



RACIAL DIVERSITY AND THE BUSINESS OF RUNNING

Mapping a path to equitable
employment, leadership, and
ownership

NEW RESEARCH FROM [THE RUNNING INDUSTRY DIVERSITY COALITION](#)

FIGHTING FOR THE FREEDOM TO RUN.

“We’ve got to be as clear-headed about human beings as possible, because we are still each other’s only hope.” —James Baldwin, in A Rap on Race



Growing up as a Black kid in my Philadelphia neighborhood, I never saw runners. You ran because you were in danger or because you thought you were in danger. There were no school programs or resources for sports, our teachers didn't take gym class seriously, and my parents and grandparents didn't have time to think about running for fun or for health while fighting for our basic needs.

It wasn't until college that I started learning about—and experiencing—the benefits of running. Since then I've run every distance up to and including the 26.2-mile marathon. Running gave me the freedom to rise above some of the challenges from my upbringing and exposed me to endless opportunities for my health and career goals. Fast-forward to today: I have made a career in the running industry as the Executive Director of the Running Industry Diversity Coalition (RIDC), and I am the cofounder of a local running club started over a decade ago.

Despite my individual success, there are systems in place that prevent Black people and other people of color from participating in and advancing in the business of running. This includes systemic racism, implicit bias, discriminatory practices, and arbitrary barriers. The RIDC aims to change this, and it is with great pride that we announce new research that centers on the experiences of people of color across the entire running industry. In collaboration with Bentley University, these studies establish a baseline for measuring collective progress.

The report you're reading is one of three in a series. It provides particular insights about the status quo of the running industry today, as well as key questions and recommendations to make transformative change towards racial justice.

More than anything, these research studies are a call to action.

We need leaders and community members—of all identities, geographies, and positions of power—to not only speak up about the importance of achieving racial justice but to also use RIDC's research findings to make the running industry more accessible, inclusive, and safe for all runners. We need you to share what accountability looks like for you and your company to do this. We need you to ask critical questions about your current systems, engage in new learnings with your colleagues, and, most importantly, collaborate with the RIDC to build a running industry and culture that leaves no one behind.

We all deserve the #FreedomToRun, and it's our shared responsibility to fight for it.

Thank you to our research funders and partners—Altra, Brooks, New Balance, On, Patagonia, Salomon, Saucony, Smartwool, and Strava—for helping to make this work possible. Thank you to our research team and study participants, board members, and staff for helping the RIDC launch necessary research that will positively impact generations to come. And thank you, reader, for being on the path to progress with us.

In partnership,
Kiera Smalls
Executive Director, Running Industry Diversity Coalition

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, THE RUNNING INDUSTRY DIVERSITY COALITION HAS DRIVEN AWARENESS, CONVERSATIONS, AND ACTION IN THE RUNNING INDUSTRY REGARDING ISSUES OF RACIAL DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION.

We know that achieving racial justice is a marathon, not a sprint, and we know that to affect real change we have to fully understand our starting line. As part of our five-year strategic plan, we partnered with Bentley University to produce quantitative and qualitative baseline measures for racial diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as it relates to running industry employment, accessibility, inclusion, and belonging. We are looking for progress, not perfection. Let's get into the data!

See other RIDC studies titled "The Future of Running: Connecting with the Next Generation of Racially Diverse Runners" and "Racial Diversity in Trail Running: Understanding the Underrepresented Experience."



IMPORTANT TERMS AND DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS STUDY

Racial Justice ¹

A vision and transformation of society to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective liberation, where Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, in particular, have the dignity, resources, power, and self-determination to fully thrive.

BIPOC

When you see 'BIPOC' throughout RIDC materials, we are talking about Black, Indigenous, and people of color. We also use the phrase "people of color" as well.

TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

Entry level & experienced staff:

Positions that do not have management responsibilities, regardless of tenure with the company. Common job titles include Coordinator, Assistant, Administrator, Analyst, Sales Representative.

Mid-level management:

Positions that have management responsibilities but not ultimate-decision making authority over a business unit or the company. Common job titles include Manager, Senior Manager, Director.

