



Catalyzing Careers
Through Skills-first Hiring

Insights From Cleveland Clinic

In partnership with



It's a balmy August day, and a line is forming outside Cleveland Clinic's South Pointe campus. People sip their morning coffees and check their phones as they anxiously wait for the organization's scheduled Community Career Expo to begin. But as the doors open and a crush of walk-ins stream into the auditorium, the air of nervous anticipation gives way to something new: a sense of possibility.

Waiting just inside the doors are Dr. Melissa Burrows, Cleveland Clinic's Director of Talent Acquisition and Workforce Diversity, and Kiersten Kanaley, Executive Director of Talent Acquisition Operations. Together, the two are on a mission not only to sustain that sense of possibility, but to nurture it. As they mingle with the crowd, Chief Nursing Officer Terri Murray leads a keynote address on the career pathway from patient care nursing assistant to registered nurse.

Rather than focusing on a list of static job requirements, Murray instead emphasizes the skills and experience needed to succeed in a healthcare career. She doesn't ask the audience, "Are you qualified for this role?" but rather asks, "Could you see yourself in this role?" The impact of reframing her query from exclusionary to inviting is immediately evident: eighteen hands quickly shoot into the air.

After a flurry of onsite interviews, each and every candidate who raised their hand during that initial keynote receives an offer on the spot. By the end of the day, Cleveland Clinic's talent acquisition team would extend a total of 81 offers.



This triumph at South Pointe Community Career Expo was the second for Cleveland Clinic. At its first expo held just a few months prior, the talent acquisition team extended job offers to 75 percent of 125 attendees, 90 percent of which were accepted.

These expos, conducted in partnership with the OneTen coalition, are core to Cleveland Clinic's overarching strategy to create an inclusive, skills-first culture—one in which skills and experience, rather than degrees, are the defining factors for a successful career pathway. By joining OneTen—a coalition of CEOs and companies committed to hiring, promoting and advancing one million Black individuals without four-year college degrees, Cleveland Clinic has taken its strategy even further by focusing its skills-first lens on racial equity.

Bolstering Black Talent with OneTen

Cleveland Clinic has long been a go-to destination for world-renowned health care, yet like many of its peers, it has experienced a significant gap in attracting, retaining and promoting Black talent. Cleveland Clinic's CEO and president and the holder of the Morton L. Mandel CEO Chair, Tomislav "Tom" Mihaljevic, M.D., was determined to change this trajectory with OneTen's guidance.

In December 2020, as Ohioans were in the grip of another recession, [a pandemic](#) and [a widening racial wage gap](#), he committed Cleveland Clinic to a goal of creating, scaling and sustaining a skills first culture and ensuring equitable career pathways for talent.

As a founding member of the coalition, Cleveland Clinic began working with OneTen and its strategic partner, Grads of Life, an organization that helps companies create and implement DEI strategies that deliver social impact and business benefits. With this help, Cleveland Clinic identified several key action items to work towards their goal, including:

- Auditing current diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices and policies
- Engaging in roundtables and interviews focused on the lived experiences of current and prospective employees
- Identifying [areas of opportunity](#) to create a more inclusive culture and equitable career journey for talent

By tapping into the coalition's cadre of experts, Cleveland Clinic exposed several critical obstacles standing in the way of achieving its OneTen goal, as well as its broader mission of advancing racial equity:

- Community distrust dating back to the late 1960s, when Cleveland Clinic's reputational boom and rapid expansion supplanted local businesses and homes
- Limited entry points in the talent acquisition process
- Exclusionary four-year degree requirements, particularly in economically-mobile roles



Increasing our hiring and promotion of diverse talent has always been important to Cleveland Clinic and aligns directly with OneTen's mission. Joining the coalition has helped us improve our workplace inclusivity practices.

— Dr. Tomislav Mihaljevic
CEO and President, Cleveland Clinic

Drawing on data collected through the audit, OneTen and Grads of Life identified four opportunities to catalyze change:

- Prioritize community outreach to restore trust
- Create apprenticeship programs to diversify hiring pipelines and build long-term careers
- Fully shift from degree-based hiring to skills-based hiring
- Develop skills-based career pathways to enable employees to advance based on capabilities rather than academic credentials

With its challenges and opportunities in clear view, Cleveland Clinic forged ahead to create a new and exemplary model for DEI and skills-based talent management.

