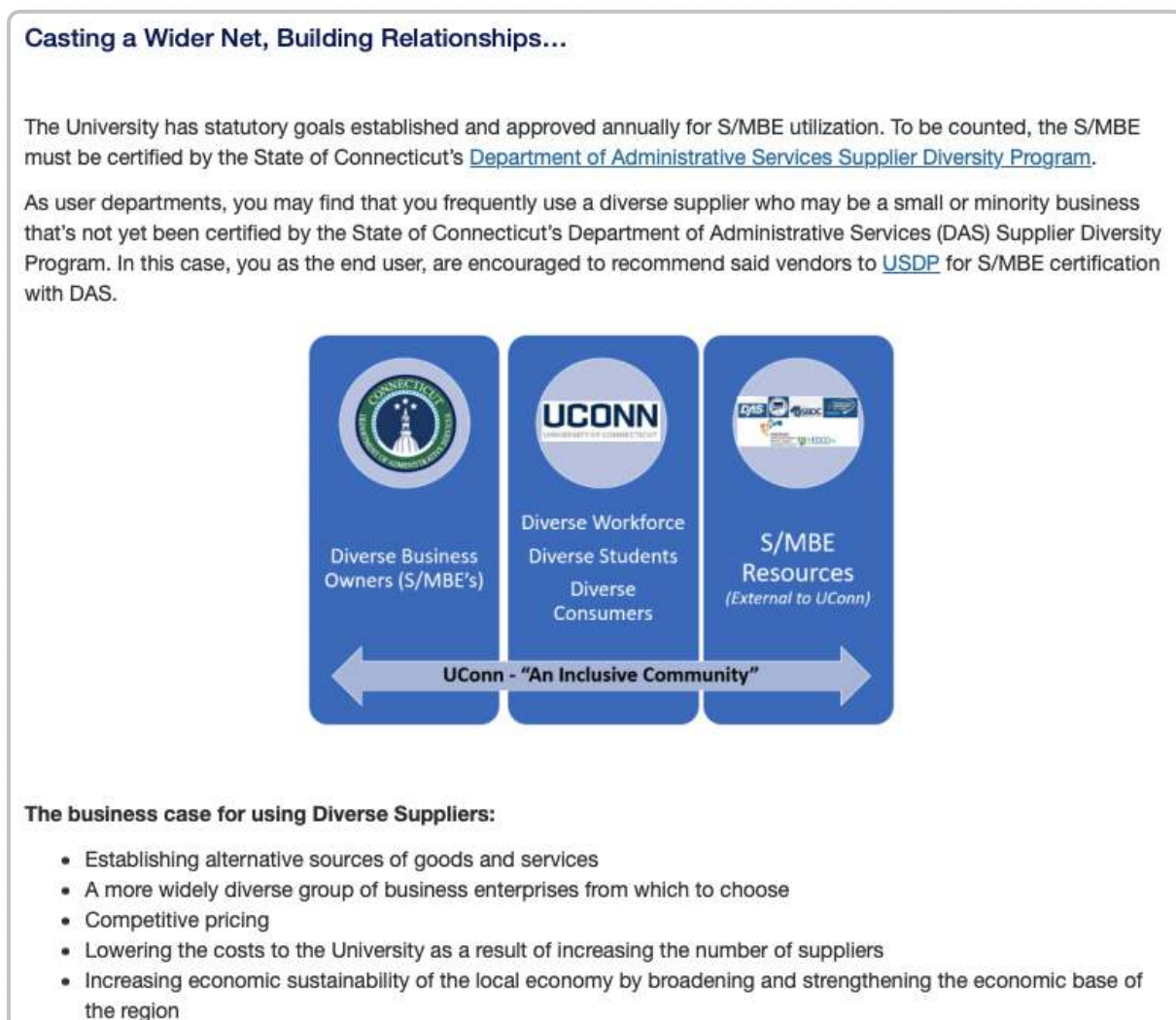


Figure 9. Supplier Diversity Value Proposition Described on the [University of Connecticut](#)

Type 8. List of outreach events

Despite a recognition that active outreach is a proven way for colleges and universities to establish relationships with DSBs, the reality is that only a handful of the sites we reviewed incorporated a list of outreach activities or events.

