



Corporate Commitment to LGBTQ+ Inclusive Travel: a Five-Point Action Plan

An IGLTA Global Partner
Strategic Forum

IGLTA Global Partner Summit
The Biltmore Miami-Coral Gables
30 May 2024



Executive Summary

The International LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA) hosted a Strategic Forum as part of its Global Partner Summit in Miami, May 2024. The discussion convened thought leaders from global brands supporting LGBTQ+ welcoming tourism, and **addressed several questions, including:**

- How can the global tourism industry work together to better combat anti-DEI (and anti-LGBTQ+) rhetoric to improve safety, promote inclusivity, and support LGBTQ+-welcoming businesses and destinations?
- How can the tourism industry better serve the needs of LGBTQ+ travelers?
- What does the future of LGBTQ+ tourism look like in terms of behavior, trends, and challenges?

The exchange led to insights at the forefront of the travel and tourism industry in 2024, particularly around **LGBTQ+ travel, and for companies navigating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).**

5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ **Be Committed and Be Bold:** A company committed to DEI should factor it into every layer of its business and be bold in that commitment.
- ✓ **Make DEI policies mandatory:** devote time and resources for team conversations around them to build trust.
- ✓ **Training is a key element** in DEI success at every level, both internally and public-facing.
- ✓ **Human capital is a company's greatest asset**, and it is vital to invite and embrace diversity.
- ✓ To express DEI or LGBTQ+ commitment only to withdraw it later under pressure is likely more **harmful to a brand.**

We're reminded that the commitment to DEI may have waned as a top priority for some companies in recent years. But there is still tremendous **value in having both a diverse workforce and clientele/customer base; equitable treatment for LGBTQ+ and all communities; and inclusive policies that hold all stakeholders in esteem.**

Companies of all sizes should take a stand on DEI, and be consistent, and courageous about it.

Introduction

There are many strategies to successfully navigate DEI in our industry, and a top priority among them is establishing core values. From that root culture comes meaningful policies, fiscal alignment, essential training, and internal/external messaging. Consistency in those commitments impacts every layer of business. **Continual DEI training and education for all team members is vital.** It is also important for DEI-committed companies to have a mechanism to respond to potential backlash, since consistent communications reflect solid corporate values.

One of the Strategic Forum's recurring notes is that DEI belongs to *every* employee. **DEI is an ongoing endeavor** that evolves over time. On that journey, **IGLTA and the IGLTA Foundation support their partners by helping empower and educate team members, develop LGBTQ+ campaigns, and strengthen DEI programs, including intersection with other affinity groups.**

The Strategic Forum was held under *Chatham House Rule*, so this report serves as a summary and analysis of the discussion, with unattributed quotations.

IGLTA is grateful to all its Global Partners and to everyone who participated in the Strategic Forum. We also want to thank the **Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau** for hosting this international gathering, along with our host hotel the **Biltmore Miami-Coral Gables**, and **Google** for its support in recording the meeting.





1 Making the entire travel industry more receptive towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Ali-Kerr's opening question invited a discussion about **challenges and strategies for industry-wide shifts to embrace LGBTQ+ travelers at all points**. One participant indicated that company priorities are the true motivator for any endeavor, including success in DEI. Many in the group agreed, "DEI had a surge moment, but now it has receded as a priority." Some corporate leaders now think DEI is "no longer needed," especially as standards change within a company (sometimes due to internal leadership changes), or across an industry (sometimes based on competitors' policies).

Some participants agreed that it's common for companies and leaders to resist being the first to step up for certain principles, beliefs, policies, etc. But most in this group agreed that **unless corporations fight and push, nothing will change**.

"Some believe that if you don't experience discomfort, you're not making progress," said one participant.

To that end, the moderator queried: "What must we do to change?" By and large, the group asserted that consistency is vital. Consistency pervades every aspect of business, from the mission and corporate principles; to budgeting, internal/external communications, and real-world action. In other words, a **company committed to positive DEI should factor DEI into every layer of its business, and be bold in that commitment**.

"DEI doesn't allow fluidity, you have to stand up for it every day," said one participant. **"You can't just tell one story and be done."**





2

Establishing and upholding values and messaging.

During the Strategic Forum, two key themes emerged to address consistent DEI commitment. On the macro level, one participant asserted, “Global companies have a responsibility to raise the bar,” so it’s important for them to exemplify a standard of equality. On the micro level, “People are people,” and **DEI does not seek special treatment for LGBTQ+ identified and other people, just equal treatment. These two levels—human and corporate—are intrinsically linked and constantly evolving, so DEI commitments require periodic reevaluations.**

How best to establish meaningful policies? Part of it stems from human resources. Just as companies often take a safer approach and resist being “the first” to take a novel position or shift a policy (especially around DEI), employees too may avoid voicing their opinions, especially if it seems out of step with company values. One participant noted, “Some people don’t step up because they worry about saying the wrong thing, they feel discomfort.” **It’s important that employees at all levels feel they are in an encouraging environment where they can make mistakes and learn from them; not feel fear or worry about punishment.** One participant said, “Respect, trust, transparency, unity—not uniformity, but unity, which is a big difference—if you have them, DEI is easier.” Overall, participants agreed that **DEI is more successful when built on trust.**

Cultivating trust among a company’s team members comes in many forms. **Making DEI policies mandatory and devoting time and resources for team conversations around them can build trust. Finding ways for each individual to feel secure in expressing his/her/their voices helps establish safer spaces where employees “start opening up.”** Human exchanges around DEI are key to helping individuals relate to one another, no matter their differences. Said one participant, “Generally, we can only denigrate things and people we don’t know.”

