

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Policies: Frequently Asked Questions



Forward:

This article was created by the RCPA Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee for to answer frequently asked questions regarding DEI policy development and refinement and to guide interested parties to related resources. This resource is intended as a springboard for further research.

What does “DEI” mean? Getting on the same page with definitions.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are terms that are frequently interchanged but have quite different meanings. Having consistent working definitions is beneficial to an organization’s DEI process.

Diversity is the presence of difference or variability in any given setting or group. It only exists in relation to other things; an item (or person) is not diverse. Regarding workplace DEI initiatives, diversity refers to characteristics of identity in a population. Examples may include (but are not limited to) race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation. Organizations increase their diversity by employing or serving individuals with variability in these characteristics.

Equity acknowledges that not every individual starts from the same place and therefore, is not afforded the same opportunities. An equitable approach addresses those differences and remedies the disparity. Organizations improve their equity by employing policies and practices that address the disparities in opportunity to ensure access for all.

Inclusion is the degree that individuals with different identities feel that they are valued and welcomed within a given group or setting. Inclusion refers to the experience of an individual within a group. It is possible for an organization or group to be diverse but not inclusive. Organizations improve their inclusiveness by creating an atmosphere where individuals with differences are welcomed, celebrated, and asked to participate in meaningful ways.

For further explanation of these concepts:

[General Assembly – What’s the Difference Between Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity?](#)

[Culture Amp – How to Define Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Work](#)

What is the legal basis for DEI Policy?

The legal basis for DEI policy and initiatives is primarily found in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1967. This law prohibits discrimination on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment. It is a remedial statute in that it seeks to remedy the historical exclusion of groups from the workplace. In June 2020, the United States Supreme Court expanded this interpretation to include sexual orientation and gender identity as additional protected classes.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits employment discrimination of any individual based on disability and mandates that employers provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. Additionally, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) prohibits discrimination against employees 40 years of age or older.

DEI policy and initiatives mirror the goal of Title VII, to remedy the historical exclusion of individuals from the workplace. DEI policies promote organizational diversity and expand representation without excluding any groups. It is recommended that an organization consult with their legal counsel prior to adopting and implementing a DEI policy.

[Title VII of Civil Rights Act](#)
[Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
[Age Discrimination in Employment Act](#)

Is a DEI Policy the same as EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) or AA (Affirmative Action) initiatives? How does it fit in within the legal framework?

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is a federal agency that enforces non-discrimination and employment laws. Employers are legally required to give equal consideration to all candidates both in hiring and in the terms and conditions of employment. Employers have a legal obligation to not discriminate against employees on the basis of race, color, religion, age, marital status, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity of expression.

Affirmative action policies focus on increasing opportunities for groups of people, like women and minorities, who have been historically excluded or under-represented. Affirmative action plans are also legal requirements for certain federal contractors and subcontractors to take affirmative action to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity for employment, without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity of expression, national origin, disability or status as a Vietnam era or special disabled veteran.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies and initiatives frequently use EEO/AA principles as a base and expand upon these legal requirements. An organization's DEI initiatives are voluntary and developed by the organization. It is recommended that an organization consult with their legal counsel prior to implementing a DEI policy to confirm compliance with all legal guidelines.

[Information on Affirmative Action](#)
[Information on Equal Employment](#)

Where do I/we get started building a DEI policy?

The very first step is to develop a basic understanding of the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion and the differences between them. It is essential to identify one or several leaders or champions for this project starting with the CEO, board, and executive leadership. Identify a DEI team (with the full support of leadership) to complete an organizational assessment and recommend policy and initiative targets. It may be helpful to review policy examples, identify compatible business objectives, and articulate benefits of a DEI policy.

[Achieve Diversity Step By Step Guide](#)
[Together Forward at Work – Conversation Starters](#)
[Organizational Culture Inventory](#)

How do I get buy in from stakeholders and leaders?