The example below, on the William & Mary supplier diversity page, highlights an event where DSB's can meet with procurement teams from several Virginia colleges and universities.

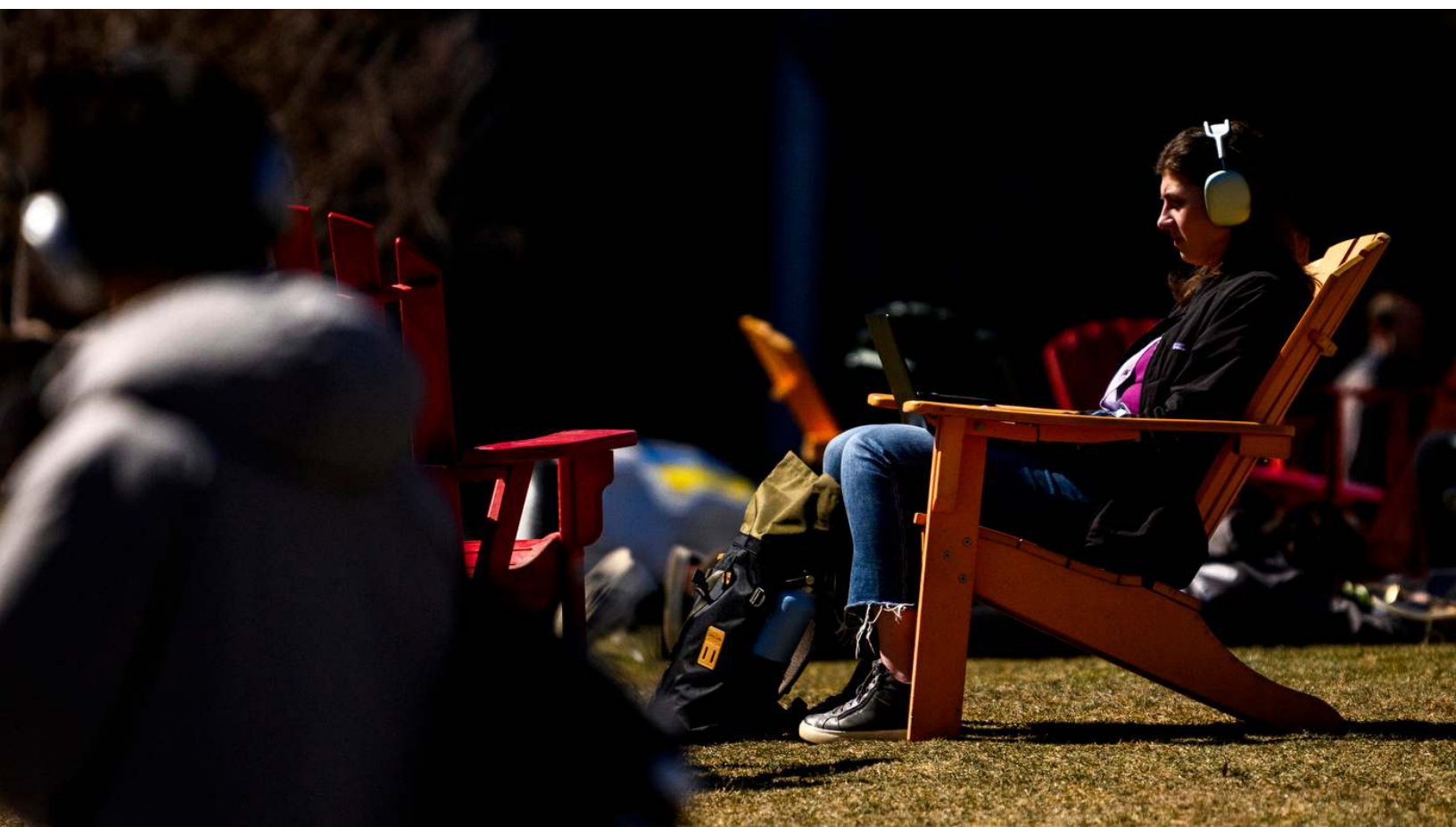
Supplier Diversity Events

William & Mary's 2023 Supplier Diversity Fair

W&M and VIMS employees are invited to attend the Spring 2023 Procure-to-Pay Forum presented by William & Mary Supply Chain Services. On April 20, 2023, from 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. in the Sadler Center Commonwealth Auditorium, hear the latest procurement and accounts payable updates and have a chance to ask questions and share feedback with our team.

Following the Forum, enjoy the 2023 Supplier Diversity Fair from 10:00 - noon in Sadler Center Chesapeake A/B/C. Meet local SWaM vendors to learn about their businesses and what they provide to W&M.

Figure 10. Supplier Diversity Events Listed on the College of William & Mary



Type 9. Diversity spend dashboard

Procurement spend, particularly in private HEIs, is regarded as confidential. However, such information is key to identifying spend to DSBs, assessing the performance of supplier diversity initiatives through quantitative metrics, and setting the appropriate goal for the future.

The example below, on the Virginia Commonwealth University's supplier diversity page, presents supplier diversity analytics dashboard where one can figure out diversity spend by department (e.g., academic programs, athletics office, and IT) and diversity status (e.g., minority-owned, non-SWaM, small business, veteran-owned, and women-owned). [2]

