

Report on Aerospace Diversity Policy & Research Forum

Report dated February 24, 2021

On February 3, 2021, the Center for Air and Space Law Task Force on Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in Aerospace was honored to co-host the Aerospace Diversity Policy and Research Forum with the United States Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency, the National Space Society and Caelus Partners. During this event, several dozen leading members of the aerospace industry came together to identify pressing issues facing the industry and derive potential solutions.



The forum resulted in over five hours' worth of intriguing conversation. After introductions, including a keynote presentation from Rob Myerson, attendees participated in working groups covering five Areas of Focus:

- Board Composition and Senior Leadership
- Supply Chain Improvements
- Workforce Development and Entry Transfer
- Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment
- Space Market Commercialization.

With the insight, information, and additional questions provided by the participants at the forum, the Center for Air and Space Law IDEA Task Force can now move forward with purpose and intentionality.

We would like to thank one of our facilitators for articulating the purpose of our work with this question:

What are the future consequences of historically marginalized groups being left out of the inevitable economic expansion that will come in aerospace industry?

Please see below for a preliminary report of findings identified during the Aerospace Diversity Policy & Research Forum.

Summary of Universal Findings

- The is no single shortcut to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Changes need to be wholesale and holistic.
- But how do end the tokenism of history marginalized individuals in a predominately white space (i.e., ending the diversity hire stigma).
- The industry needs more accountability in all areas when it comes diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- The industry needs to provide more education to individuals outside of aerospace about the commercial and career opportunities within the sector.
- There needs to be a renewed and improved emphasis on providing successful mentorship opportunities within the aerospace industry.
- The industry needs to continue utilizing the skills learned during the pandemic to fight the historic “tyranny of geography” that unnecessarily excluded historically marginalized individuals and diverse-owned companies.

Session Highlights

Board Composition and Senior Leadership

- We need more research on lateral transitions into the Board Room and other Leadership positions.
 - How can we provide the necessary support systems for individuals looking to transition from outside of the aerospace industry?
 - How can we create opportunities for candidates who are outside of the traditional “golfing network”?
- How can we determine the necessary skills for successful leaders and potential candidates?
 - Maybe there should be a higher emphasis on leadership skills, while allowing room for technical and function skills to develop.
- Find a way to introduce new and outside perspective to leadership, especially when it comes to DEI.

Supply Chain Improvements

- We need to increase transparency in the subcontracting process to help smaller diverse companies navigate the system.
 - Better upfront specifications may allow smaller business to compete for certain contracts.
 - Hiding the ball on budgets can disenfranchise small businesses.
 - Budget knowledge allows small businesses to make determinations of (1) reasonability and (2) feasibility.
 - An increased focus on providing debriefings for failed contract bids will allow smaller companies to gain more insight into contracting needs and expectations.

Workforce Development and Entry Transfer

- There's a lack of data within the industry – providing that information will make a big difference in terms of action steps.
- The industry should focus more on networking and mentorships.
 - Often times, marginalized individuals lack the connections and guidance to successfully navigate entrance into, and career sustainment in, the aerospace work sector.
- The industry should increase outreach efforts by exposing young students (and their support systems) to the various career opportunities available in the aerospace sector that are not NASA.
- Is it possible to completely reimagine how interviews are conducted within the industry to make sure marginalized candidates are needlessly disqualified based on unnecessary presumptions?
- How can we disincentivize nepotism in recruiting and hiring practices?

Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment

- There are multiple possibilities of new pipelines within the industry.
 - How do we find these pipelines and highlight their benefits?
- We need an increased focus on educating subcontractors, businesses, and other vendors on how to properly navigate the sector – including working with the primes.

Space Market Commercialization

- One of the easiest ways to get smaller, diverse-owned businesses into the aerospace sector is through Sensors.
 - The relevant question is: How does the industry promote this pathway to startups and other small businesses?
- There are many aerospace initiatives (private and public) that are looking to provide funding to diverse-owned businesses, but there is a disconnect.
- Can the aerospace industry successfully mimic the incubators and accelerators from other industries?