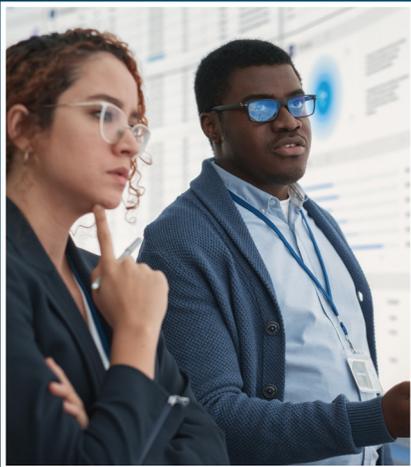


# A Plan for MSPs and Other Tech Businesses





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## Introduction

The DEI&B (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) Interest Group is thrilled to publish this comprehensive DEI&B guidebook. This resource has been meticulously crafted to support managed service providers (MSPs) and IT professionals in their journey towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

In today's rapidly evolving industry, it is imperative that we not only acknowledge the importance of DEI&B but also actively implement strategies that promote these values. This guidebook serves as a practical workbook, offering actionable insights and ideas that can be seamlessly integrated into your daily operations. Whether you are just beginning to explore DEI&B initiatives or looking to enhance your existing efforts, this guidebook provides a wealth of information to help you navigate this crucial aspect of organizational development.

The workbook is designed to be user-friendly and adaptable, catering to the unique needs of each organization. It includes a variety of exercises, case studies, and best practices that highlight successful DEI&B initiatives within the tech industry. By engaging with this material, you will gain a deeper understanding of how to create a more inclusive environment that not only attracts diverse talent but also fosters a sense of belonging for all employees.

We believe that diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords but essential components of a thriving workplace. We are committed to supporting our partners in their DEI&B efforts and are confident that this guidebook will serve as a valuable tool in your journey towards building a more inclusive and equitable industry.

Thank you for your dedication to this important cause. Together, we can create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive future for the IT community.

—DEI&B Interest Group members



## The State of Diversity in Tech

The business case for diversity is undeniable. As technology continues to interconnect our societies, our workplaces must mirror these changing environments. A diverse and inclusive workplace offers more creativity and innovation, plus empowers employees with the freedom to bring their best and authentic selves to the workplace. A company that is serious about its future success cannot ignore the financial and competitive benefits

inclusivity brings. In addition to the financial and competitive benefits, organizations of all sizes have an increasingly diverse clientele. Having a diverse workforce helps employers reach all potential revenue sources.

### **THE BENEFIT OF DEI&B: BY THE NUMBERS**

- 1. Financial Performance:** Companies with diverse executive boards have a 95% higher return on equity than those with homogeneous boards. (*McKinsey & Company, "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters"*)



- 2. Innovation and Creativity:** Diverse teams are 45% more likely to report growth in market share and 70% more likely to capture a new market. (*Boston Consulting Group, "How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation"*)
- 3. Employee Engagement:** Inclusive companies have 2.3 times higher cash flow per employee over a three-year period. (*Deloitte, "The diversity and inclusion revolution: Eight powerful truths"*)
- 4. Talent Attraction and Retention:** Organizations with inclusive cultures are six times more likely to be innovative and agile.  
  
67% of job seekers say a diverse workforce is important when considering job offers. (*Josh Bersin, "Why Diversity and Inclusion Has Become a Business Priority"*)
- 5. Decision-Making:** Diverse teams make better decisions up to 87% of the time compared to individual decision-makers. (*Glassdoor, "50 HR and Recruiting Statistics for 2020"*)
- 6. Customer Insight and Satisfaction:** Diverse companies are 70% more likely to capture new markets, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. (*Cloverpop, "Hacking Diversity with Inclusive Decision Making"*)