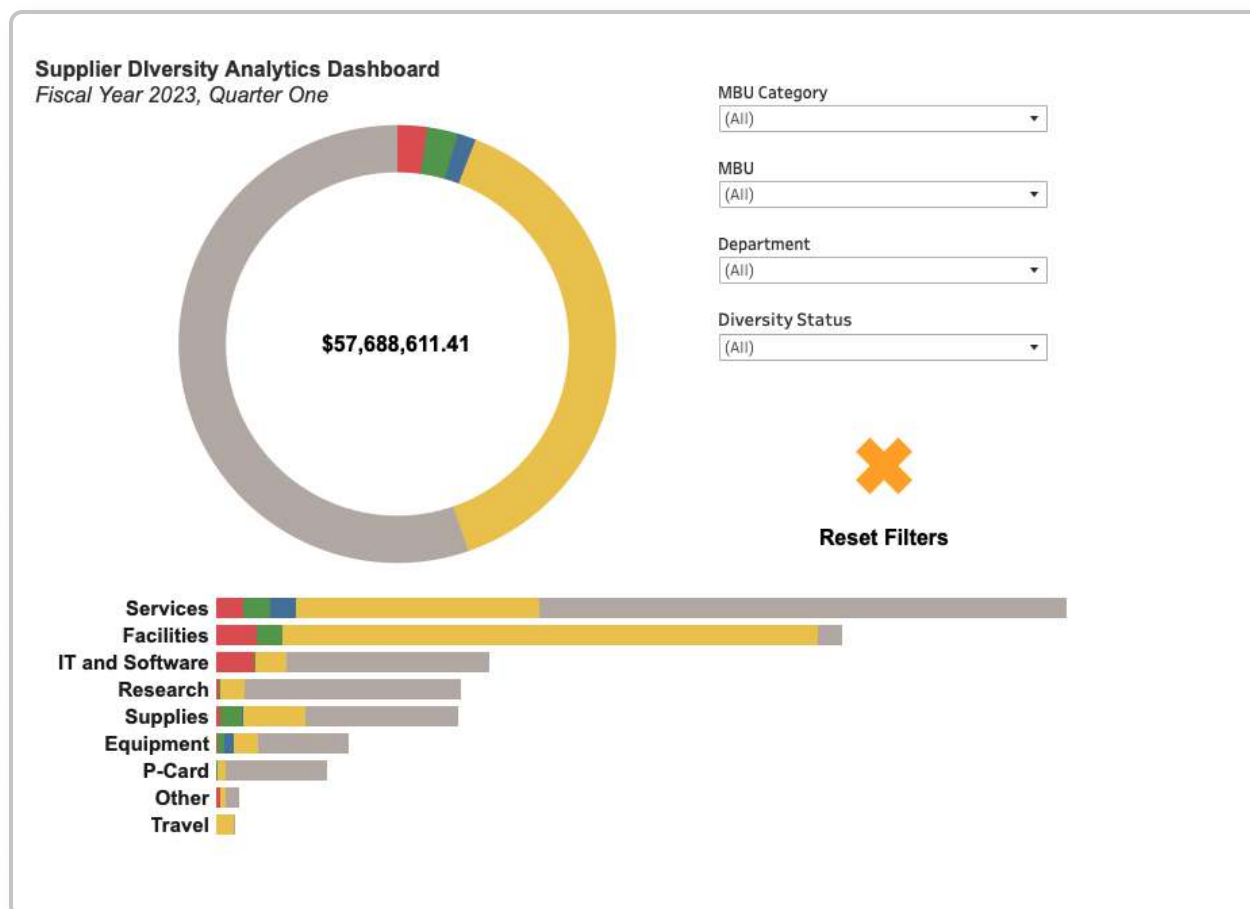


Figure 11. Supplier Diversity Dashboard Embedded on [Virginia Commonwealth University](#)

[2] The acronym SWaM (Small, Women-owned, and Minority-owned Business) is widely used in the State of Virginia.

EXAMPLES OF WEBSITE BEST PRACTICES

In our review of HEI websites, we discovered several examples of websites that do an excellent job of incorporating and organizing information for diverse suppliers. These sites make a point of welcoming DSBs into their procurement system.

To provide some examples of what can be done, we learned about the design and maintenance of three sites: University of Connecticut, Drexel University, and University of South Florida.

Example 1. University of Connecticut

Diverse small business owners feel the University of Connecticut's supplier diversity pages helps them navigate the procurement process and makes them more confident about trying to compete for business, according to Veronica Cook, Executive Program Director of Supplier Diversity Program.

Since persuading internal stakeholders to consider diverse suppliers is a major priority, Cook includes information for them on the site. Her goal is to make it easy for academic departments and units to search a database of certified diverse vendors.

