

The Big Rail Diversity Challenge 2023: Why your organisation should participate

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With just three months until this year's Big Rail Diversity Challenge 2023, leading organisations committed to equality, diversity and inclusion explain why they are supporting the high-profile event.

The Big Rail Diversity Challenge (BRDC) is Women in Rail's (WR) flagship event and is specifically designed to highlight the benefits of gender-balanced and diverse teams and the need to promote inclusion within the sector.

A cross between It's a Knockout and The Krypton Factor, the BRDC provides a platform for team building and networking while participants go head-to-head in a mixture of fun mental, physical and skill-based challenges in diverse and gender-balanced teams.

Now in its eighth year, the 2023 event is being held at Newark Showground, Nottinghamshire, on 21 June. More than 460 industry professionals have already signed up to participate and there is a growing number of supporting organisations recognising the event's credentials.

The Railway Industry Association (RIA), which launched the hugely successful joint EDI Charter with WR in

2020, has supported the BRDC and fielded teams every year since the event was launched.

Chief Executive, Darren Caplan explained: “We believe it is a fun way to promote an important point. That for UK rail to be at its best, its workforce needs to be genuinely equal, diverse and inclusive.

“Both existing railway professionals and future trailblazers need to work together to ensure we have a talent pool which includes the widest mix of people and skills for rail employers to work with and choose from – which is represented at the BRDC.

“This agenda is not just nice to have – rail faces a skills shortage, so we need to celebrate the opportunities rail offers and attract the next generation of talent.”

Young Rail Professionals (YRP) which for the first time in its 14-year history has a gender-balanced executive committee led by a woman, has also been a BRDC supporting organisation since the event’s launch.

Fi Westcough, National Chair of Young Rail Professionals said: “YRP team members are eager and excited to participate in WR’s BRDC.

“The vision of this team building, networking and fundraising event extends far beyond the gender-balanced teams tackling the challenges. The day raises awareness of the benefits of gender diversity and advocating for a more representative rail industry.

“WR see a future railway industry which has more than just 16% women across the board and more than 4% female engineers. YRP is proud to support WR as they work to make this future a reality.”

Passionate about EDI, the National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR) has been a BRDC supporting organisation since the first event and a team will be taking part this year.

NSAR Chief Executive Neil Robertson, said: “We are delighted to be involved in the BRDC and coordinate industry efforts in attracting and promoting new talent to enable the rail sector to be competitively positioned with other industries.

“We aim to support rail employers to foster an environment where each individual is able to succeed based on their dreams, skills and talent.”

Charity Railway Benefit Fund, a BRDC supporting organisation since 2017 and running a 2023 challenge highlighting collaboration and communication, is inspired by the unique nature of the event: “We are delighted to be involved in such a great event. A day of pure fun and amazing teamwork to promote and reinforce the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workplace in our industry.” commented Suzy Powell, Fundraising Manager RBF.

“We have seen how much opportunity there is to develop a more diverse workforce and what massive benefits can be achieved by doing so. If there is something we can do at the RBF to support and make a difference, then we will.”

The Rail Forum has also been an ardent BRDC supporting organisation since the event's launch. Elaine Clark, CEO of Rail Forum said, "We are delighted to support the BRDC.

"The Rail Forum is proud to have a gender-balanced team which we believe helps demonstrate our commitment to gender diversity within the industry.

"We also work, with the help of our members, to support the industry's wider efforts on the skills agenda to attract and promote new talent to the rail sector. This includes attracting young people from different backgrounds to those from which we traditionally recruit."

British Transport Police (BTP) is another long-standing BRDC supporting organisation and has regularly set challenges that highlight safety campaigns in a fun and educational way.

"BTP is proud to work with WR supporting the BRDC," explained Supt Mark Lawrie, Head of Special Constabulary. "We believe in WR's assertion that diverse gender teams are 'Better for People, Better for Business and Better for Rail'.

"Whilst the BRDC is a fun event, and we see each year how teams from across the rail and associated industries enjoy the vast array of challenges they face; it has a serious message - that the rail industry should be accessible to all and that underrepresented groups can be huge assets to all teams."

There's still time for organisations to take part in this year's Big Rail Diversity Challenge. For more information, call to speak to a member of the team on 01780 432930 or email info@bigraildiversity.co.uk

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