- 7. Productivity:** Companies with inclusive practices see a 21% increase in productivity. (*Center for Talent Innovation, "Innovation, Diversity, and Market Growth"*)
- 8. Brand Reputation:** 78% of people believe that companies have a responsibility to address social justice issues, which positively impacts brand reputation. (*Forbes, "The Benefits of Creating a Diverse Workforce"*)
- 9. Problem-Solving:** Teams with diverse members are 20% more likely to overcome a challenging task. (*Edelman, "Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Brand Trust in 2020"*)
- 10. Risk Management:** Companies with diverse boards have a 43% lower risk of bankruptcy. (*Harvard Business Review, "How Diversity Can Drive Innovation"*)

These statistics underscore the comprehensive advantages that DEI strategies bring to organizations, enhancing their financial health, market positioning, employee engagement, and overall operational effectiveness.





“I mask my social struggles so my autistic traits are not as clear which I find extremely tiring. I often wonder how many interviews I have been denied because I have declared my diversity”

—Tech industry employee



## PLANNING FOR DIVERSITY

The following section is intended to provide support and resources for inclusive workforce planning and diversity recruitment strategies. Workforce planning requires knowledge of current industry demographics as well as internal staffing needs and potential candidate pools, particularly on a regional level. While broad workforce recruitment can be done nationally, truly successful diverse recruitment and retention plans require small to mid-sized technology solution providers examine their hiring practices

and make every effort to source new talent that is reflective of the communities they serve and in which they reside.

If senior management and/or human resources is unsure of where to start, pull the census info for your geographical region (accessible via [The U.S. Census Bureau](#)). This will provide statistical parameters for diversity inclusion goals as well as help to identify opportunities for growth.

Additional components worth assessing at the outset include:



### **Taking a detailed look at staff demographics.**

- Does a particular department have a more homogeneous culture in regard to race, ethnicity, gender, age, veteran or disability status?
- For example, you may find one area has a much higher percentage of employees approaching eligibility for retirement than others.
- By clarifying where current (or projected) diversity deficits exist, the company can better strategize for ongoing recruitment.

### **Reviewing minimum skill requirements and emerging trends of interest.**

- Both are appropriate benchmarks to establish in regard to identifying a beneficial knowledge base for incoming employees.
- Avoid assuming that one staff loss equals one replacement.
- Be willing to ask the question, “What different skill sets are needed for the future?” (Particularly in regard to company-wide, long-term goals).

### **Engaging lower management in workforce planning.**

- Entry-level supervisors often know exactly what skills and diversity their teams currently lack and the characteristics which are likely to add value to the group.
- While it is still nearly impossible to take workforce planning to an individual level (except during the start-up phase), valuable information can still be gained related to managers’ needs if they are involved in the process.



### **Anticipating the company-wide impact improving inclusion.**

- Evaluate if certain departments already have fewer employees and could use additional assistance. Should their staffing needs take priority on a fundamental level?
- Assess the frequency of highly skilled and knowledgeable employees of diverse backgrounds being offered promotions, transfers and/or other opportunities for advancement.
- Develop flexible workplace plans that can accommodate unforeseen changes.
- Many factors can impact diversity recruitment and retention, including fluctuating economic conditions, legislative changes or world events.
- Create low, median and high projections for recruitment and retention as baseline measures of success.



# Getting Started Checklist

## ANALYZE

- Identify current staff demographics
- Identify leaders that buy-in is needed from
- Identify who will be involved in the DEI&B initiative and what role they will play
- Gain an understanding of behavior and culture change
  - Identify and record key metrics related to objectives to measure the success of the program periodically
  - Things to measure: business impact, revenue profit, job satisfaction, retention, etc.
- Identify the frequency of evaluation of these metrics

- Review minimum skill requirements and emerging trends or interest
- Identify your target population for recruiting talent
  - Determine if you want to make recruitment a regional, national, international, or multi-regional effort
    - Research regional demographics (if limiting only to regional recruitment)
- Determine barriers and challenges
- Anticipate the company-wide impact of improving DEI&B

## DESIGN A PLAN

- Identify need/purpose for your DEI&B program/efforts
- Define program objectives
- Engage lower management in workforce planning\*
- Develop a plan to gain leadership buy-in

“As someone with a longer, non-Western name, I have often been asked to shorten it or change it to make it ‘easier’ for people to pronounce. I am proud of my name, it’s meaning, and my heritage.”