Senior management:

Positions that have ultimate decision-making authority over individual business units or the entire company. Common job titles include VP, Senior VP, President, C-Suite, General Manager, Owner, Founder.

Senior executive:

An individual who is part of senior management.

RIDC EMPLOYMENT AND PARTICIPATION STUDY OBJECTIVES



PHASE 1: PARTICIPATION

Source statistics to outline the current racial and ethnic composition of running participation in the US

See the RIDC research report: *The Future of Running: Racial Diversity in Running Participation*.



PHASE 2: EMPLOYMENT

Source statistics to outline the current racial and ethnic composition of running industry employment, leadership, and ownership.

Analyze and compare the diversity of the US population to the current state of diversity within running participation and to the current state of diversity within running industry employment, leadership, and ownership.

Utilize statistics to:

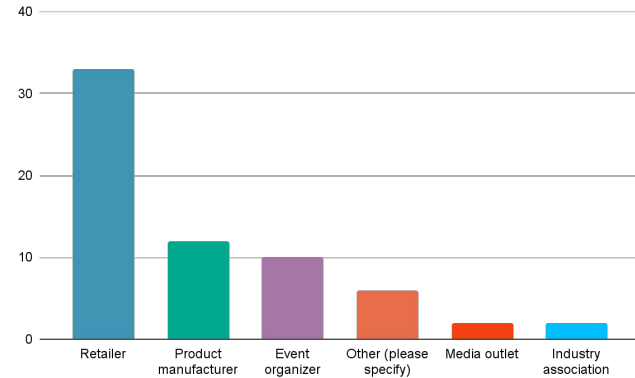
- Measure and track progress with regard to racial and ethnic representation in running industry employment, leadership, and ownership
- Measure and track racial and ethnic representation in running participation
- Assist organizations in the running industry to create goals, build action plans, and measure progress over time

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

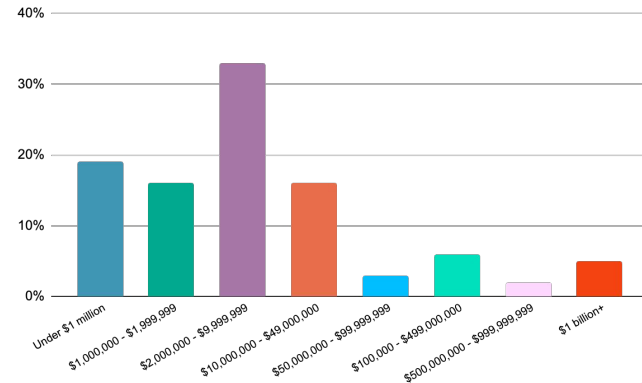
- The 63 organizations who participated in the survey were primarily retailers, product manufacturers, and event organizers. “Other” included advertising agencies, nonprofits, athlete coaches, and consulting companies.
- **Geography:** Respondents represented every region of the United States.
- **Distribution:** 33% distribute globally, 24% nationally, 19% regionally, and 24% locally (defined as one state).
- **Ownership:** 14% had a parent company, 86% did not. 6% were publicly traded.
- **Size:** 42% had fewer than 10 employees, 20% had 50–99 employees, 28% had 100–499 employees, and 10% had 1,000 employees or more.

Note: We spent nearly four months recruiting for responses (the initial plan was for two months). We were met with a good amount of fear and red tape conversations. Nevertheless, we persisted. We look forward to seeing an increase in responses in the future.

