



REUTERS EVENTS™

# Reuters Events Automotive Spotlight Interview

Championing Diversity, Equity and  
Inclusion within Automotive





## TELLIS BETHEL

Group Vice President, Chief Social Innovation Officer  
**Toyota Motor North America**

Tellis Bethel is group vice president and chief social innovation officer for Toyota Motor North America (TMNA). Bringing his personal passion for advancing equity to the role, he oversees TMNA's strategic partnerships, philanthropic efforts, and diversity and inclusion activities. With the goal of ensuring mobility for all, Bethel directs initiatives to expand access to opportunities and create a culture of inclusion that strengthens both communities and TMNA.

With over fifteen years of experience with Toyota Financial Services, Bethel's background in finance and analytics enhances his current position, connecting the dots between data and market share and substantiating the impact of TMNA's social innovation efforts on business and relationships.

Bethel began his career with Toyota Financial Services as a Graduate Management Team Member (GMTM) in risk management planning with an emphasis on financial hedging activities. He subsequently served as financial risk manager, analytics manager, sales finance manager, business marketing manager, credit risk senior manager, and general manager of Finance and Business Analytics. Most recently, Bethel was vice president of Voluntary Protection Products, where he led the business unit responsible for \$300M+ in operating income annually from the origination of optional products when financing Toyota, Lexus, and Mazda vehicles.

Bethel holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree from Clark Atlanta University and a Master of Business Administration degree from the Kelly School of Business at Indiana University.

With a commitment to enhancing accessibility for everyone and making inroads for future generations, Bethel devotes his time and resources to marginalized groups, including the Boys & Girls Club of America, Junior Achievement USA, North Texas Food Bank, TutorMe, and HBCUs (including his alma mater), as well as HSIs. Within Toyota, Bethel participates in affinity groups focused on women and LGBTQ+ segments and has been recognized with the Diversity Champion Award for 2022 and the president's award for his community involvement.

In his free time, Bethel enjoys following the financial markets, exercise and travel. He and his wife Crysti are the proud parents of two children, Myles and Nia.

Favorite Quote:

*"Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to."*  
– Richard Branson

*Hayley Dunn, Head of Automotive Strategy, Reuters Events: **D+I, or Diversity, equity and inclusion is one of the most talked about topics for organizational success. What does Toyota see as the business case for D+I?***

**Response:**

Toyota's vision of "Mobility for All" at its core is a message of inclusion. It is about providing universal, inclusive and accessible mobility options to the greatest number of people.

Toyota views diversity and inclusion as a fundamental value, driving a people-first culture that welcomes and encourages all voices.

*Dunn: **As an award-winning organization for D+I commitments, how do you feel your leadership has influenced Toyota Motor North America to accelerate its D+I program?***

**Response:**

Our people-first culture and continuous improvement are long-engrained tenets of Toyota.

In the U.S., our formal efforts with D+I began more than twenty years ago when the company formed its Diversity Advisory Board (DAB), comprised of external leaders. That same year, the first Employee Resource Group, TODOS (Toyota Organization or the Development of Latinos), was launched. Today, we have more than 100 resource groups across the country, and are recognized as a Top Company for Diversity by DiversityInc.

In our quest for continuous improvement, D+I efforts are benchmarked through external surveys, with action plans developed and supported through our Chief Diversity Officer who also has responsibilities as the Chief Legal Officer and Senior Vice President of Corporate Resources, helping further engrain D+I across the organization.

The case for D+I is only ever towards expansion and acceleration. Social Innovation works continuously to create new ways of broadening understanding and fostering communication. Successful mentoring programs, increased executive engagement, relevant speaker series, robust Employee Resource Groups, meaningful education courses and collaboration across boundaries are just a few of the ways Toyota has led rapid evolution of its culture of D+I.

*Dunn: **Could you tell us a bit more about your company's D+I commitment— what helped to shape it? And what are the key pillars that forms your D+I strategy?***

**Response:**

Two foundational pillars of the Toyota Way are showing respect for people and working for others. Toyota's D+I commitment starts there.

We believe D+I is an essential component in everything we do. D+I education helps our employees and dealers address an evolving marketplace and the diverse needs of customers. Additionally, supporting diverse suppliers strengthens communities. In addition, within communities, we are creating access to opportunities through education, including most recently through a \$110 million holistic education and community engagement effort called Driving Possibilities.

*Dunn: **What are Toyota Motor North America's best practices to make D+I effective and authentic?***

**Response:**

Effective D+I is consistent, authentic and proactive. It is not top down, but organization wide. And it's about action, not bumper sticker statements.

Within the company, the Diversity and Inclusion team consults with department leads across the enterprise, provides tools and education available for all, and benchmarks efforts to continuously improve. We also share our knowledge with other companies, so collectively we all do better.

*Dunn: **Can you tell us about Toyota's efforts to promote Diversity and Inclusion internally with current employees?***

**Response:**

Toyota has a number of internal channels through which to promote Diversity and Inclusion. Internal platforms publish feature articles, spotlight team members and news about Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Toyota social channels also offer engagement with employees and form an additional means of internal communication. The ERGs also maintain robust communications across the enterprise, highlighting symposia, speakers, affinity holidays, plus volunteer and mentoring opportunities. Every August, the D&I team within Social Innovation hosts D&I Month, a celebration of all things D&I at Toyota and includes guest speakers, education, contests, creative expression, and videos, all communicated weekly through feature articles, digital signage, newsletters, and emails. And finally, the culmination of each year's progress in D&I is the D&I Annual Report, which is produced for use in all North American regions and hosted externally on Toyota.com.

***What would be your advice to other Automakers who want to build an effective D+I strategy?***

**Response:**

What has worked at Toyota is to set ambitious goals and continuously improve the methods for reaching them. Strategies take into account differing needs of each group, division and region, and are developed as part of open dialogue with employees. Just as Toyota works closely with members of communities to help solve issues, the company also listens carefully to the concerns of its diverse workforce to close gaps.



Diversity and inclusion speaks  
to the heart of the Toyota  
Way and respect for people.  
D+I is good for business, and  
essential for our true mission  
of creating happiness  
for all. We believe an  
equitable society is a  
healthy society"

Ted Ogawa, President and CEO  
**Toyota Motor North America**