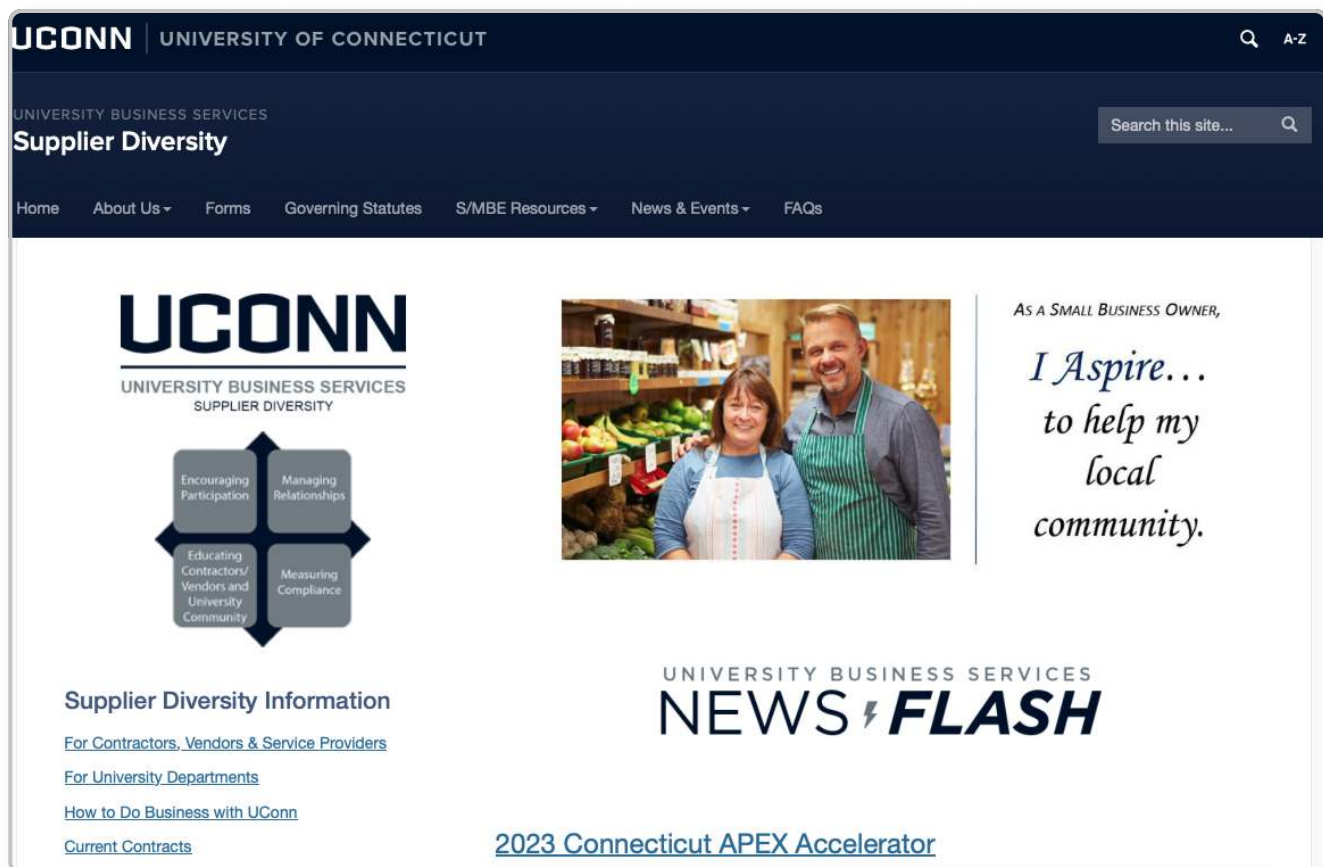


Figure 12. Supplier Diversity Website of the University of Connecticut

Example 2. Drexel University

Allen Riddick, Executive Director of Economic Impact & Workforce Inclusion at Drexel University, oversees Drexel's supplier diversity pages. His goal for the website is to remove barriers and accelerate the learning curve for DSBs. The site includes a step-by-step process on how to engage in the procurement process. Content is updated quarterly. The page also has a link where DSBs can input their credentials, commodity code, or certification status. into a database that can be accessed by internal stakeholders via Microsoft Teams.



Figure 13. Supplier Diversity Website of Drexel University

Example 3. University of South Florida

The University of South Florida (USF) has an exceptionally robust supplier diversity site within the university's website. USF is one of the very few sites that displays open contracts. In addition, the use of multimedia, including a video call to action, effectively communicates the supplier diversity message in multiple ways. The webpages are updated on a regular basis with the support of the university's web management team.