Organization Type
Based on primary source of revenue

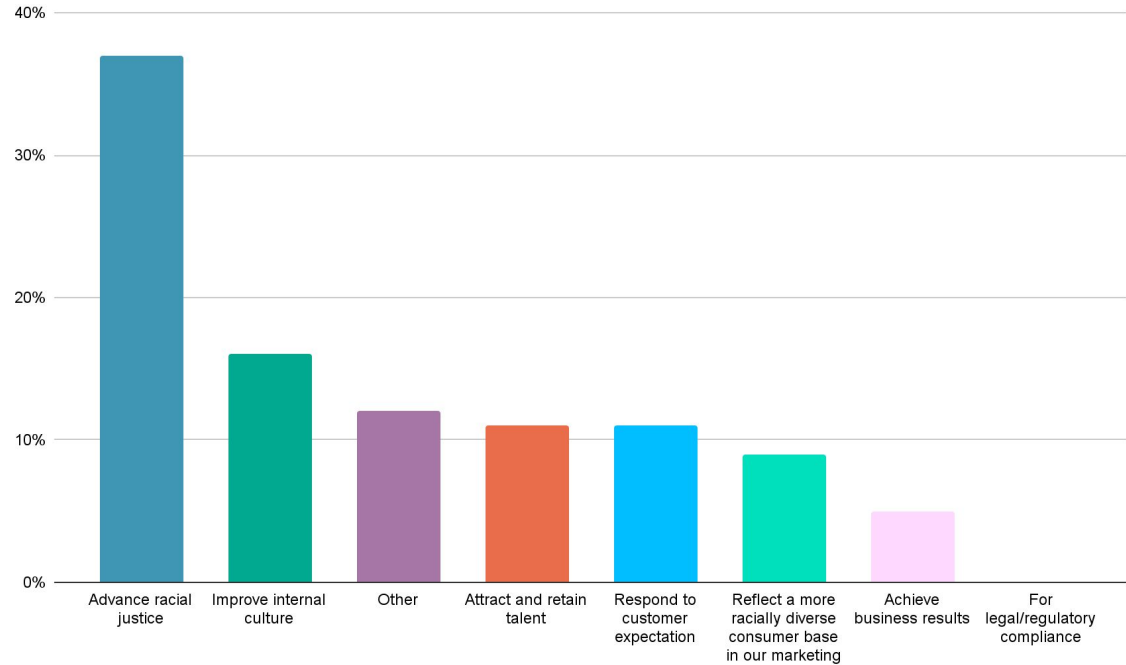


Annual Revenue



WHY ARE ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTING TO RACIAL JUSTICE AND DEI?

Advancing and achieving racial justice was the most common motivation for DEI commitment



***“Other” comments centered on morality, values, and sentiments like “it is the right thing to do.”*



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION GOALS



93%

of respondents said that they strongly or somewhat agree that their organization is committed to racial justice and racial diversity, equity, and inclusion

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents feel their organization is committed to DEI.

That said, the path to progress—and how that progress is tracked—is not clear at all.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION GOALS

70%

**of organizations
have DEI goals**

70% of respondents said their organization has racial/ethnic diversity, equity, and inclusion goals that are *approved* by senior management

59% have goals that are *generated* by senior management

59%

**don't track
progress vs. goals**

14%

**publish goals for
public viewing**

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION GOALS

50%

of organizations have DEI policies that are approved by senior management and communicated to employees yearly

41%

of organizations include DEI in decision making processes

35%

of organizations analyze statistics and monitor trends about racial and ethnic identities of employees each year

LEADING CHANGE

44%

of organizations have
a senior executive
leading DEI efforts

Senior executive was defined as an individual with ultimate decision-making authority over an individual business unit (or entire company) and/or someone who is part of the senior management team.

77%

of DEI executives are
white

Of the DEI executives who are people of color, **15%** are Black, **8%** are Asian, and **4%** are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander*.

White DEI Executives

Black DEI Executives

Asian DEI Executives

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander DEI Executives



*Totals may not equal 100% due to data collection methodology. For each employee who identifies as biracial or multiracial, respondents inputted data for all racial/ethnic identity groups that apply.



HIRING A RACIALLY DIVERSE WORKFORCE



60%

of respondents don't know
where to find qualified
candidates from
underrepresented
racial/ethnic groups

**Recruitment of diverse
candidates is the largest
perceived hurdle for
employers.**

RECRUITING A RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE WORKFORCE

While recruiting a diverse workforce is a perceived hurdle, the percentage of respondents who agree that their organization takes specific steps to recruit diverse candidates declines as the seniority of the position increases.