While increasing diversity in an organization is often driven by social justice principles, it is also, simply put, good for business. There is a growing body of evidence that supports improved organizational performance with a diverse workforce. McKinsey & Company describe how companies with greater ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to outperform industry averages making the case for the financial benefits of increased diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. [Read full article.](#)

Additional organizational benefits include recognition and positive PR through public initiatives and easier recruitment for talent as a diverse and inclusive organization is attractive to new hires. Diverse employee backgrounds and varied perspectives also increases organizational agility, a valuable trait in today's marketplace. High inclusivity in an organization promotes employee retention which decreases

organizational costs associated with recruitment, hiring, and onboarding incurred with employee turnover. Inclusivity also promotes the free sharing of ideas which drives innovation and creativity.

Data speaks volumes to decision makers. [McKinsey & Company completed a broad statistical analysis](#) of the importance of diversity on various aspects relative to profitability and performance.

Additional Resources:

[Why Diversity Matters](#)

[Scientific American – How Diversity Makes Us Smarter](#)

[Better Decisions Through Diversity](#)

[How Diversity Can Drive Innovation](#)

[Diversity and Inclusion Statistics](#)

[Statistics that will Convince you to Prioritize Diversity and Inclusion](#)

Who should participate on the DEI team/committee and in the development of a DEI policy?

When developing a DEI policy, there is no right or wrong answer as to who should be involved in the process, but care should be taken to ensure that participation is agency wide. It is essential that each participant's opinion and input are valued and weighed equally regardless of organizational role.

DEI policy development and implementation should include participation from employees selected from a variety of levels within the organization such as the organization's CEO, Board of Directors, directors, managers, direct line employees, and volunteers. It is recommended that a Diversity Committee be formed from those representatives to keep the work on track.

It is also recommended that formal sessions, assessments, and surveys be conducted with *all* employees of the organization to solicit thoughts, feedback, experiences, and a wide viewpoint on issues.

What should a DEI policy include?

The specific elements of a DEI policy will differ between organizations based upon their values, priorities, and personal organizational assessment. It is important that an organization live out their diversity, inclusion, and equity plan and values. The policy and plan should only include goals and action items that the organization intends to uphold and accomplish.

While the specific elements of a DEI policy will differ by organization, some common elements in a robust policy include:

- An overarching organizational statement on cultural equity. This may be similar to the organization's mission statement but focused on inclusion.
- An explanation of what diversity, inclusion, and equity mean in the context of your organization. Be sure to differentiate the meanings of these terms as they are not the same. (see section: *What does "DEI" mean? Getting on the same page with definitions.*)
- Goals related to diversity that your organization wants to achieve. DEI goals should be code for organizational leaders and accountability. Goals should be specific and targeted and expand beyond hiring practices or "diversity quotas."
- After establishing DEI goals, specific initiatives should be developed to help achieve these goals. These initiatives become the organization's DEI action plan. This action plan should include specific directives that describe how to accomplish the high-level goals. This section should address specifics on how the organization will pursue necessary system changes such as what language to be used in job descriptions or where/how positions or services are advertised. These initiatives should include a time frame for completion, metrics for evaluation, and a point person for responsibility.

- Commitment to create a diversity and inclusion network within your organization and community. This may include selecting diverse partners, vendors, etc.
- Outline any diversity related programming or education your organization currently has in place or plans to implement.

Additional Resources and Examples:

[Brighter Strategies – DEI Framework](#)

[DIY DEI Toolkit](#)

[DOD Diversity Plan](#)

How do we align DEI initiatives with organizational goals, values, and business plan?

The first step is to clearly identify, understand, and describe the organizational goals, values, and business plan. Next, the DEI team should explore and explicitly state ways in which DEI initiatives overlap with the already stated values and goals.

Every organization already has a direction and a focus. It may be helpful to select DEI targets and initiatives that align and directly support the established goals of the organization.

Examples:

[Americans for the Arts Statement on Cultural Equity](#)

[Bloomerang Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Policy Template](#)

How do we select meaningful metrics/measurements for DEI?

The greatest consideration when selecting meaningful metrics is that they must be able to show progress towards the established initiatives and organizational goals. This data can then be used to identify high risk areas, prioritize initiatives, set achievable targets and program goals, assign responsibility, and measure the impact of the implemented change.

Each organization must determine the most appropriate metrics to adopt based upon their own assessment, business strategies, and priorities.

