

# Teaming up to bring more diversity to Pittsburgh's workforce

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By Elizabeth Bloom / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

As the CEO of Vibrant Pittsburgh, Melanie Harrington is perhaps an ideal example of the sort of activity her organization is trying to promote.

Having worked at a think tank in Atlanta for much of her professional life, Ms. Harrington moved to Pittsburgh in July 2010 to run the Downtown nonprofit.

When she heard that the Pittsburgh region was looking to increase its economic competitiveness by fostering diversity and inclusion, "I said, 'Wow ... that is very forward-thinking,'" she said.

Ms. Harrington, who is African-American, relocated to Pittsburgh and is working to help others do the same. Vibrant Pittsburgh has teamed up with OppsPlace.com and nine companies -- BNY Mellon, Education Management Corp., FedEx Ground, Giant Eagle, Highmark, PNC Financial Services Group, PPG Industries, UPMC and U.S. Steel -- to attract and retain diverse talent in the Pittsburgh region.

Vibrant Pittsburgh, an organization that grew out of the Welcome Center for Immigrants and Internationals, launched in September 2010 and is dedicated to improving diversity in the region.

OppsPlace.com, a minority networking and jobs website run out of the Bethesda, Md.-based RLJ Companies, launched in beta mode in February with a full release on July 1, according to Kelli Richardson Lawson, president and chief operating officer.

On the OppsPlace website, job seekers can log in for free to apply for posted opportunities, network with other users and find useful tips on the job search process. Though it is targeted toward diverse job seekers, anybody can sign up for the site, and the listed opportunities are not exclusive to OppsPlace. The Vibrant Pittsburgh logo is planted on the homepage, so users can link to its resources, as well, such as information about Pittsburgh's neighborhoods and affinity groups.

Companies headquartered in Pittsburgh or with Pittsburgh offices so far account for nine of the 44 companies currently on OppsPlace. That high proportion allows Pittsburgh to have a prominent presence on the website.

Because Pittsburgh has generally outperformed many cities during the recession, Ms. Harrington believes now is the time to market the city.

Companies have already been actively posting on the OppsPlace website.

"At any given time, we'd have hundreds of jobs posted," said Sue Suver, vice president of human relations for U.S. Steel.

BNY Mellon has 324 jobs available in Pittsburgh on OppsPlace, according to Lane Cigna, a company spokesperson. The company pushes out all of its jobs through OppsPlace, "in excess of a thousand jobs" every month, said Terri Gregos, director of global strategic talent acquisition programs at BNY Mellon.

Approximately 8,000 jobs are listed on the site, which has 77,000 unique monthly visitors, according to Mrs. Lawson.

OppsPlace gives Vibrant Pittsburgh a national marketing platform to bolster its regional recruitment efforts, which include attending meetings with affinity groups and speaking at conferences. The organization focuses on recruitment within a 250-mile radius of Pittsburgh so that people might already know of changes happening in Pittsburgh and be able to stay close to friends and family.

It markets Pittsburgh based on characteristics of the places it is drawing from. For instance, Pittsburgh's low cost of living is a selling point in Washington, D.C., but is less applicable in Cleveland, according to Yvonne English Roebuck, director of marketing and talent attraction.

While Vibrant Pittsburgh is focused on marketing the Pittsburgh region, so are the companies that it has partnered with. The companies have "set aside individual ambitions to support the overall goal" of promoting diversity in the region, said Ms. Harrington.

"One of the beauties of OppsPlace ... is that it gives us an opportunity to market our region, not just our companies," said Ms. Suver, who pointed out that recruiting of that type is especially important in attracting dual-income families to the area.

By banding together, "We could really take a look at how to address this particular issue and attract talent that we might not traditionally see in Western Pennsylvania," said Ms. Gregos.

For the companies, diversity can "bring results to the bottom line," said Mrs. Lawson.

"We believe these partnerships will allow us to better connect with these constituencies by attracting, promoting and retaining team members at all levels who can relate to our diverse customers," said Mark Minnaugh, chief administrative officer and chief financial officer of Giant Eagle, in an email.

For BNY Mellon, diversity is "a business imperative" for a company with offices in 36 countries, said Ms. Cigna.

"When people look at things differently, that's when you have the real power to solve and tackle issues and problems," added Ms. Gregos.

As the U.S. becomes more diverse, Pittsburgh -- which consistently ranks among the country's least diverse areas -- should not be left behind, according to Ms. Harrington.

"If we don't figure out how to attract and retain and elevate a diversity of talent, then we're going to miss out on the national workforce," she said.

According to data provided by Vibrant Pittsburgh, approximately 11 percent of Pittsburgh residents are minorities and just 3 percent are foreign-born.

Because of this stasis, Pittsburgh is "not growing in a way that will continue to provide a lot of viable economic development," said Ms. Suver.

The companies are looking for ways to track results from the fledgling website. Ms. Suver said U.S. Steel hopes to develop metrics to see how many diverse candidates who used OppsPlace are actually hired there. BNY Mellon has recently wired its tracking system with OppsPlace and is starting to analyze the results, said Ms. Gregos. Both Vibrant Pittsburgh and OppsPlace are looking to improve their tracking functionality, as well.

"We have to figure out a way to kind of either quantify that and capture it, so we can share that good news with the rest of the public," said Ms. Harrington.

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