

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion defined

By Betty Ruoss

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) isn't a thing we do, it's how we do all things. DEI refers to efforts an organization or institution take to create a more welcoming, equitable environment. This enables people of different backgrounds to succeed and for diverse perspectives to be heard through valuing individual differences, fostering cultures that minimize bias, and address systemic inequities.

DEI efforts can be reflected in an organization's mission, vision, and values, incorporated into strategic plans; and cascaded throughout the organization. Nonprofits, foundations and companies are openly talking about and practicing the use of DEI within their organizations.

Diversity - When we speak of diversity, we are talking about all the ways we are different..... the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is about all the things that make us who we are.... our identities. Some are physical and some are different. This may be race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, education, language, marital status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or a diversity in thought, such as ideas or perspectives.

People are now beginning to see beyond the differences. Diversity in organizations matter. Many places now value the benefits that a diverse workforce can bring. Different groups of people bring different viewpoints to discussions and resolution of issues. This variation of attitudes and ideas can provide valuable input to brainstorming sessions and issues requiring creative solutions. Diversity helps to strive for activity and profit and gives organizations a competitive advantage. There is fair and equal selection of promotion practices. Companies have a larger pool of candidates to select to promote, which leads to diversity throughout the whole organization. Furthermore, organizations with diverse leadership are more likely to understand the needs of a diverse client base.

Equity - Equity means that it is fair and that it is successful for everyone.....fairness for all regardless of visible and invisible identities. You cannot have diversity and inclusion without thinking about equity.

Inclusion - Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. When people aren't included it's noticed. People are left out and not able to participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. One example of inclusion is removing barriers that restrict disabled people; making sure passageways for wheelchairs are wide enough and kept clear to make sure that people with a physical disability can move easily around the building. When inclusion is part of the culture, we tend not to notice differences.

It is believed that an organization that prioritizes diversity, equity and inclusion creates an environment that respects and values individual difference along varying dimensions. In addition, inclusive organizations foster cultures that minimize bias and recognize and address systemic inequities, which, if unaddressed, can create disadvantage for certain individuals.

Remember, you don't get the "D" without the "E" without the "I" to make DEI work for all.

Inspire hope, empower people, and strengthen communities.