What is unique about our industry, as noted by several participants, is that **“travel can shift perceptions.”** The very nature of working in travel and tourism requires interaction with a broad array of humans of all ages, genders, affiliations, orientations, etc. **So diversity and inclusivity seem like natural elements of the travel business.** On that note, a participant shared that in one Southern African nation, travel is called “the industry of peace.” Travel promotes understanding and peaceful co-existence. And because LGBTQ+ intersects with every other community, “everyone has met a queer person,” said one participant.

From a practical business angle, “DEI has to be ingrained in the organization. It’s our job as leaders,” said one participant. Another added, **“Education starts at home,” meaning each company must be intentional for DEI to be central to its mission and strategies.** The group commonly agreed that if company leadership is truly committed, then DEI is bigger than “It’s nice to do.” It is: “We must do.” Team input helps establish priorities; those priorities help establish and uphold DEI policies.



Dynamic note-taking provided by Ink Factory



3

Training as a vital element.

“DEI isn’t just the job of the DEI department, it’s every department’s job,” said one participant to wide agreement. Not all companies have DEI departments or committees, but to be successful in equity and inclusion, it must be part of training and education. DEI goals often are cemented at executive levels. But training and education are the means that tie a company’s goals to its culture. One participant shared this analogy: “Don’t ask someone to paint a room but then don’t give them a paint brush.” Tools are needed to perform work. With DEI, training is a tool.

DEI training “should be mandatory,” said one discussant, noting a recent surge of Gen Z new hires who need training. Most agreed that cultivating critical thinking, training, and education for all staff is imperative. They help set the tone for company values, and should be intentional.

“Situations will arise; training prepares you on how to react,” noted one participant. One fictional example was shared about a same-sex couple embracing poolside at a resort; another guest could complain to a staff member. **With training, the staffer will be better equipped to handle the situation appropriately for all parties.**

Companies are successful when DEI practices support both team members and clients/customers. **A 360-leadership approach can help executives better assess and understand DEI perspectives, set goals, address challenges, and collaborate across all company layers.** The moderator quoted a familiar expression that “leadership is about serving others,” and many agreed that **effective leaders adapt quickly to changing circumstances while keeping everyone aligned with common goals.**



Training is a key element in DEI success at every level, both internally and public-facing.



4

Amplifying diverse voices.

Human capital is a company's greatest asset, and Strategic Forum participants generally agreed that it is vital to invite and embrace diversity. Talent is what makes a company operate well, and finding ways for every team member to contribute builds connections and knowledge. One person's experience could potentially spare another person's hardship, suggested one discussant. "Never speak for someone else. Never think you can know everything about a person," said one discussant. Rather, learning about different team members' experiences fosters empathy, honesty, and understanding.

"Every story told is valuable to someone else."

Human narratives are an effective way to cultivate connection. One participant noted that a company can **harness the power of social media to support DEI programs by sharing individual stories**. For example, instead of a company explaining how it supports LGBTQ+ team members or customers, it might use Instagram Reels or other social-media videos as an amplifying platform for LGBTQ+ individuals to tell their own stories firsthand. That level of **authenticity is empowering**, and a positive reflection on a brand's respectfulness.

Some participants expressed concern about conservative leadership (governmental or corporate) rewinding progress made around DEI. One discussant noted that **it has been particularly helpful to rely on IGLTA to help empower team members, educate travel agents, support LGBTQ+ campaigns, etc. An organization can use IGLTA membership and benefits to underscore its LGBTQ+ community support, and develop its DEI programs—including intersection with other affinity groups.**

One participant explained that IGLTA recently launched its new "Destination" Reels series, where hosts visit different cities to show what it's like in an array of neighborhoods, businesses, etc. This is another example of **letting the story be shared directly for viewers/consumers** to see for themselves what a place is like, or to hear from a person in her/his/their own words. It's also a way for IGLTA to support members, partners, and destinations in their DEI commitments.





5

DEI is a journey, not a destination.

One participant noted the recent struggles of a few major corporations supporting, and then retracting, their visible support of LGBTQ+ Pride campaigns. The topic sparked several insights, including the idea that along with consistency in DEI practices, “brands need to be bold.” It was expressed:

“Not having a statement is a statement.”

