

Driven by Data

Since joining the Commodity Futures Trading Commission as its first chief diversity officer, Tanisha Cole Edmonds has sought to use data to assess progress and set objectives on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility

IQ: You joined the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) at the start of 2022 as the agency's first chief diversity officer. What does the role entail and what milestones have you achieved so far to promote diversity and inclusion across the organisation?

Tanisha Cole Edmonds (TCE): As a member of the CFTC's executive leadership team reporting directly to the chairman, I oversee the Office of Minority and Women Inclusion (OMWI) and provide leadership and executive direction on the CFTC's efforts to integrate and promote diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) at all levels of the agency's workforce and in our management and business operations. I also oversee the CFTC's equal employment opportunity programme.

On a day-to-day basis, my team and I are engaged in collaboration, consultation and advisory services, education, research and analysis. We use a data-driven approach to drive DEIA at the CFTC through quantitative and qualitative data collection,

metric development, trend monitoring, report dissemination and delivery of training and educational programmes and resources to educate the CFTC workforce.

My work and that of my team is to uncover what agency policy, principles or practices may be driving the data and trends. We seek to understand and analyse what organisational and operational structures at the CFTC and embedded in its day-to-day procedures and practices may be barriers to creating a more diverse, equitable, inclusive and accessible organisation. I work in partnership with the CFTC's divisions and offices to ensure they receive relevant DEIA information that will influence better business decisions for the CFTC.

Through consultative sessions and check-ins with CFTC division/office directors, I aim to understand the unique needs of each division office, so my team and I can assess their specific DEIA needs and help develop a plan for customised DEIA services and strategies. These services and strategies can include a range of customised options, from

toolkits and workshops to programmes that address division/office-specific DEIA workplace needs.

We liaise daily with a variety of agency stakeholders to provide advice and consultation to improve policy and process development and strategic thinking. We also manage change and enhance organisational culture and performance.

In my two years with the CFTC, we have achieved several milestones, including the development of an agency-wide DEIA vision statement, creation of DEIA performance standards for executives as part of the CFTC's executive performance management programme, and development of the CFTC's first standalone DEIA strategic plan, to be issued this year. We also implemented an outreach and engagement programme, including a strategic recruitment plan to proactively engage and recruit diverse top talent to the CFTC, and held a CFTC-wide career forum for recent graduates and early career talent.

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IQ: On announcing your appointment, CFTC chairman Rostin Behnam noted that the CFTC continues to fall short on its Equal Opportunity Employer & Diversity Statement to support the recruitment of a truly diverse workforce, specifically when it comes to management-level job opportunities. How are you addressing this issue, and how do you measure progress?

TCE: Like many other financial regulatory agencies and across the financial industry as

a whole, we are actively trying to understand and develop solutions for challenges we are experiencing in attracting and retaining diverse talent.

We first had to truly understand the issue through an analysis of the data. In collaboration with our human resources colleagues, we looked at CFTC-wide data, division-specific data and data trends across grades and occupational categories. We conducted an analysis of our pipeline into management-level job opportunities. We are also reviewing and analysing our applicant

flow data across positions.

We learned we have some data gaps that impede a full understanding of the root causes of the challenge, and we have incomplete data or have not maintained baseline data in some of these areas. We are working collaboratively to assess progress and evaluate root causes, as well as build evidence on key questions regarding DEIA initiatives and integrate insights into policymaking and operations.

Even as we work to build that data strategy, we are consulting and advising on the implementation of structured, equitable hiring processes that mitigate potential bias and developing inclusive outreach and engagement strategies. We are also providing advice and consultation on advancing new internal leadership development and mentoring programmes for non-supervisory employees to help create a pipeline of promotion-eligible candidates.

In addition, we are seeking opportunities to expand paid internship and fellowship opportunities to support the development of a diverse talent pipeline to maximise the CFTC's ability to build a high-performing workforce from all segments of society. From a purely numbers perspective, we will look to measure progress in the diversity of our applicant pools and improvements in our DEIA index score in the annual Federal Employment Viewpoint Survey. I am proud to note that since my arrival in 2022, we saw an overall increase in the DEIA index and in every category of the index from 2022 to 2023 for the CFTC.

It is important to emphasise that we are embracing and promoting a growth mindset, so progress is measured not only through acknowledging and celebrating the accomplishment of goals, but through learning and improvement. We will continually engage in review and iteration of our strategies and activities, so we are embracing the idea of continual improvement on our DEIA journey at the CFTC.

IQ: The CFTC has committed to promoting DEIA at all levels of the workforce, and its talent and business operations. How do you define your objectives in each of these areas and what challenges do you encounter? →

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→ **TCE:** Broadly, our objective is best articulated through the CFTC’s DEIA vision statement: “The CFTC embraces diversity as a strength and understands that transparency, fairness and equity must guide decision-making. Everyone is accountable for contributing to a respectful, safe, inclusive, accessible and collaborative workplace culture so that opportunities and means to excel are available to all.”

I hope during my time at the CFTC, I will have helped to usher in a culture where equity is both an intrinsic value and the normal course of business, an environment where open conversations about similarities and differences enable strong, sustainable organisational

decisions, and a culture where inclusion and access are reflected in our everyday actions.


As the first chief diversity officer at the CFTC, I am working with our leaders and our workforce as a whole to embrace collaboration and innovation and demonstrate a willingness to try new approaches in ways that can mean rethinking how we do business, working across traditional silos and challenging long-held assumptions and processes. Change is hard and those conversations and expectations can be difficult. In our development of the CFTC’s first DEIA strategic plan and the thoughtful engagement of our executive leadership team, I see progress and I am optimistic

about what we are positioning ourselves to accomplish.

IQ: As a regulator, how do you interact with diversity programmes and initiatives being undertaken across the industry? Do you think more regulatory intervention is needed to ensure progress is made across the board?

TCE: I am regularly invited to speak at industry conferences and roundtables and participate in monthly inter-agency meetings with OMWI directors or chief diversity officers at other financial regulatory agencies. We partner with other financial regulatory agencies on initiatives, share best practices and provide advice and guidance to each other.

Section 342 of the Dodd-Frank Act established OMWI offices at financial regulatory agencies and provides broad statutory authority and protection for diversity and inclusion initiatives at financial regulatory agencies. As the only financial regulatory agency that was not included in the Dodd-Frank Act, the lack of this statutory authorisation impacts the CFTC’s ability to fulfil the broader mandates of Section 342 to address diversity and inclusion within the CFTC’s workforce, procurement and contracting activities and regulated entities.

I will continue to advocate for a legislative or regulatory fix that places the CFTC’s ability to advance and promote DEIA on a par with other financial regulatory agencies and my agency’s leadership has also advocated for this for years. We’ll get there one day, hopefully soon. 

DIVERSE AGENCY EXPERIENCE

Tanisha Cole Edmonds is the first chief diversity officer at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), where she is responsible for providing leadership and executive direction to the CFTC’s efforts to integrate and promote diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility at all levels of the agency’s workforce, and its talent and business operations.

Prior to joining the CFTC in 2022, Edmonds served as deputy director for the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights and deputy chief diversity officer at the US Department of the Interior. She has more than 20 years of combined experience of labour and employment law litigation and implementing equal employment opportunity and diversity, equity and inclusion workplace strategies and solutions.

Edmonds began her career as an attorney at Passman & Kaplan PC, a boutique law firm in Washington, DC, where she litigated employment discrimination complaints before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Merit Systems Protection Board, and the US District Court for the District of Columbia. Edmonds was also a contributing author of Passman & Kaplan’s first edition of the Federal Employees Legal Survival Guide.