

# Tech summit addresses industry's lack of diversity

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In this photo taken Monday, Dec. 8, 2014, Rev. Jesse Jackson, center, visits Kacie Gonzalez, left, vice president of business development and Nick Norena, both with the company Shoto, at the Workshop Cafe in San Francisco. Now that Jackson and, his group, Rainbow Push, have gotten the technology industry's biggest companies to confront an embarrassing shortage of women, African-Americans and Hispanics on their payrolls, he is stepping up the pressure to come up with solutions at workshop to be held Wednesday in Silicon Valley. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Civil rights leader Jesse Jackson spent most of this year pressuring the technology industry into facing up to the glaring scarcity of women, blacks and Latinos at companies renowned as great places to work.

Now comes Diversity 2.0—finding ways to reverse a deep-rooted problem that isn't going to be as easy to fix as writing new lines of code for a computer bug.

The challenges, along with some of the potential solutions, were explored Wednesday at a Silicon Valley summit organized by Jackson and his group, Rainbow Push.

In a show of their commitment, Google, Apple, Facebook and more than 20 other tech companies sent representatives to the forum held at the Santa Clara, California headquarters of a Silicon Valley pioneer, computer chipmaker Intel Corp. The crowd of roughly 300 people also included entrepreneurs, academics and nonprofit groups eager to change the cultural and educational milieu that turned computer programming into an occupation dominated by white and Asian men.

"It definitely feels like we are entering a new phase," says Laura Weidman Powers, CEO of Code2040, a San Francisco nonprofit that has been lining up technology internships for black and Latino college students for the past three summers. "When we first started, diversity just wasn't on the list of these large companies that have power and potential to make change. Now, it really feels like it is. They may not know exactly what to do yet, but they are interested in taking steps in the right direction."

Wednesday's forum marked the first time that many tech companies have publicly addressed their lack of diversity since acknowledging the problem earlier this year in contrite blog posts accompanying the ethnic and gender breakdowns of their workforces.

Gwen Houston, Microsoft Corp.'s general manager of global diversity, said she welcomed the opportunity because she believes technology companies and their top executives need to be held more accountable for the lack of women and non-Asian minorities on their payrolls. She pointed to Microsoft's appointment of John Thompson, an African-American, as its chairman earlier this year as a sign of progress.



In this photo taken Monday, Dec. 8, 2014, Rev. Jesse Jackson, right, visits Kacie Gonzalez, vice president of business development, center, and Nick Norena, both with the company Shoto, at the Workshop Cafe in San Francisco. Now that Jackson and, his group, Rainbow Push, have gotten the technology industry's biggest companies to confront an embarrassing shortage of women, African-Americans and Hispanics on their payrolls, he is stepping up the pressure to come up with solutions at workshop to be held Wednesday in Silicon Valley. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

"Change is happening, but not as fast as we want," Houston said.

With a few notable exceptions like Intel Corp. and Hewlett-Packard Co., most major technology employers had long resisted requests to release the employment data that they regularly file with federal labor regulators. Google Inc. finally relented to Jackson's demands in May, triggering a domino effect across the industry.

Jackson, 73, says he intends to hold the companies accountable for promises to make their workforces look more like the overall population. He met with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella last week and had what he described as a "positive and productive dialogue" Monday with Apple CEO Tim Cook.

He has another closed-door meeting scheduled Thursday with Intel CEO Brian Krzanich. Next month, Rainbow PUSH will release the first of what Jackson promises will be an annual scorecard rating the diversity progress of major tech companies.

"Many of these companies had an unfounded fear that we wanted to disrupt them," Jackson said in an interview. "We came not to disrupt, but to build. Inclusion will lead to growth."

Silicon Valley, a place that prides itself on progressive thinking and meritocratic policies, has a lot of ground to make up. For instance, only 2 percent of the U.S. workers at Google and Facebook are black and the number of Hispanics is below 5 percent at both companies. Cutting across the U.S. in all industries, 12 percent of the workforce is black and 14 percent is Hispanic. Meanwhile, less than one-third of the worldwide workforces at most major technology companies, including Google, Apple and Facebook, are comprised of women.



In this photo taken Monday, Dec. 8, 2014, Rev. Jesse Jackson gestures during an interview in San Francisco. Now that Jackson and, his group, Rainbow Push, have gotten the technology industry's biggest companies to confront an embarrassing shortage of women, African-Americans and Hispanics on their payrolls, he is stepping up the pressure to come up with solutions at workshop to be held Wednesday in Silicon Valley. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Google already has underscored its commitment to bringing more women into the technology industry by pouring \$50 million into a program called "Made With Code" during the next three years and partnering with nonprofits such as Girls Who Code, which has been running summer educational programs for girls since 2012. In October, Google launched an effort to diversify the gender and ethnic mix of its suppliers, said Yolanda Mangolini, the company's director of global diversity.

"It's not just about the numbers," Mangolini said. "It's about cultural change and cultural changes take a long time. It's like moving an aircraft carrier."

President Barack Obama also is trying to prepare more teenage girls and minority boys for technology careers as part of educational programs unveiled this week. The initiative calls for major school districts encompassing New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Las Vegas, Houston and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to starting offering introductory computer science courses to all students in high school or middle school.

Microsoft and most other major tech companies are pouring money and time this week into the "Hour of Code" in classrooms across the country. The program encourages teachers to set aside at least one hour this week to teach students about computer coding.

Liliana Monge, who runs a Los Angeles computer coding camp called Sabia.la for women and minorities, likens the technology industry's reckoning with its diversity issue to what happens after a habitual drinker finally starts to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

"First you have to understand you have a problem," Monge says. "Now, we are entering the second phase where (the companies) have to take the next steps to change."

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