—Tech industry employee

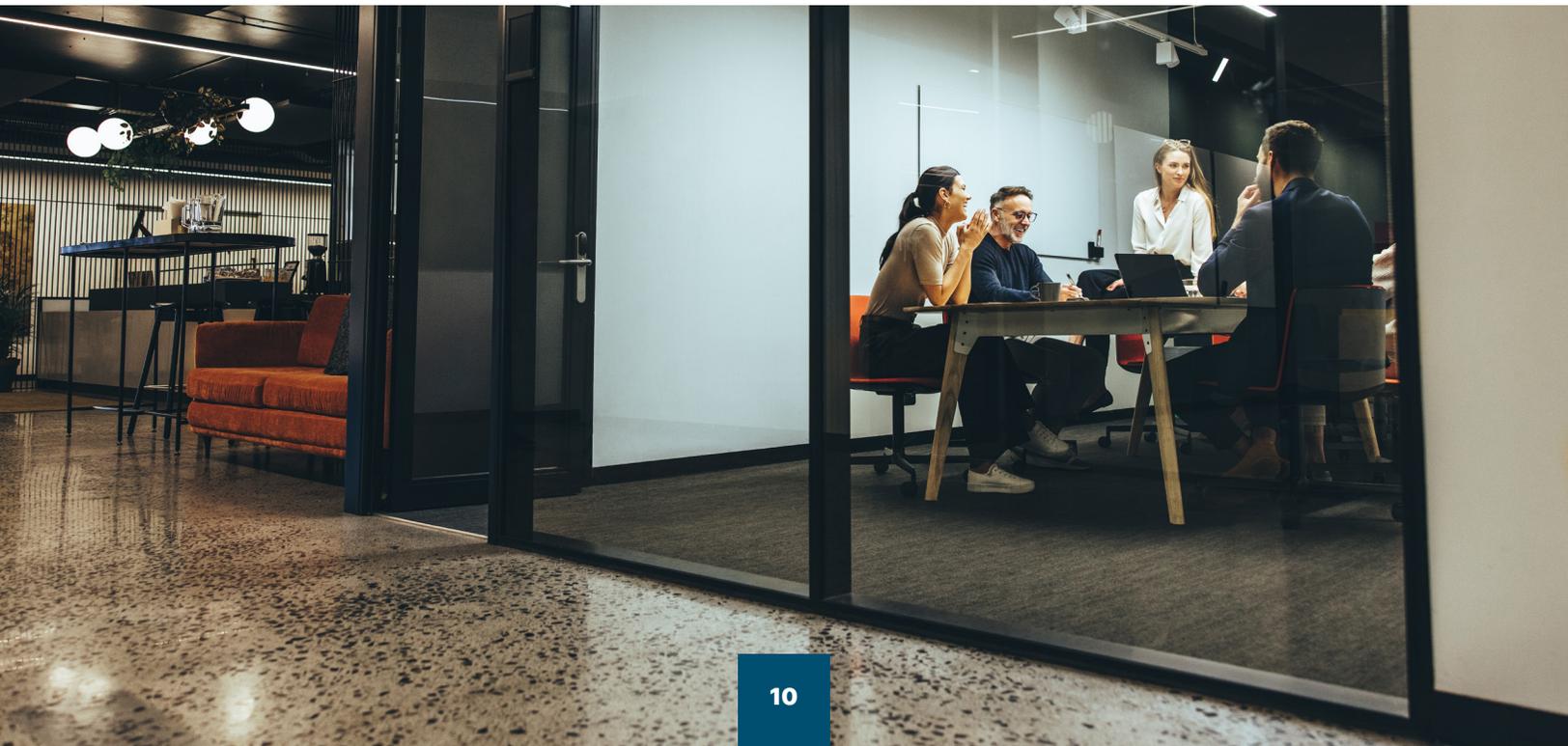


## GAIN LEADERSHIP BUY-IN

- Explain what DEI&B is (if necessary) and its importance to organizations
- Tie your initial program objectives to business performance, (improvement), values, mission
  - Explain how “the best person for the job” + “a diverse person” can improve organizational performance
  - Use proven business cases from reputable sources
- Explain how the program will be implemented, ran, and maintained
- Explain how leadership support will have a positive impact on the employees, program, and business
- Collaborate with leadership to identify their concerns and expected outcomes of the program
- Create and finalize clear program objectives based on your initial objectives and those that leadership have identified

## DEVELOP (PEOPLE, MATERIAL, ETC.)

- Develop a flexible workplace plan that can accommodate unforeseen changes\*
- Work with the necessary people to develop any material needed for the program
  - **Training team**
    - To develop training materials for new and existing employees and leadership
  - **HR**
    - To develop DEI&B job descriptions
    - To develop DEI&B onboarding materials
  - **Marketing team**
    - To develop marketing materials about DEI&B initiatives, changes, and opportunities
    - To garner local community and online support and presence





## RECRUIT & IMPLEMENT

- Acquire talent
  - Prioritize
  - Follow Up
  - Deploy Meeting
  - Give
  - Create
  - Solicit
  - Ask regularly
- Develop talent
- Foster change/develop growth mindset

## EVALUATE & UPDATE

- Measure and compare key metrics data to prior metric data to determine impact, what needs improvement, and what is working
- Develop retention plan
  - Produce onboarding guides based on different hiring authority needs.
  - Provide online hiring resources for new managers (email templates, short video clips, etc.).
  - Create professional development plans for all employees (5–10 year projection).
  - Acquire interns who self-identify as the demographic in which diversity growth is needed.
  - Offer staff opportunities to be trained specifically in recruitment and/or data analysis.
  - Ensure visual materials (brochures, websites, social media posts) reflect workplace diversity.
  - Make a company-wide database to log previously screened and qualified resumes.