Creating Career Mobility Through Apprenticeships

One of the central insights that emerged from OneTen's audit of the organization was to use apprenticeships¹ as a strategic talent pipeline for full-time hires.

For people without four-year college degrees, **apprenticeships offer opportunities** to learn new skills while getting paid, cultivate a professional network and gain more access to jobs with family-sustaining wages. This is especially significant for Black adults, 76 percent of whom do not have a bachelor's degree.

OneTen helped Cleveland Clinic identify and strengthen connections with local talent developers to pave the way for its inaugural apprenticeship programs. The pharmacy apprenticeship, which launched in October 2021, enrolled 24 apprentices, half of whom were Black. By January 2022, Cleveland Clinic had launched a second apprenticeship program, this one in information technology, which received nearly 200 applications. Of these, all five apprentices who made the cut were Black.

Cleveland Clinic CEO Dr. Mihaljevic also took cues from OneTen's Community of Practice (COP), recurring forums in which coalition employers collaborate and share insights and best practices around creating and sustaining inclusive and equitable skills-first cultures.

As OneTen experts routinely underscore in COP sessions, having a powerful advocate who can make connections and push for on-the-job opportunities is essential to getting Black talent the support, visibility and stretch assignments needed to excel.



The executive sponsor is a liaison who... can really serve as a conduit between the actual apprentice and any kind of issue or concern they may have as they go through the program.

— **Dr. Melissa Burrows**
Director of Talent Acquisition and Workforce Diversity, Cleveland Clinic

1. While work-based experiences can take many forms, apprenticeships show particular promise, with 91 percent of apprentices securing full-time employment after their program.

Indeed, it was the COP that prompted Dr. Mihaljevic to rally internal executive sponsors who could give apprenticeships an added boost. At his direction, Cleveland Clinic took OneTen's counsel in earnest, assigning apprentices executive sponsors, mentors and credentialing and operations leads. The human resources team continues to do regular pulse checks with apprentice managers to ensure smooth transitions throughout each apprentice's learning journey.

The success of Cleveland Clinic's apprenticeship program and executive sponsorship model revealed a big opportunity: by creating more work-based experiences, it could help pave the way for dozens of Black talent to advance into more senior roles. Today, Cleveland Clinic is invested in scaling the program and has created an educational platform to educate leaders and managers on the value of apprenticeships, including the steps they need to take to establish an apprenticeship program as well as how they can identify whether their department is apprentice-ready.

Since the launch of its initial apprentice programs, Cleveland Clinic has recognized the need to expand its talent support services, which currently remain a material hurdle. "In our eagerness to launch apprentices, we probably didn't have as many talent supports as we could have," says Chief Talent Officer Gina Cronin. The hospital system is working in partnership with OneTen to scale much-needed services like transit and childcare to ensure that once talent is in the door, they have the resources they need to stay there.

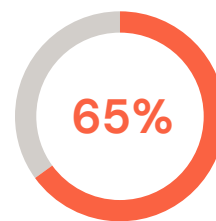
Making the Shift to Skills-Based Hiring

Beyond expanding apprenticeships—or "learn and earn" experiences, as they are sometimes called—Cleveland Clinic made tremendous strides in adopting [skills-based approaches to hiring](#), a [proven action](#) that catalyzes careers for Black talent.

Using OneTen's guidelines to determine which roles to target, Cleveland Clinic rewrote more than 260 job descriptions to remove unnecessary four-year degree requirements and to articulate, in plain language, the necessary and desired skills needed for a role—a process often referred to as "re-credentialing." Cleveland Clinic sought out an expert partner to re-credential more than 2,000 roles to be skills-first.

But, as Dr. Kelly Hancock, Cleveland Clinic's Chief Caregiver Officer and the holder of the Rich Family Chief Caregiver Chair acknowledges, creating a skills-first culture is more complex than simply removing degree requirements. To move the work forward, Cleveland Clinic needs an ongoing mindset shift.