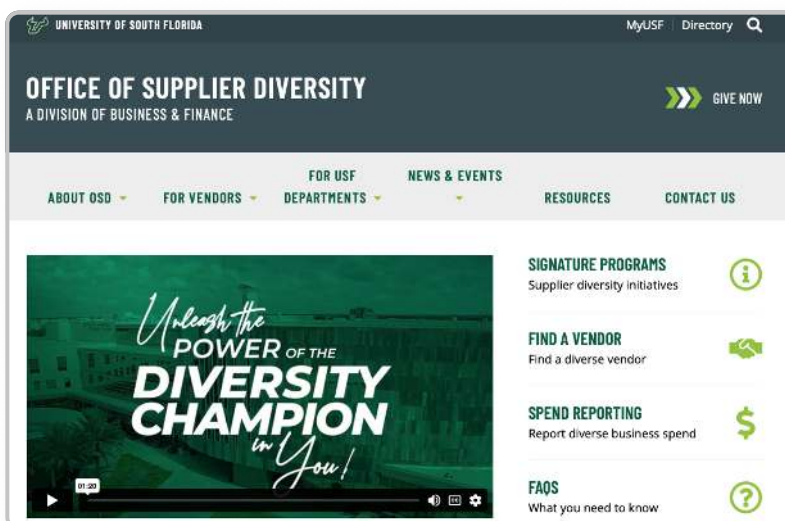


Figure 14. Supplier Diversity Website of the University of South Florida

CLOSING THE AWARENESS DEFICIT

This analysis of college and university websites in New England underscores the need to close the supplier diversity awareness deficit. Currently, only 12 institutions (10.5% of the total) provide a dedicated online space for DSB's to learn how they can engage in the procurement process. We know that supplier diversity web pages can make a difference; they can open a window into an institution's procurement process, which is very often seen as complex and confusing by small businesses.

Deciding what kinds of information to share (and how to share it) can serve as a way for an institution to listen to the needs of its local diverse business community and demonstrate its commitment to diversity and inclusion. HEI procurement websites are an essential tool for promoting supplier diversity. They enable organizations to embrace diversity and inclusion in their procurement practices, which can lead to better business outcomes and a more equitable society.

Developing informative websites, such as the ones we have highlighted in this report, is not a cure-all solution. Achieving greater supplier diversity necessitates ongoing efforts that involve both internal and external stakeholders. However, thoughtfully crafted websites can heighten awareness and facilitate open communication between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and diverse suppliers.

What's Next

In this study we made the case that supplier diversity web pages can make a difference in enabling organization to move the needle towards more inclusive procurement practices; they can open a window into an institution's procurement process, which is very often seen as complex and confusing by small businesses. Deciding what kinds of information to share (and how to share it) can serve as a way for an institution to listen to the needs of its local diverse business community, build trust and demonstrate its commitment to diversity and inclusion.

An efficiency-driven economic approach to HEI procurement may conflict with an equity-oriented social approach. Particularly, the COVID-19 emergency placed an extraordinary financial burden on HEIs, which may prioritize cost reduction over supplier diversity.

To wrestle with this issue, we are currently conducting additional research based on structured interviews, focus groups and large-scale surveys with HEI procurement and contract officers in New England. We will also continue to collect data from diverse small businesses to deepen our understanding of barriers and opportunities to supplier diversity.

The final goal is to study how HEIs can take a balanced approach considering both efficiency and equity, and to do that, what systems and structures need to be changed to facilitate the participation of DSBs in the HEI procurement market.

APPENDICES

A1. Brief survey of diverse small suppliers

Survey question: What information is most important from a DSB perspective? (insights from 3 respondents to brief survey)

Perspective of an experienced DSB – has done business with HEIs

Priorities of importance

1. Listing of current contracts and open bid opportunities
2. Specific steps on how to do business with the university -- the how-to's
3. Contact information for the university's procurement staff who focus on supplier diversity

Comments

- In order for me to do business with a university, I want to ensure that their goals are aligned with my small business about their commitments to DEI. Companies want to work for organizations that are small business friendly, provide a direct contact/resource to go to while being ushered through the process. Information should be ready and available to businesses to be able to access on the universities site and easy to follow.
- If they already experience doing business with colleges and universities, the items that can help them most are things specifically related to business at this university.
- Diversity does not matter as much to me as being able to get the job done. This is a different perspective I have had than before, owing to interactions within the cleantech industry.
- If I've had experience working with colleges and universities then I'm on the website looking for opportunities and it's the first thing I'll check. Having a very specific list to apply helps to even the field for all applicants whether they are return suppliers or new suppliers. Having contact people is important for clarification.

