THE ELFA
Diversity,
Equity,
Inclusion
TOOLKIT

Overview

Each company should become a place where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are a fundamental part of the company's values and culture. Bringing together diverse life experiences and backgrounds adds value to your workplace community and reinforces the importance of inclusion. Many companies know that inclusivity is a key asset in creating a positive work culture and general success, but they don't know exactly where to start.

The ELFA Equity Committee has prepared a set of guidelines located in this Toolkit to provide companies with many comprehensive and tangible ways to integrate inclusion and access throughout all levels of an organization. Each area of focus in the guidelines includes a general description followed by practical tools which any manager or CEO needs to advance their DEI strategy.

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The Business Case for Diversity

First, let's address the business case for diversity. It's not just about making people feel valued, but ultimately, inclusion impacts your bottom line. Companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians[1] and companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians[2]. Inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87 percent of the time and diversity makes it easier to attract top talent.

Beyond the business case, simple and low-cost adjustments to recruitment practices, work environment, and communication will give companies access to a variety of untapped opportunities. Here are five overarching ready-to-use guidelines that you can add to your company's DEI toolkit in your pursuit of organization-wide diversity, inclusion and belonging.

1. Regularly communicate the importance of inclusion with your company.

Your organization should engage in continuous discussions on how to strategically implement inclusion priorities at all levels of the company. To start, you should conduct a culture assessment of your company, using interviews, surveys, or a focus group to determine your company's "culture baseline." Figure out where you are at present, based on the information provided by your staff, and then determine what adjustments and strategies are needed to create a culture of inclusion and open communication. Here are some basic examples of how to communicate your organization's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Create and fully embrace a DEI philosophy and **mission statement** for your organization. Make sure to publicize your mission statement and communicate your philosophy to all staff, clients, vendors, and volunteers.

- Create safe ways to report incidents of discrimination at work. Add a non-discrimination/DEI policy to your bylaws and other appropriate company policies.

- Showcase diversity in all your publications, educational events and media materials to include a diverse range of skills, ability, age, race, sexual orientation and gender. Prioritize soliciting a diverse group of voices to ensure broad representation and perspectives.

- Conduct quarterly DEI training for all staff and volunteers, including all legally required training for the states in which you operate.

- Educate staff that the word diversity does not always mean minority. Find ways to recruit beyond issues of gender and race, while at the same time increasing access and opportunities for people of color and other minorities or diversity groups. · Celebrate a diversity-friendly culture and acknowledge **diversity months and holidays** across religions and cultures.

- Understand the value and perspective of the newest generation in the workforce and be conscious of hiring across generations.

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[1] From the article "Why Diversity Matters" in the Driving Diversity & Inclusion Section"
[2] From the article "New Research: Diversity & Inclusion Leads to Better Decision Making At Work."

2. Create strategic partnerships with diverse organizations and develop a broad professional network outside of people that look like you.

Cultivating strategic partnerships with other organizations that have a direct pipeline to communities you are looking to include will allow you to get your company's message to another group of potential employees. By diversifying your network and outreach efforts, you cast the broadest net possible to look for a diverse group of candidates to join your staff and it also can create a pipeline for diverse individuals to serve in leadership roles within the organization.

It's also important to create detailed strategies that can help you increase the number and quality of applicants for your open staff and volunteer positions. It is one thing to acknowledge that diversity is important to your organization; it's another thing altogether to deliberately seek diverse representation. Collect information about who is applying for your volunteer and/or staff positions (veteran status, race, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation) and use this information to help set a recruitment strategy. Potential employees and board members will look to see if there are people in the organization who look like them and who can identify with their values and culture, and high-performing talent will actively seek other opportunities if they don't feel inclusion and representation is a priority in your company[3].