Metrics should be selected for three different purposes:

- (1) Diagnosis – Identify bias blind spots, identify risk areas, and prioritize initiatives for the organization.
- (2) Track Progress – Assess if the organization is heading in the right direction towards goal achievement.
- (3) Measure Return on Investment – Track how successful initiatives are in achieving DEI goals, and how that has impacted programmatic and financial goals; e.g., numbers of persons served and staff productivity.

Additional Resources:

[Measuring Employee Experience](#) – DEI Questions to Use

[Culture Amp Blog](#)

[Implementing Inclusive Policies](#)

Should I use the data I have?

A good place to start is to assess the data you already have access to – what you are already collecting. Look broadly throughout your organization. Relevant data may already be collected by multiple departments (e.g., service provision, human resources, fiscal/finance, fundraising/public relations) and need to be centralized. However, existing data is unlikely to provide *all* the data needed to effectively measure DEI goal and initiative progress.

How do I use the data I have?

The data currently being collected may meet the needs for each department individually, but it is probably not sufficient to make a good assessment of where things stand organizationally.

Look for ways to add depth to the available data rather than duplicating the collection of the same items. Comparing data with past performance, community demographics, or industry peers may give more meaning to the information available.

How do I expand/drill down into my data without starting over?

To start, identify a specific Diversity/Equity/Inclusion goal or initiative. Next, determine what information is needed to make an accurate and meaningful assessment of where the organization or individual department currently stands in relation to that specific goal. Begin by looking at what data you already have, and then determine what information is missing that would provide a more complete picture.

For example, an organization may already collect global data on the ethnicity of persons being served, but the data may not be specific enough to truly assess if it is reaching all persons of that ethnicity. By adding additional layers of information collected such as age bracket, sex, or gender identity, a clearer picture will emerge regarding the population served. Disparities may emerge within the global data set when filtered for additional qualifiers. Organizations can then use that information to inform future goal and target settings.

[Sample Diversity Survey Questions](#)

How do we measure the return on investment?

Calculating the Return on Investment (ROI) for an initiative is very business specific. It is generally recommended to target something measurable such as: cost per hire, cost to retain, and turnover costs. Individual performance metrics can be used but aggregate numbers are more representative.

When projecting ROI as a DEI initiative, an organization should calculate the cost of the current state, the cost of the future state (post initiative), and the cost to change. The challenge to this approach is that some of those “costs” may not be tangible or easily obtained.

Related Articles:

[How to Measure ROI of Diversity Programs](#)

[Diversity Best Practices – The ROI of Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[How to think about the ROI of Inclusion](#)

What do I do with the data (metrics) that I collect?

Collecting data without using it is not helpful. The data collected should be used as a part of a constant feedback loop with the organizational leadership, the DEI team, and all other stakeholders. Transparency is important, even if the initial data isn't great.

The following steps should be included in your DEI plan:

- i. Establish baseline measures – This is needed to identify issues/targets and to be able to track results.
- ii. Set targets – Targets help individuals to focus their efforts.
- iii. Assign responsibility and establish accountability – Accountability ensures that initiatives do not get lost.
- iv. Track and analyze results – Establish by whom and how often to determine what is working and what is not.
- v. Report results and outline new initiatives – Seeing improvement motivates further change.

- vi. Review metrics regularly – Change and adjust as needed when situations and initiatives change.

For more information:

[Setting and Achieving Diversity Targets](#)

How do I/we know when we are done?

Creating a workplace that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive is an active, never-ending process. Once a DEI policy and plan is in place, processes should be created to track, measure, and evaluate progress in targeted areas at regular intervals. It is an ongoing process to adjust initiatives and/or identify new targets for improvement based on the data collected. It is expected that an organization's DEI needs will shift and change over time.

It is also important to regularly assess the culture and inclusivity of your organization. Changes in personnel, organization growth, structure changes, and community demographic trends are all examples of factors that can alter the culture of an organization in a short period of time.

For more information:

[Design an Employee Diversity and Inclusion Survey](#)

Additional Resources:

[SHRM members may access offers additional DEI Policy related resources](#)

[Harvard Business Review – Board Diversity](#)

[Harvard Business Review – Inclusive Language Policies](#)

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