

# YOUR COLLEGE

## The Granum Center Asks: Are You Playing to Win?



**HAVE YOU EVER STOPPED** to think about the difference between playing to win and playing not to lose? When considering corporate strategy, one can be more appropriate than the other. Sometimes, taking a more conservative approach is the right answer. But when it comes to growing the diversity of our industry's field distribution system, the Granum Center's Executive Impact Initiative (EI<sup>2</sup>) has our first five participating companies thinking differently about how to drive real results.

### BACKGROUND

The Northwestern Mutual Granum Center for Financial Security launched its signature offering, the Executive Impact Initiative, in 2013. This unique industry offering is an invitation-only, multi-company intensive six-month focus on one key distribution issue; in this case, growth through distribution diversity. EI<sup>2</sup> launched in the spring with focus group research including more than 50 successful, diverse financial professionals and leaders from our five participating companies. The results of these field focus groups—including custom company analyses, executive summaries and video footage—were provided to the participating companies and served as the pre-work for the Capstone Clinic in June. There, each company brought its team of key leaders and decision-makers to a two-day session where the focus was on sharing and learning from each other. Each team left with a six-month action plan designed to affect current business strategy and drive meaningful change. We were ready to declare victory and part ways.

### BUT THEY ASKED FOR MORE

Our executives told us that the things they loved most about the EI<sup>2</sup> experience included focused time with their teams, vulnerability and sharing across companies, and accountability outside of their company. As part of the post-Capstone follow-up, leaders from our five companies asked us for even more. They felt good about the new tactics and strategies they

were putting in place, but they wanted to make sure it was enough to truly move the needle in a way that would create sustainable, cultural change. This led to our December "Play to WIN" fly-in, which focused on innovation.

Teams were challenged to take everything they had learned thus far about diversity and look at it through a new lens. Participants were called to question assumptions, to be courageous and to try new approaches to attracting and developing more diverse field leaders—even if it scared them. They left with a framework for innovating that they could use with their corporate and field leaders to continue to pioneer new experiments that will lead to desired, sustainable results.

### AN INNOVATION FRAMEWORK

Many of the challenges facing distribution today will not be solved with yesterday's thinking. Rather than focus on problem definition, the EI<sup>2</sup> teams took the opportunity to explore and imagine a desired future state related to distribution diversity, which was outlined in the form of "what if" questions. These "what ifs" became our guideposts for developing new concepts into field experiments. Small groups were tasked with innovating a variety of ways to create their desired end goal. Obstacles could only be shared during the "bulletproofing" phase of experiment development—and were offered in the spirit of what to plan for and how to tackle the plan, not as a reason to pull the plug on the idea. Each team left not only with multiple ideas for experiments to begin, but also with a tool they could use again and again to help them continue to innovate.

### PLANNING UNDERWAY FOR 2014 EI<sup>2</sup>

We will launch an entirely new EI<sup>2</sup> series—focused on another critical topic for our industry—with an exclusive group of new companies later this year. If you are interested in learning more or would like to be considered as one of our invitees, please contact the Granum Center's executive director, at Jennifer.DeTroye@TheAmericanCollege.edu. ■■