Here are some examples of organizations in your community that cater to large diverse populations:

- Churches or religious affiliates
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- All-Women Colleges or Universities
- LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations
- Fraternity and sorority networks
- On-campus student unions or organizations
- Adult adaptive or disability inclusion organizations

3. Examine your assumptions.

It is very common for leaders to assume that each employee shares their own background, but this is not necessarily so. Ask yourself, do you sometimes find yourself addressing your colleagues or staff as if they all share your religious faith, sexual orientation, or social class? All too often we automatically assume other people have a similar frame of reference and we speak as if everybody is familiar with them. Here are some examples of questions you might ask yourself:

- Do I expect my team to share my cultural and political views?
- Do I expect most of my team to come from similar backgrounds?
- Do I expect most of my department to understand my culture or media references?
- Do I link certain individual characteristics or tendencies with levels of intelligence and ability?
- Do I think I naturally know which of my team members have physical, emotional, or learning disabilities?
- Do I assume most people of certain races come from lower income families or have weaker academic standing?

There are life lessons associated with these questions that you and your staff can learn from and discuss.[4]

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[3] From the article, "Forbes: 3 Benefits of Diversity In The Workplace."

[4] From the article, "Forbes: The Importance of Cultural Diversity in the Workplace."

4. Allocate funds annually to support DEI

You should prepare annually to allocate money to support your company's DEI initiatives. Whether a stipend for a DEI consultant, or it's a specific travel budget to attend several networking events at organizations or events such as Historically Black Colleges, you will need to develop new efforts to produce successful outreach strategies. Some additional strategies may also include:

- Plan to advertise employment and internship opportunities with minority networks.
- Allocate funding in your budget each year for diversity initiatives, outreach, and professional development.
- Conduct ongoing DEI training for all of your staff.
- Plan community days for staff to participate in outreach and advocacy in the local community.
- Utilize the Equipment Leasing & Finance Foundation's **guest lecture program** to expose college and grad students to the equipment and finance industry.
- Review your company's social impact programs and involve your teams in outreach and focus.
- Plan to bring in guest speakers to share more information for each of the **DEI celebration months** throughout the year.

5. Create and continually reference a company-wide DEI plan.

It's essential that your company create an inclusion statement and an accompanying plan to develop and sustain inclusion goals and success metrics. As part of this plan, your company should set monthly goals for the organization and meet regularly to discuss progress[5]. Be sure to create and stick to a timeline to measure your effectiveness and create policies and procedures to enforce your strategies. Other general guidelines for your inclusion plan are as follows:

- Create policies and procedures for recruiting and retaining new diverse talent.
- Schedule time each meeting for your outreach advisory board or inclusion rep to give an update on current initiatives.
- Allow interested staff members to volunteer to lead these initiatives. Don't place DEI duties on staff from marginalized communities unless all parties agree to participation.
- Take active steps to continually ensure the office is free of unprofessional language and conduct.
- Institute a recognition/reward system to help promote DEI awareness and activities.

Continuously placing focus on inclusion is not always an easy process. It will take time and effort, but it's a significant component of any community and should be woven into the fabric of the daily operations in your organization. Please review "Additional Resources" for more information.

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[5] From the article, "Harvard Business Review: Global Teams that Work.""

Additional Resources

- Cisco's Purpose Report- December 2022
- Growing Rural America Sustainability Report - CoBank Site - CoBank.
- Diversity and Inclusion | CoBank - CoBank Site - CoBank.
- Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index 2020
  Harvard Business Review, "The Big Idea: Before You Make That Big Decision⋯"
- Women in the Workplace, 2019 (first link is the summary and second link is the study itself): https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2019
  and https://wiw-report.s3.amazonaws.com/Women_in_the_Workplace_2019.pdf
- Bullying at Work: 5 Strategies to Fight Back: https://www.jodymichael.com/blog/bullying-at-work-4-ways-to-fight-back/
  Race Matters, eradicating racism in the corporate world webinars:
  https://infokf.kornferry.com/race-matters.html
- How HR can support a culture of Neurodivergent Inclusion https://www.hibob.com/guides/neurodiversity-inclusion-hr/
- New Report from CHCI Sheds Light on the State of Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: https://dei360.org/state-of-dei-report/

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