

How To Start a Diversity and Inclusion Committee At Work

Power to Fly



A diversity and inclusion committee is an important tool that can aid and accelerate the impact of your Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging initiatives at work. Companies know that diverse teams perform better. That's why 83% of U.S. companies say they have implemented DEIB initiatives in their organization. Yet 62% of surveyed workers feel their company's DEIB work is not effective.

A diversity and inclusion committee could be the critical missing component. This committee is a group of employees tasked with the oversight and leadership of DEIB within the organization. The creation of this diversity and inclusion committee is a major way to hold your organization accountable for its inclusion goals. With such a committee in place, companies bridge the gap between their DEIB intentions and their employees' everyday experiences. Here's how to do it.

First steps to start a diversity committee

To get started building a diversity and inclusion committee, you don't need your committee charter written just yet. But, you will need a concept of the committee's structure and function in order to recruit members and get them going in the right direction.

A diversity and inclusion committee is composed of employees from different backgrounds, identities, and roles within the company. The committee has a clearly defined structure and purpose which includes goals, roles, and responsibilities. Here are the key steps to starting a diversity and inclusion committee using that structure:

1. Identify resources.

What resources can you offer this committee? What is the budget? What room or facilities can they use to meet? Which department's budget will cover their supplies, printing, and other material needs? Who signs off on those resources?

2. Define membership.

When actively searching for members, consider employees:

- From all levels of the company
- With various backgrounds and identities
- From different departments or functions
- With passion for their community or DEIB in general

Ideally, committee members represent a mix of skills, interests, expertise, authority, and backgrounds.

Participation is voluntary. Participation is also compensated and recognized in some way, whether that's through salary or through advancement and promotion opportunities.

Determine the length of the membership period. Build-in capacity and sustainability with a process for replacing members and leadership at regular intervals.

3. Recruit.

Recruit for the committee by proactively approaching certain staff members as well as advertising to all:

- Post open notices in common areas, such as the kitchen and bathrooms.
- Encourage nomination by peers or managers.
- Advertise in staff meetings.
- Identify leaders within communities and groups.

4. Provide a foundation.

Members need a strong foundation on which to begin their DEIB work. Provide committee members with:

- DEIB definitions and language
- DEIB training

5. Outline the structure, authority, and reporting.

Where the committee lives and the extent to which it has decision-making power will significantly determine the committee's effectiveness. Consider these questions to determine the committee's structure and authority:

- Does this committee live within a department?
- Does it sit above specific departments (e.g. an executive committee)?
- Does the committee need to seek approval prior to implementing policies or decisions? If so, from whom?
- How does the committee make internal decisions? By voting?

- How is the committee structured internally? Is there a chair? Is that person appointed or elected?
- How is the work of the committee reported to leadership or company-wide? How often?

Roles and responsibilities

Now that members have been recruited and the structure is in place, it's time to determine the diversity and inclusion committee roles and responsibilities. A diversity and inclusion committee is responsible for:

- Researching the current state of DEIB in your company. The committee needs current data about your company's demographics, salary structure, and more. They may gather this data through existing HR databases, LMS, or by conducting employee surveys. This information can be sensitive. Ensure that members understand and conform to data privacy as they collect and analyze employee information.
- Developing proactive strategies to prevent or eliminate discrimination. These strategies can be based on best practices, but also focus on the needs and experiences of your employees.
- Developing policy and supporting revisions. The committee develops specific directions for policy implementation. When the policy is geared towards compliance with labor law (e.g. Americans with Disabilities Act), ensure the committee has the proper legal or professional support.
- Implementing educational programs. The committee organizes and manages a consistent calendar DEIB training that addresses a variety of topics.
- Connecting DEIB to the bottom line. All DEIB activities developed and implemented by the committee connect to broader organization mission, values, and business strategy.
- Reviewing the effectiveness of DEIB programming and policy. The committee is also responsible for regular review, analysis, and reporting of DEIB programs.

Diversity and inclusion committee goals

Task the diversity and inclusion committee with a mission statement. This task can be two-fold: a mission statement for the committee itself, but also a diversity statement for the company.

With the broader mission in mind, the committee develops specific DEIB goals with actionable steps for their achievement. These goals are also time-based and measurable. What these goals look like will vary from organization to organization. Some examples of DEIB goals include:

- 100% pay equity
- Increasing representation of women in leadership
- Increasing representation of specific underrepresented groups
- Reducing absenteeism
- Improving employee engagement
- Increasing employee retention
- Increasing diversity of job candidates
- Increased perceptions of safety, inclusion, and belonging

Applying a specific percentage or other quantifiable amount to these goals is critical. That will require a baseline measurement prior to implementing DEIB initiatives.

Give diversity and inclusion committees authority

Diversity and inclusion committees are a powerful way to breathe life into your DEIB initiatives. This cross-functional group of employees has the organizational knowledge to make big goals into reality. To be successful, a diversity and inclusion committee needs structure, but most of all, it needs authority. Allow these committees to have real decision-making power and a budget to draw upon. This way they'll not only get things done, but give the members a tangible sense of making a difference. Search through our resources for employers to learn more.