



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Audit 2026-2027

raiseRED Dance Marathon

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RaiseRED is an integral part of our campus that unites University of Louisville students of all backgrounds to improve the community.

Preface

As we enter into our 14th year, we understand that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) needs to be at the forefront of our decision-making. This DEI audit aims to ensure ongoing accountability leading up to the dance marathon, acknowledging past lapses in this consideration and how we have grown from it. Especially in the past, there has been confusion where diversity, equity, and inclusion were perceived as synonymous, despite each having distinct definitions.

For multiple years, raiseRED's leadership team and participants in the marathon, also called dancers, have been primarily composed of people who are involved in the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Council. In turn, we have had a lack of diversity in the makeup of our organization, with little to no participation from the multicultural groups on campus. We therefore acknowledge raiseRED's reputation as an exclusive organization and are dedicated to changing this perception. We aim to create an environment where all students feel welcomed and valued. This audit outlines our ongoing efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion, emphasizing our commitment to continuous improvement.

Diversity

Simply put, our dance marathon has historically lacked diversity that reflects the University of Louisville's student body. Despite the university's student population being 43% people of color as of fall 2025, our marathon has not mirrored this diversity. Only 28% of registrants last year indicated they were a race other than white (the total excludes those who were unspecified/preferred not to answer). Similarly, while only 10% of the student population is a part of Greek Life (Interfraternity, Panhellenic, and National Pan-hellenic Council), the majority of participants have come from the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Councils, comprising about 76% of our dancers in the 2025-26 year.

This lack of diverse representation excludes a significant portion of our campus community, limiting participation and fundraising potential from various student groups. For instance, there has been minimal engagement from the National Pan-Hellenic Council (the governing body for the "Divine Nine" historically Black sororities and fraternities) with less than 1% of our dancers being a part of this Council. This situation has potentially inadvertently made other Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) feel unwelcome in our events.

RaiseRED is actively pursuing diversity initiatives to broaden our dancer base. We are shifting our focus away from solely relying on the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Councils for participation in our marathon. Instead, we are expanding our outreach efforts to include other Greek councils and multicultural organizations with whom we have not previously engaged. This includes attending their meetings, participating in their events, and establishing relationships with their Executive Boards to foster connections leading up to the marathon. At the 2026 Dance Marathon, we had 5 new RSOs participate with their own teams. Our goal is to encourage broader participation and interest in our events among these groups.

Similarly, when recruiting for raiseRED staff, we are committed to enhancing diversity. Over the years, we have seen progress in diversifying our staff, which has started to reflect in the demographics of our dancers. While the change is incremental, it signifies progress. Moving forward, we aspire to further align these numbers with the broader demographics of our campus community in the coming years.

Equity

Equity entails ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals, regardless of their identity. Historically, we have not sufficiently prioritized equity in our planning. Recognizing these inequities, we are actively addressing these issues as detailed below. We are committed to making our marathon more inclusive by reevaluating our requirements and exploring alternative ways to show support for hospitalized children. Our goal is to create an environment where all students have equal opportunities to participate and contribute, regardless of their circumstances.

The Shift to a 12 Hour Marathon

As an organization, raiseRED Dance Marathon is committed to creating an engaging, sustainable, and successful fundraising event. We value the feedback of our past dancers and are continually looking to improve our participant experience. After reviewing program feedback, studying national data and trends, and meeting with other dance marathon programs, we knew a change needed to be made. That change came in the 2025-26 year by shifting our marathon to a 12-hour format instead of the traditional 18 hours that went overnight. The goal behind the change was higher dancer retention and energy throughout the marathon, while allowing our marathon to be more accessible. The 2025 marathon had 30% of dancers (that attended the marathon) check out early while the 2026 marathon only had 16% of dancers (that attended marathon) check out early. With the things that we have learned this year about the new 12 hour format, we are excited to see how retention of dancers throughout marathon continues to increase.

While the traditional 18-hour overnight format has long been a unique and meaningful part of raiseRED, we also recognize that it hasn't always been feasible for all students. Some—particularly those balancing work, school, and other commitments, like night-shift employees in UofL's Metropolitan College program—have found it challenging to fully participate. Others have shared that certain personal needs, such as managing health conditions, caregiving responsibilities, or neurodivergent experiences, can make overnight involvement more difficult. By transitioning to a 12-hour daytime marathon, we aimed to reduce those barriers and create a more accessible and inclusive environment. In 2025 we had 370 dancers attend our 18-hour overnight marathon, in 2026 we had 398 dancers attend our new 12-hour marathon. This shows that the daytime and shorter format allowed for more University of Louisville students to attend the main event. We believe this shift will help more students stay engaged throughout the event and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. With greater participation, our community can come together to raise even more, support even more, and make an even bigger impact in the fight against pediatric cancer and blood disorders.

Fundraising

We have set a \$200 fundraising minimum for participation in the marathon. Depending on when individuals register, the time given to raise this amount varies, posing challenges that may be insurmountable for some students due to their circumstances. This requirement has unintentionally restricted access to our event for those who may not have the means to meet the fundraising target.

Regarding our fundraising minimum, we acknowledge that asking individuals to raise \$200 can be daunting. However, as a fundraising organization committed to our cause, these minimums are essential for maximizing our fundraising efforts. Recognizing that this amount may be challenging for some students to achieve independently, we've implemented strategies to help offset this requirement. This equity effort spreads to our leadership team as well. With our Service Staff, they are able to be a part of leadership while offsetting their staff minimum of \$500 by engaging in various service projects throughout the year.

In 2023-24 we introduced Service Support—a program aimed at increasing accessibility to raiseRED and eliminating the financial burden of fundraising for dancers who may be unable to raise the minimum amount (\$200) necessary to attend the raiseRED Dance Marathon. The goal of this program is to give individuals the opportunity to show their support and involvement to raiseRED through the donation of their time and dedication to the community through service events such as volunteering at the Ronald McDonald House Charities or Norton Children's Hospital Foundation events.