To sustain this shift and inform bias mitigation efforts, Cleveland Clinic leaders routinely attend OneTen COP convenings, during which top human resource leaders from across the coalition meet to exchange challenges and lessons learned. Cleveland Clinic has also launched an enterprise-wide council dedicated to championing DEI change from within. These efforts include defining DEI-related objectives and key results (OKRs), which they plan to achieve with the backing of Dr. Mihaljevic and Dr. Hancock.



Black managers are **65% more likely** to be promoted to the next stage of leadership if they have a sponsor.*

“We need to help leaders increase their ability to manage differences—whether in background, style, orientation, and/or mindset and beliefs. We must challenge our own assumptions that newly hired caregivers whose paths—different than ours—are somehow less deserving.”

— **Dr. Kelly Hancock**
Chief Caregiver Officer,
Cleveland Clinic

*Source: Harvard Business Review

Developing Equitable Career Paths

[Transparency around paths to advancement](#) helps employees understand where they are in their career journey, what opportunities are available to them and what steps they need to take to advance professionally. Well-defined, clearly communicated pathways for advancement also foster greater professional satisfaction and a stronger sense of belonging, particularly for Black talent who have historically been pushed to the margins.

Cronin acknowledges the challenge of creating accessible pathways while navigating the standardized certification and degree requirements within the healthcare system. However, she cites some encouraging progress. Cleveland Clinic found that for its highly in-demand role of medical assistant, 15 of the 17 essential skills do not require a medical assistant degree. In response to this insight, Cleveland Clinic created a career pathway that offers participants the training they need to become a medical outpatient clinical care assistant. Since 2021, Cleveland Clinic has removed 80 percent of the degree requirements for clinical care assistants and has used the pathway model to create more opportunities for adjacent roles.

Collaborating with OneTen and Grads of Life has enabled Cleveland Clinic to identify and establish similar pathways for eight of its most critical job areas. Internal human resource business partners and Cleveland Clinic's [Global Leadership and Learning Institute](#) are now engaging hires on these career pathways from day one.

Leveraging Technology to Listen and Learn

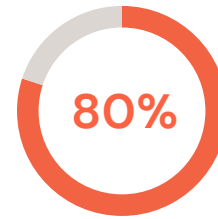
What continues to propel Cleveland Clinic forward is its ability to listen to and incorporate community feedback, marshal its technological resources and respond meaningfully.

Thinking back to the first career expo, Kanaley recalls an interaction in which a candidate shared that they applied for a role but never heard back from anyone. Kanaley decided to analyze past applicant data and found that:

- 63 percent of all applicants applied only once to available jobs
- 53 percent of those applicants received only an automated reply

These insights revealed a stark realization: the talent acquisition team had just one shot to attract community members, who were unlikely to apply for other roles after receiving an automated rejection. After gaining this insight, explains Kanaley, they developed an email campaign to reconnect with those one-timers. The message was simple and honest: "We didn't get it right. Give us another shot. Here's what we've heard from you and here's how we've made it better."

Cleveland Clinic also leveraged technology to give candidates more control over the interview process. For example, for some roles, applicants can complete an asynchronous, recorded interview independently. The recording is then reviewed by a recruiter and feedback is provided to the candidate via



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SMS or email. For harder-to-fill roles, applicants can self-schedule time with a recruiter, which affords more flexibility. These digital “self-service” options allow applicants to select the process that best accommodates their unique schedules and needs.

In alignment with OneTen's push for employers to better measure and track DEI progress and outcomes, Cleveland Clinic is now using data tracking and technology-enabled innovation principles to examine and iterate on its talent acquisition process and improve outcomes.

Cleveland Clinic also introduced a new program specifically designed to help avoid missing out on great talent. Their talent acquisition team calls it, “screening in, not screening out.” If an applicant goes through screening and is not a one-to-one match for the role for which they applied, their application goes to a recruiter for manual review. Working with the understanding that great talent can be lost when systems automatically pull applications based solely on criteria, recruiters carefully review these resumes to see whether the applicant has the potential to thrive in a different role. The organization is closely tracking the program's effectiveness through newly-implemented measurement dashboards and meets twice-weekly to discuss process improvement.