63%

Entry Level and
Experienced Staff

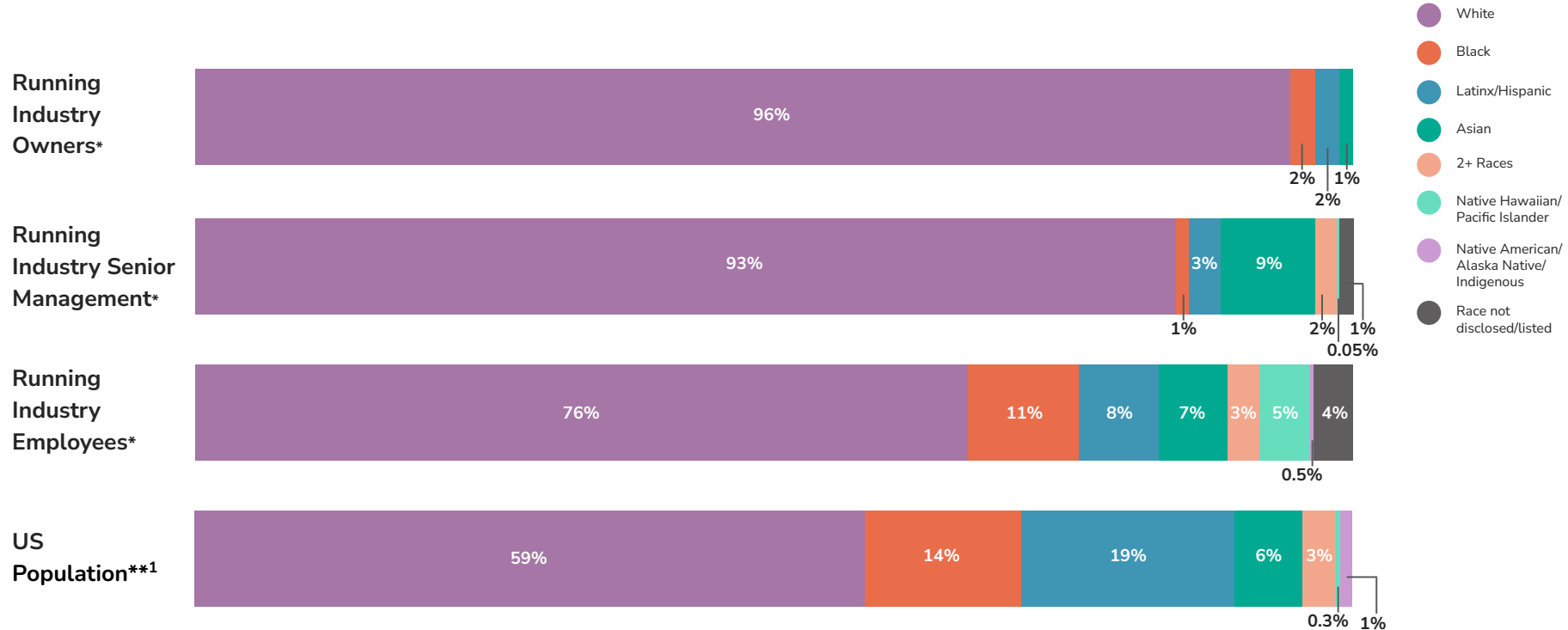
58%

Mid-level
Management

48%

Senior
Management

DIVERSITY OF RUNNING INDUSTRY COMPARED TO US POPULATION



*Totals may not equal 100% due to data collection methodology. For each employee who identifies as biracial or multiracial, respondents inputted data for the "two or more races" category as well as the racial/ethnic identity categories that are applicable to each employee's racial/ethnic identity.

**Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding and US Census reporting methodology; Hispanic/Latinx may be of any race and are included in applicable race categories except for White.

EXPERIENCE AND BARRIERS

It is important to recognize that experience and barriers in the workplace are not universal for all people of color. Systemic racism and barriers show up differently for specific racial groups and the individuals within them.