### *Educational Resources*

[www.projectimplicit.net](http://www.projectimplicit.net)

[equity.ucla.edu/know/implicit-bias/](http://equity.ucla.edu/know/implicit-bias/)

[www.getimpactly.com/post/implicit-bias-in-the-workplace](http://www.getimpactly.com/post/implicit-bias-in-the-workplace)

[www.pryor.com/?s=DEI](http://www.pryor.com/?s=DEI)





## What's an Employee Resource Group and Why Do We Need One?

Employee resource groups (ERGs) support an organization's inclusion and diversity goals and objectives as determined by organizational leadership and exist to benefit and advance their own group members by working strategically internally and externally. ERGs are entirely employee-led communities that allow employees to express themselves freely and drive organizational change. They are open communities that support and empower underrepresented groups and educate and inspire allies to drive equality. ERGs can drive customer engagement, transform culture and spark innovation.

Aligning ERGs with business imperatives and priorities show how an employee community can add value to an organization as well as develop its functions and brand. Also, ERGs give people the chance to develop their careers by learning new skills, presenting in front of leaders, managing budgets, leading strategies, and helping address business issues.

“I try really hard to use more inclusive pronouns—hi all, you all, everyone, etc. It costs me nothing at all, but I hope makes others feel more welcome.”

—Tech industry employee

## ERGs are good for business but can also:

- Play an important role in supporting an organization's business initiatives.
- Act as a sounding board around strategic diversity objectives within the organization, in support of a more inclusive work environment.
- Be a collective voice around shared issues or concerns that help to promote an inclusive, respectful workplace, by uncovering issues that are specific to the needs of a diversity community within the organization.
- Provide opportunities for employee development, education, and training, recruitment, retention, and business outreach and development.
- Support innovation by providing insights on new markets, product development and multicultural marketing, while enhancing the company reputation in the marketplace.