Rebuilding Community Ties

As of December 2022, Cleveland Clinic has hired and/or promoted over 1,600 OneTen talent since joining the coalition in 2020. Yet for all its momentum on the tactical side of practice change, Cleveland Clinic recognizes that better practices on paper do not always translate to improved lived experiences. To realize a truly inclusive work culture, repairing the trust deficit with community members is essential.

To demonstrate its commitment to the community and to rebuild trust, Cleveland Clinic initiated on-the-ground programs designed to engage, listen and learn. They looked to connections made through OneTen's ecosystem—including local networks of talent developers, community-based organizations and fellow coalition employers—to plan and launch its community career expos.

The hospital system also partnered directly with the City of Cleveland's council members to conduct door-to-door campaigns. This grassroots effort, designed to meet residents where they are, provide an opportunity to speak about career opportunities at Cleveland Clinic, as well as hear directly from them how Cleveland Clinic can better integrate itself into the community.

Cleveland Clinic hopes to make it clear through these outreach efforts that residents have a stake in company practices, too. “Because the perception of Cleveland Clinic in the community and with the residents is still fragile, we're sort of working at this backward to some extent,” says Dr. Burrows. “It's [about] building consistency so that the community understands that we're not leaving. We're here to stay, we're here to partner and we're here to listen.”



Start Where You Are: Key Takeaways for Leading Employers

When reflecting on its successes and lessons learned, Cleveland Clinic acknowledges there is a long way to go on its journey towards building a better culture. However, the team has identified several lessons that have helped them accelerate progress and that may act as helpful guidelines for other organizations seeking to meet DEI goals and create more inclusive organizations, including:

- **Securing executive support.** Having a C-suite-backed strategy helps ensure DEI efforts are appropriately resourced from a budgeting and staffing perspective and provides champions at the highest levels of leadership to advance the necessary change management.
- **Listening to your community.** Lived experience is just as important as, if not more telling than, quantitative data.
- **Securing company-wide buy-in.** From the start, Cleveland Clinic conducted a series of “roadshows” throughout the organization to provide education about the partnership as well as outline workstreams. These roadshows created momentum throughout the organization and provided opportunities for departments and institutes to ask questions and brainstorm how they could best support DEI goals. When embarking on any DEI program or significant practice change, consider conducting a similar initiative to secure buy-in and inspire excitement.
- **Leveraging the OneTen coalition.** Opening new pathways of opportunity for Black talent and individuals without four-year degrees requires thoughtful collaboration. The coalition enables employers, talent developers, community-based organizations and other stakeholders to mobilize around a shared mission to advance DEI and skills-based practice.

For Cleveland Clinic, the coalition has been both a thought partner and an accountability partner, one that has provided essential support on Cleveland Clinic’s ongoing path to DEI maturity as well as connections to vital resources when barriers threatened to derail progress. Dr. Mihaljevic perhaps captures it best: “Our partnership with OneTen accelerated our efforts and propelled us forward more rapidly than we could have done on our own. OneTen provided access to a community of knowledge and resources that we didn’t have internally. This partnership has been tremendous and life-changing for so many.”



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— Dr. Tomislav Mihaljevic
CEO and President, Cleveland Clinic

About OneTen

Founded in 2020, OneTen is a coalition of leading chief executives and their companies who are coming together to upskill, hire and promote one million Black individuals who do not yet have a four-year degree into family-sustaining jobs with opportunities for advancement over ten years. OneTen connects employers with talent developers and other skill-credentialing organizations, leading nonprofits and community-based partners who support the development of diverse talent. By creating more equitable and inclusive workforces, we believe we can reach our full potential as a nation of united citizens. OneTen recognizes the unique potential in everyone—every individual, every business, every community—to change the arc of America's story with Black talent.

Join us at [OneTen.org](https://oneten.org), where one can be the difference.