The following pages outline specific data and unique experiences for three different racial and ethnic groups: **Asian**, **Hispanic/Latinx**, and **Black/African American**.



EXPERIENCE AND BARRIERS: ASIAN EMPLOYEES



of US population¹



of running industry
employees



of running industry
senior management
leadership positions

¹(US Census Bureau, 2023)

The data suggest that representation of Asian employees and senior management in the running industry is strong. However, anecdotal feedback suggests that Asian employees are not equitably represented in all types of leadership positions. Additionally, inclusion and sense of belonging are of great concern for this group.

EXPERIENCE AND BARRIERS: HISPANIC/LATINX EMPLOYEES



19%

of US population¹



8%

of running industry
employees



3%

of running industry senior
management leadership
positions

¹(US Census Bureau, 2023)

Representation of Hispanic/Latinx employees in the running industry remains disparately low when compared to the US population. There is a significant need for outreach and inclusion to create increased access to employment opportunities as well as career advancement for this group. We must keep in mind language barriers as well.

EXPERIENCE AND BARRIERS: BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN EMPLOYEES



14%

of US population¹



11%

of running industry
employees



1%

of running industry senior
management leadership
positions

¹(US Census Bureau, 2023)

Black/African American employees are drastically underrepresented in senior leadership positions compared to other racial/ethnic groups. The industry needs to address bias and discriminatory practices, career development, and advancement for this group.

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND GENDER

- Only one in four C-suite leaders is a woman, and only one in 20 is a woman of color.
- Women of color are more ambitious than their white counterparts, despite getting less career support: 41 percent of women of color want to be top executives, compared with 27 percent of white women. Examples of career support include a manager supporting a person's career development, strong allies on a work team, senior colleagues praising someone's skills or advocating for a compensation increase for them.
- LGBTQ+ women and women with disabilities report experiencing more demeaning and "othering" microaggressions. Compared with women overall, they're more likely to have colleagues comment on their appearance or tell them that they "look mad" or "should smile more."

Note that there are minimal sources available to analyze the intersection of race and gender from a non-binary, gender expansive lens.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Setting clear racial justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and policies and making sure every department uses these guidelines are critical first steps for organizations in the running industry. Below are some specific steps organizations can take to help achieve these goals.

- **Track progress vs. goals each year.** The old adage “that which gets measured gets done” applies to racial justice and DEI goals as much as it does to other types of business goals.
- **Publish your goals for everyone to see:** Particularly for larger organizations, this is an important way to share your values and beliefs, demonstrate commitment, and hold yourself accountable over time. If you aren’t hitting your goals, speak openly and honestly about what’s holding you back. How can the RIDC help you?
- **Ensure that someone with authority in your organization is ultimately responsible for DEI policies and goals.** This person (or group) should have decision-making authority and should be a voice at the table for strategic planning.
- **Include DEI metrics in the performance evaluation of senior management.** Over 80% of respondents do not do this.
- **(Re)assess your organizational processes/policies** at every level to ensure racial equity and DEI is fully integrated and not an afterthought.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