## ERG Benefits to Employees

ERGs are not social groups or clubs. The focus is to accomplish business-related goals, not social goals, and has frequent interaction with leadership locally, regionally or organizationally. In addition, ERGs provide employees with opportunities for:

- Development
- Mentoring
- Networking
- Showcasing their skills and becoming known within the organization
- Positively impacting the business through business development and the opportunity to channel their voices to advocate for change



## Steps to Establishing an Employee Resource Group

1. Prepare a brief statement of what you want the ERG to represent and accomplish. This is not the same as your mission statement. The purpose of this document is to use it as part of an ERG application form should your organizational structure mandate an approval process.
2. Develop an ERG application form. Work together with human resources or business owner to get the document approved. The application form may include:
  - ERG name
  - Purpose
  - Alignment with organizational goals
  - Alignment with diversity goals
  - Name of ERG champion (This should be a senior leader)
  - Resources needed, i.e., meeting space, funding
3. Define the ERG's purpose, goals and objectives
4. Establish a list of at least six employees interested in joining the ERG and identify targeted members from various functions, levels and locations.
5. Prepare an introductory message, including the brief statement of what you expect the group to represent and accomplish. Send this message via an email blast to potential members.

6. Maximize participation and support by spreading the ERG message via other internal communication methods, i.e., intranet, staff meetings, etc.
7. Coordinate your first meeting with the individual responsible for heading up DEI&B efforts.

The first one to two meetings should focus on developing the group's mission and charter demonstrating:

- ERG alignment of its mission with the organization's business goals
  - ERG alignment of its mission, goals and objectives with the organization's DEI&B plan
8. Establish ERG operating principles and structure, i.e., number of annual meetings, roles, responsibilities.





## Building & Attaining Talent

### **BUILDING A TALENT ADVANTAGE**

Company culture is formed by the beliefs and values of its leaders that guide the actions and behaviors of all team members. While the culture isn't something that staff can see, they know what it feels like. Do they feel that their contributions are valued? Do they think they can be their authentic selves? Do they believe that they are treated fairly? What are they getting besides a paycheck?

A good company environment brings employees through the door, keeps them there, and drives business results. Understanding how culture plays a significant role in optimizing talent can be the difference between a thriving organization and one just getting by. Leaders that create a climate that inspires curiosity and provides intellectually stimulating challenges and opportunities for growth have a competitive advantage.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING TALENT**

- Hire people who fit the culture you want, then manage it to be the culture you're creating.
- Allow employees to pursue entrepreneurial projects within the organization and cultivate interests outside of their current role.
- Make mentorship a part of the ecosystem.
- Invest in ongoing training.
- Let employees know they are valued.

### **ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS**

- Is leadership fully invested in diversity and inclusion strategies?
- Is your organization having honest conversations about race in the workplace?
- Does a recruitment philosophy exist?
- What is your employee value proposition?
- Is there an existing infrastructure for supporting, training and promoting new hires?

“I would love to be able to help educate others in a compassionate way, to enable their understanding, but I fear the reaction of the small percentage, or I often hear people say, ‘I would know if I saw a transgender person’ which makes me laugh.”

—Tech industry employee



## STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A DIVERSE PIPELINE OF CANDIDATES

According to a CompTIA survey of more than 200 SMBs, slightly more than three-quarters report their organization has tried at least one strategy to help build a diverse candidate pipeline (77%).

Leveraging network for referrals	47%
Attending job/career fairs catering to a diverse population	37%
Recruiting from colleges/universities with diverse populations	36%
Removing biased language from job descriptions	32%
Creating a brand strategy to attract talent	32%
Placing job ads in publications catering to a diverse demographic	30%
Partnering with boot camps or community programs that teach technical skills	19%

**Source:** [CompTIA Diversity in the High-Tech Industry report](#)

## DIVERSE WORKFORCE – TALENT ACQUISITION AND RETENTION CHECKLISTS

A shortage of technology professionals is an ongoing concern on an international level and the average employee retention period is approximately three years. Companies need to be invested in closing this gap with diversity and inclusion. Senior management should be committed to seeking diversity in terms of skills, experience and cultural backgrounds—plus they need to ensure this mindset is communicated



throughout the organization. Senior management therefore sets the tone for prioritizing diversity in every aspect for the talent leadership team. This will also help increase retention rates by creating opportunities to address individual and collective differences among the staff as these initiatives are launched and expanded beyond recruitment into onboarding, professional development, leadership training, performance evaluation, and workforce planning.