In 2026, the University of Louisville's Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement Center allowed students to come into their digital engagement center and call potential donors.

Students who choose to participate in this came into the Center and received a list of past raiseRED donors. Oftentimes, these are donors who donated year after year, and then their connection to our organization has graduated, or they have just not yet donated that year. Students are then able to call people off this list and ask them for donations that then go to the student's own fundraising page. Being able to offer this opportunity to our students allows them to have more accessibility to a variety of donors in order to help them hit their minimum.

We also receive ongoing support from our alumni, who donate throughout the year to assist participants in meeting their fundraising minimums. Furthermore, we periodically offer boosting programs to help dancers reach their goals. These efforts aim to make raiseRED more inclusive and supportive for all participants, ensuring a positive experience for everyone involved in our marathon event.

Pledge to Stay

Our dance marathon traditionally required participants to stand for the entire duration. While this was intended to show solidarity with hospitalized children battling cancer and blood disorders, it inadvertently created barriers for individuals with physical disabilities, making attendance difficult or impossible. In recognition of the physical demands of our marathon, we transitioned from a "pledge to stand" to a "pledge to stay" in 2022. Instead of requiring participants to stand for 12 hours straight, we now encourage them to remain present at the marathon, enhancing accessibility. While we encourage everyone to stay for the entire event, we understand if participants need to take breaks from the programming as necessary.

Accommodation Room

To further improve accessibility, we've introduced an accommodation room. This quiet space provides a retreat for students who may feel overstimulated or need a moment to relax or even nap amidst our content-heavy marathon activities. The accommodation room is explained to all of our dancers in case they need a minute to relax without any questions. This addition has proven beneficial in keeping participants engaged and reducing the likelihood of them leaving the event prematurely.

Additional Efforts

We've implemented additional measures to ensure maximum accommodation, such as incorporating captions in our social media videos and during the marathon itself. We've also developed opportunities for students to engage with raiseRED beyond attending the main event. Through our Cardinal Crew program, students are paired with children from the hospital to participate in fun activities throughout the year, fostering a connection to our cause ahead of the marathon.

On our dancer registration form, we have a section for “access needs” where students are able to state anything that might help make them more comfortable at the marathon. Before the main event, our team reaches out to each person to clarify and explain the systems we have in place to help accommodate their needs. For example, some students listed they may be overstimulated at times and need a calm space to go to. We utilize a room in the Student Activities Center for this purpose, and we email the students who requested a calm room on the registration form to let them know about this space and exactly where it is a few days before the marathon.

Additionally, we host pre-events throughout the school year on a smaller scale, which are open to all students. These events, often on or near campus, provide exposure to our dance marathon prior to the main event, allowing the student body to engage with our beneficiaries without the commitment of attending the marathon itself. They can learn more about our main event, ask questions, hear family stories, and participate in different activities that align with our cause. These events are a great opportunity for them to learn more about raiseRED as a whole before deciding to commit their time and fundraising efforts.

Feedback on these initiatives has been positive thus far, encouraging us to continue enhancing our organization with further adjustments to promote equity and accessibility for all participants.

Inclusion

As an organization, our goal is for every individual attending tabling events, pre-events, and the marathon itself to feel genuinely welcomed. Whether they're a first-time dancer or a seasoned executive board member with years of raiseRED experience, inclusivity is paramount. Historically, we've tended to group dancers by their respective student organizations, often favoring larger groups like the Interfraternity and Panhellenic Councils. This can create an intimidating atmosphere at events where these groups dominate, potentially alienating individuals from smaller clubs or those participating independently.

Team Miracle

To address this, we're making more effort to create a sense of community within our Team Miracle dancers (those who register without a team). Recognizing the growing number of individual participants over the years, we've adapted by introducing Student Involvement Staff members dedicated to supporting these Team Miracle dancers. These staff members serve as liaisons between raiseRED and individual participants, ensuring they have a point of contact for questions and support. In 2025, we had 24 dancers on Team Miracle with a goal to grow that number and lower the intimidation level of coming to a Dance Marathon “alone”. In 2026,

we were able to expand this number to 58 Team Miracle dancers and aim to continue that growth.

Team Captains

In our commitment to inclusivity, we aim to value all student organizations equally. We want every Registered Student Organization (RSO), regardless of size, to feel important and included in raiseRED. This is why, during the 2024-25 year, we implemented “Team Captains” as a part of staff to represent their respective RSOs. Each year we aim to welcome new participants from various RSOs and individual dancers. Throughout the year we show our appreciation and encouragement to all of our various RSO teams. This recognition extends not only to newcomers but also celebrates the ongoing contributions of clubs that have been involved with raiseRED over the years.

At raiseRED, we take the commitment of registering for a 12 hour marathon seriously. Therefore, we strive to express our gratitude and celebrate every organization and individual who participates. By taking these steps, raiseRED is dedicated to creating a more inclusive environment where every individual feels valued, and we're eager to continue progressing in this direction.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, this document is dynamic because Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts are ongoing and not a one-time event. We intend to utilize this document throughout the year to hold ourselves accountable, acknowledge our successes and areas needing improvement, and most importantly, strategize for continual enhancement in the upcoming school year. There will always be opportunities for raiseRED to grow in the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and this audit serves as a platform for that recognition.

As an organization, our goal is not only to be recognized for our successful fundraising efforts for pediatric cancer and blood disorders but also for creating an inclusive environment where all students feel welcomed, regardless of their identities or backgrounds. We take pride in the progress we have achieved thus far and eagerly anticipate further advancements ahead.

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