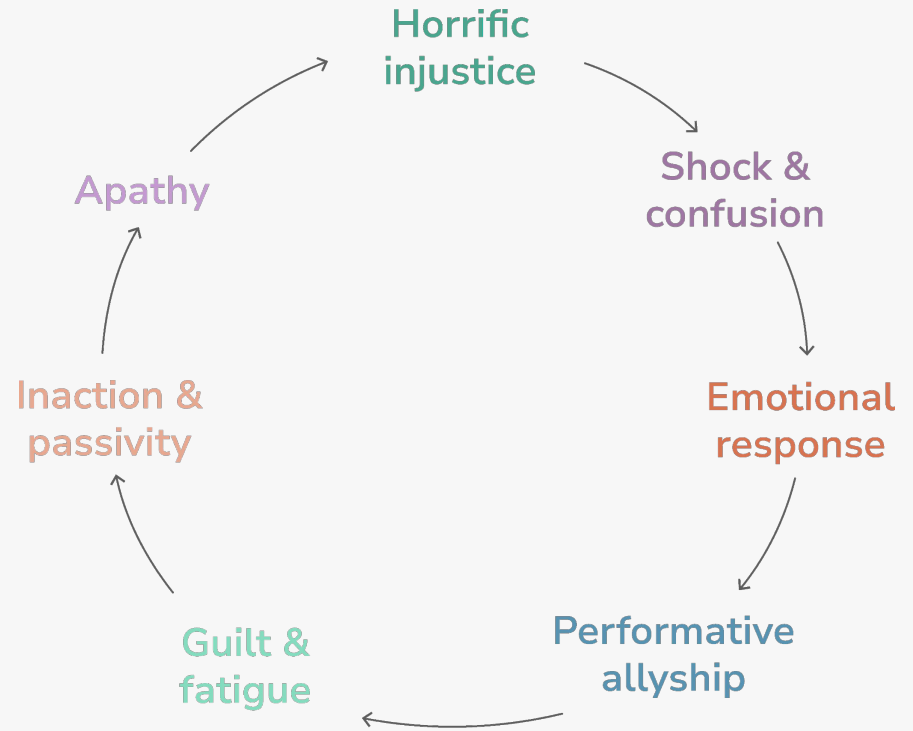
The foundation of the status quo being upheld in running industry employment needs to be restructured to be more inviting, welcoming, and supportive for current and future employees of color. Below are some specific steps organizations can take to help remove barriers for underrepresented employees.

- **Create and prioritize engagement, advancement, and retention programs** for underrepresented employees. Only 40% of respondents offer these programs.
- **Develop new policies for recruiting a diverse workforce at all levels** in the organization, from entry-level employees to senior managers. To be clear: not just internships or entry-level positions.
- **Consider all stakeholders in your racial equity and DEI goals.** Create preferred provider policies that prioritize intentionally considering contractors, vendors, and suppliers of color. 77% of respondents do not have these kinds of policies.
- **Provide ongoing racial equity and DEI training for all employees** Only 50% of respondents provide this training.
- **Continuously educate yourself on the unique challenges and experiences of different racial and ethnic groups** and how to solve for them. Not all barriers look alike within groups.

THE CYCLE OF INACTION

This cycle has been repeated **throughout history** in response to horrific injustice. The running industry can – and must – break the cycle.

The running industry is at risk of falling into the back half of the cycle. With continuous intentional action, we can avoid that.



(Coke, 2021)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TEAMS

What are specific steps **my organization** can take to improve our racial equity and DEI efforts?

Who is held accountable, within each department, to ensure they are **meeting the DEI values and goals** of the organization?

How can we reevaluate the skills, qualifications, and processes we seek in **leadership positions** to be more inclusive of racially diverse backgrounds

Does our team currently have people of color that are being **underutilized/undervalued** in their present position?

What ongoing trainings and education do we provide to managers to ensure racial equity and DEI is at the center of **decision making**?

What **metrics and tools** do we have or can we create to track goals and progress, and share with other organizations in the industry?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The RIDC, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, would like to express our gratitude to everyone who made this research possible. Your investments in this project have advanced our knowledge and understanding of the impacts on the running communities we serve. This research is the beginning of envisioning something better – a more inclusive and racially diverse running industry.

Thank you to New Balance for their leadership, and for providing the generous funding that helped us to see what's possible.

We are extremely grateful to each and every participant in this study. Your willingness to share your experiences and insights, be vulnerable, and meaningfully engage with us is a significant contribution to not only the RIDC but is deeply impactful for the running industry. The RIDC would also like to recognize the dedication, expertise, and work of the research team:

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THANK YOU





ABOUT THE RIDC

The RIDC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that unites the running industry by providing resources, measuring progress, and holding the industry accountable to equitable employment, leadership, and ownership positions and improving the inclusion, visibility, and access for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

[Learn more at **RUNNINGDIVERSITY.COM**](https://www.runningdiversity.com)