## ACQUISITION CHECKLIST

A three-year outline for drafting recruitment efforts aimed at obtaining quality, diverse talent should involve:

- Prioritize buy-in from senior management. This must happen before any lasting change can occur. Organizing office meetings or retreats to explore what's working and not working with current DEI&B efforts. Asking questions like 'what does America look like today?' and "How is or isn't our company reflective", can be a good place to begin.
- Follow up with internal diversity training for current employees. Eventually transition these into monthly strategy sessions ("power hours"). These may taper off to quarterly conference calls or brief in-person meetings after the initial six months or one year.

- Deploy meeting transcripts or written recaps of key talking points to all meeting attendees and leadership team members within 24–48 hours of each session.
- Give practical prompts intended to generate concrete connections—and solutions—to real-life workplace scenarios. (Examples: name an effective DEI&B protocol in your department. Describe a challenge you are now facing in recruiting local talent.)
- Create a system of support to track how newly acquired staff is adapting to the workplace culture.
- Solicit industry and legal experts to facilitate ongoing DEI&B training modules such as the company's attorney or an HR hiring specialist. These professionals can frankly address interview and hiring dos and don'ts beyond best practices by also clarifying what is required—and prohibited—by state and federal laws in regard to interview questions, reference checks and more.

"I wish as a non-white person I could see more people of my heritage at the same level as myself or more encouragement in STEM."

—Tech industry employee

- Ask regularly, "How are we sourcing new hires at all levels?" DEI&B needs to be a priority at each employment tier. Also keep in mind that potential clients' first impressions are formed by whom they encounter on your front line. Company guests should see people like themselves on the other side of the desk. It helps build trust and confidence.



## RETENTION CHECKLIST

About 18 months into initiating improved DEI&B strategies, evaluating how new staff is acclimating to workplace culture becomes an equally important component to focus on. It can be one of the most accurate indicators of whether or not leadership and hiring teams are accomplishing what they set out to do (based on internal feedback from staff and turnover statistics). Organizations that retain high levels of diverse talent typically do the following:

- Produce onboarding guides based on different hiring authority needs.
- Provide online hiring resources for new managers (email templates, short video clips, etc.). Create professional development plans for all employees (5-10 year projection).
- Acquire interns who self-identify as the demographic in which diversity growth is needed. Offer staff opportunities to be trained specifically in recruitment and/or data analysis.
- Ensure visual materials (brochures, websites, social media posts) reflect workplace diversity.
- Make a company-wide database to log previously screened and qualified resumes.

Your company should also create ways for your personnel to connect with each other through affinity or employee resource groups by providing networking, mentoring and social settings. Such groups increase employee engagement by demonstrating to individuals that people like themselves are not only finding success within the enterprise but are willing to help them succeed as well.

## Ongoing DEI&B Strategies

### PRIORITIZING EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Companies do well when employees are feeling their best. Focusing on employee wellness has become a staple in many organizations as a way to attract top talent, keep staff happy and productive, and decrease turnover.

Workplace wellness means something very different now than in previous years. Financial issues, sleep deprivation, self-confidence, mental and physical health concerns have amplified. Companies are under greater pressure relating to corporate social responsibility, culture, and their role in society—and many are discovering the potential of leveraging benefits as a tool to help address social inequality within the workforce.

Employee wellness should be considered a business imperative. Leaders are thinking deeply about the profound connection between employees' health and work—and, ultimately, performance. Designing well-being into work at the individual, team and organizational levels is the path to build a sustainable future where employees feel and perform their best.