Novice DSB – has never done business with an HEI

Priorities of importance

1. Specific steps on how to do business with the university -- the how-to's
2. Listing of current contracts and open bid opportunities
3. Ability to input your business information into the university's diverse supplier database
4. Statement of the university's commitment to supplier diversity

Comments

- This is critical for a small business who has not worked with the college because they need to know who is there go to person, what they should be paying attention to and having a direct resource to navigate them through a lengthy process can take some time. It is important that the steps are clear for a MWBE company
- More important to get into the ecosystem.
- Seeing the commitment statement may make me, as a diverse supplier, feel more comfortable about applying. Seeing faces and knowing there are people to contact with questions may make people who are initially intimidated feel more comfortable and helps to begin relationship building as you are no longer creating a bid for a logo. If I'm new at this, seeing the steps gives me an idea of the things I'll need to create my bid.



A2. Website Rating

Of the 12 schools that have supplier diversity-specific webpages, we rated the webpages themselves to see if they contained the useful points we talked about. Below are our ratings. 1 point means the webpage completely met our criteria while 0.5 points mean that there could still be an improvement in that area. **Some of these questions may be answered on other parts of the school's website**, but due to the nature of how much someone is likely to dig through a website, we only considered the information on the supplier diversity webpage itself.

Table A1. Rubric for supplier diversity website rating

| Question being asked | | 1 point | 0.5 point |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| Q1 | Is there a statement of institutional commitment to supplier diversity? | A statement exists | There is a shared statement between schools that share the same website. This is for university systems like the University of Massachusetts. |
| Q2 | Does the website contain links to certification organizations? | There are links to the website. | The certification organization is named, but there are no links. |
| Q3 | Is there a 'How to do Business With' or FAQ section specific to diverse suppliers? | There is a specific FAQ section for DSBs. | N/A |
| Q4 | Is there a specific contact point for diverse suppliers? | There is a specific contact person and their email. | There is a general procurement email noted. |
| Q5 | Is there a list of current contracts or pending contracts available? | There is a list specific to each school. | There is a shared list or the school links to a state site that does not differentiate between HEI and other procurement. |
| Q6 | Is there a DSB database? | There is a school specific list that is shared with the public. | This links to a resource not affiliated with the school, such as a state database. |
| Q7 | Is there information for internal use about small diverse businesses? | There are links | States that there are resources, but no specific information on their website. |
| Q8 | Is there a list of outreach events? | There is a list | Links to outside the organization (such as state resources) |

Figure A1 shows the rating result of supplier diversity websites. While HEI 0 has a score of 7 out of the total score of 8 (meaning that the university/college fully meets 7 criteria), HEI 11 has a score of 1 (meaning that the university/college meets only one criterion). We anonymized the HEI names in order to demonstrate the overall status of supplier diversity websites, rather than identifying who is the best performer or who is the worst one.