A company that commits to DEI and LGBTQ+ visibility as corporate policy should know why it’s doing so, then proudly stand up for that position. **To express DEI or LGBTQ+ commitment only to withdraw it under pressure is likely more harmful to a brand.**

Returning to the concept of establishing DEI as a core principle, company leadership and culture should first evaluate its direction and consider how important DEI is. For example, is DEI so important that it has dedicated funding? A budget helps “keep conversations alive in the company,” and supports ongoing training, maintains campaigns, etc. Said one person: “Money pushes you to be more intentional.”

Going further, **DEI-committed companies should have a mechanism to respond to potential backlash.** One discussant noted, “People need to be put to task to uphold their corporate values.” And in the case of corporations that backpedal on DEI or LGBTQ+ campaigns, they may attempt to conceal their missteps, **“but the dust is still under the rug,” and consumers do notice.**





On the other hand, if a global brand is hit hard by negative backlash, another company may avoid following a similar path, especially if it operates out of overall concern for stock value.

In such cases, partners are reminded that **IGLTA can help facilitate change through the work it does every day, including reporting research and data, and developing strategies and procedures.** One discussant asserted, **“IGLTA is often the amplifying voice for its partners.”**

Internal conversations are a proven means to team bonding, and an effective way to keep DEI strategies evolving. It was noted that some Global Partners are so large they have the input of hundreds of thousands of employees—so it’s impossible that everyone will agree with everything. This can be true in small companies too.

“But it’s important to listen and make each person feel heard,” said one discussant. “And we can agree to disagree,” said another. **“Respect the differences. Embrace them.”**

Small steps can feel very meaningful, too. One participant noted that her team proposed the option of adding preferred gender pronouns to name tags in her company, and they were enthusiastically received and are commonly used today.

Many in the group believe that generational changes will affect corporate priorities and practices. It was expressed that “the next generation will be more comfortable with diversity through knowledge, mindfulness, acceptance.” And while DEI always will be an emotional issue, it is a lived experience.

“DEI is not a box to check,” and leaders now and in the future are wise to “be bold, stick to your priorities and keep things going.”

One participant said, “I’m here to learn more, and to communicate it.” That statement serves as an ideal approach to promoting DEI across every layer of business and branding.



Dynamic note-taking provided by Ink Factory



About IGLTA Global Partnership

The IGLTA Global Partnership program provides our partners with the context, vocabulary and research to **develop a platform for supporting the LGBTQ+ travel community.**

We build **strong brand alliances**, enabling both the partner and IGLTA to elevate each other's voices.

Through our shared values, mutual **commitment to DEI**, and by **promoting LGBTQ+ travel globally**, our combined strength allows us to bring the conversation forward and **walk together as leaders** in the global LGBTQ+ travel space.

By **demonstrating best practices** and **championing our accomplishments**, IGLTA and its valued portfolio of Global Partners represents the **true leadership of global travel brands supporting the LGBTQ+ travel community.**

IGLTA GLOBAL PARTNERS

PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER



For more information: gpteam@iglta.org



IGLTA
ADVANCING
LGBTQ+ TRAVEL



**2024
IGLTA Global Partner Summit
Host Destination:**

MIAMI
GREATER MIAMI & MIAMI BEACH

Host Hotel:



THE BILTMORE
MIAMI-CORAL GABLES
EST. 1926



2024 IGLTA Global Partner Strategic Forum Participants:

Moderator:

Aka Ali-Kerr (she/her); Human Resources Director, Andaz Miami Beach, Hyatt Hotels

Adriana Mantilla (she/her); Regional Manager Mexico, Caribe and Central America; Booking.com

Cesar Wurm (he/him); VP, Commercial Premium Brands; IHG Hotels & Resorts

Cheryl Richards (she/her); SVP, Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer; Visit Dallas

Dan Rios (he/him); Director, LGBTQ+ Tourism Marketing; Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

Dougal Mckenzie (he/him); Chair / Head of Industry; IGLTA / Google

Kristen Wells Scott (she/her); Senior Director, DE&I; Hilton

Lionel Garcia (he/him); Director of Strategic Accounts; MSC

Max Etcheverry (he/him); Director of Global Sales; Delta Air Lines

Meg Ten Eyck (she/her); Vice Chair / Founder & CEO; IGLTA / EveryQueer

Reginald Charlot (he/him); SVP Tourism Market Development; New York City Tourism & Conventions

Soraya Zaoudi (she/her); Press & Public Relations Manager; Turespaña

Sylvia Brookoff (she/her); Senior Manager, Brand and ESG; American Express Travel

Taylor Atkins (he/him); Sr. Manager, Sales Communications & Integration; Disney Destinations

Tom Kiely (he/him); President and CEO; Visit West Hollywood

William Abreu (he/him); Marketing Coordinator; Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

About the author:

Kelsy Chauvin (she/her), is a freelance writer specializing in LGBTQ+ interests, as well as travel, arts and culture, cannabis, and gastronomy. Her work has been featured in an array of publications including Fodor's Travel, Condé Nast Traveler, Lonely Planet, Orbitz, Passport, and others. Follow her on Instagram and X/Twitter: @kelsycc.