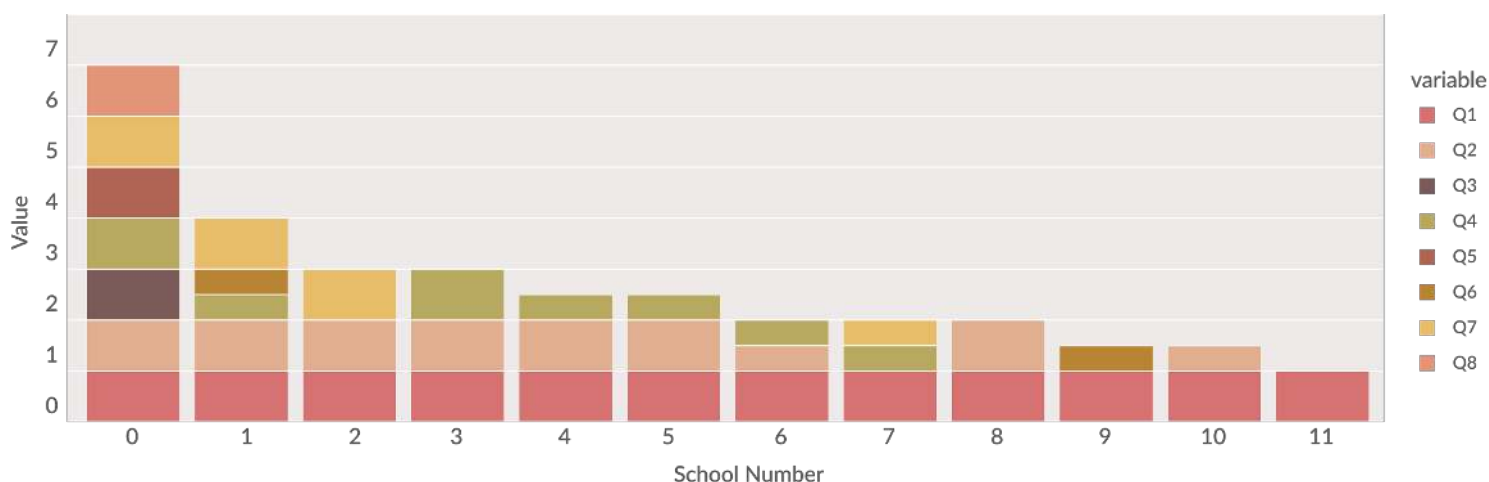


Figure A1. Rating of Supplier Diversity Websites

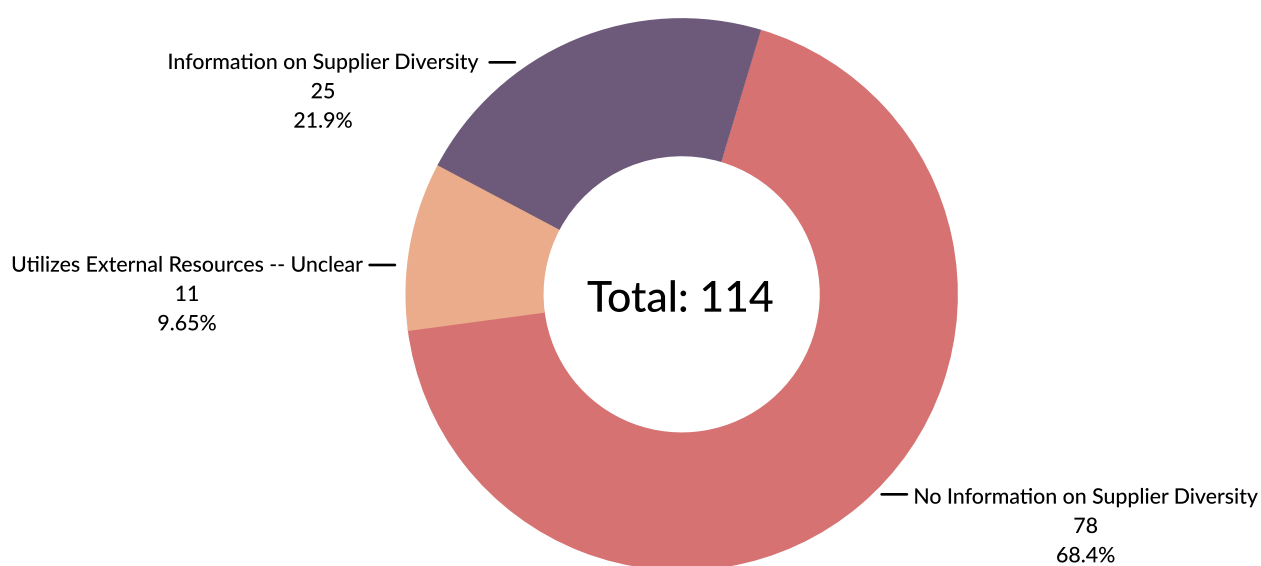


Figure A2. HEI Procurement Websites on Supplier Diversity

Note. Out of 114 HEIs, only 25 explicitly mention supplier diversity; 11 refer to external sites; and 78 are very behind in their positions on supplier diversity.