## WORKPLACE WELLNESS STRATEGIES

Follow these recommended strategies to prioritize wellness in the workplace:

- Establish a culture committee where employees can freely discuss stress related to the job or workload without fear of reprimand.
- Set realistic expectations as to when remote workers are meant to be checking and responding to emails—and when they're not. Clarify what time zone(s) are included in a typical workday.
- Provide tools for submitting anonymous employee feedback.
- Train leaders to spot when employees are struggling before tense situations escalate and dissatisfaction among your team proliferates.
- Encourage staff to advocate for their own wellbeing by being honest about personal conditions and circumstances which may be affecting when and in what capacity they are able to work from home.

“Something that often happens to me is people touching me in a way they would not touch a man. I have to even say that it bothers me.”

—Tech industry employee

## PROMOTING DEI&B STRATEGIES INTO YOUR EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

### The Importance of Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Team Meetings

Promoting diversity and inclusion in team meetings is crucial for fostering an environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute. Inclusive meetings leverage diverse perspectives, which can lead to more innovative solutions, better decision-making, and increased team engagement. When team members see that their unique backgrounds and viewpoints are acknowledged and appreciated, it enhances their sense of belonging and commitment to the organization's goals. Ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate helps to break down barriers, reduce biases, and create a more equitable workplace.

### Effective Strategies for Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Team Meetings

- **Set Clear Ground Rules:** Establish and communicate ground rules that encourage respect, open-mindedness, and equal participation.
- **Rotate Meeting Roles:** Rotate roles such as facilitator, note-taker, and timekeeper to give everyone a chance to contribute in different ways.
- **Encourage Diverse Perspectives:** Actively seek and encourage input from all team members, especially those who may be less vocal.



- **Use Inclusive Language:** Be mindful of using language that is inclusive and respectful of all team members.
- **Create a Safe Space:** Foster an environment where team members feel safe to share their thoughts and experiences without fear of judgment.
- **Be Mindful of Meeting Times:** Schedule meetings at times that are convenient for all team members, considering different time zones and personal commitments.
- **Provide Various Ways to Contribute:** Offer multiple channels for input, such as verbal contributions, written comments, or anonymous feedback.
- **Highlight and Celebrate Diversity:** Recognize and celebrate the diverse backgrounds and contributions of team members.

- **Address Unconscious Bias:** Conduct training sessions on unconscious bias to raise awareness and mitigate its impact in meetings.
- **Solicit Feedback:** Regularly solicit feedback on the inclusivity of meetings and be open to making improvements based on that feedback.

## PUBLISHED DEI&B EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

### The Benefits of Building and Publishing a DEI&B Events Calendar

Creating and publishing a calendar of DEI&B events and activities is highly beneficial for an organization. It demonstrates a committed and proactive approach to fostering an inclusive culture, allowing all employees to feel recognized and valued. A well-structured DEI&B calendar helps to raise awareness and educate employees on diverse perspectives and experiences,





contributing to a more informed and empathetic workforce. By scheduling regular DEI&B events, organizations can encourage continuous learning, celebrate diverse backgrounds, and promote meaningful dialogue around inclusion. Moreover, a DEI&B calendar provides clear communication and transparency about the organization's commitment to diversity, making it easier for employees to participate in and support these initiatives.

## Various DEI&B Calendar Events

- **Cultural Heritage Celebrations:** Black History Month, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Native American Heritage Month
- **International Days of Observance:** International Women's Day, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, World Refugee Day
- **Awareness Weeks/Months:** Pride Month, Mental Health Awareness Week, Disability Employment Awareness Month, National Coming Out Day
- **Educational Workshops/Seminars:** Unconscious bias training, cultural competency workshops, allyship seminars, inclusive leadership training
- **Discussion Panels/Roundtables:** Panels on gender equality, racial justice, LGBTQ+ issues, accessibility in the workplace
- **Community Engagement Activities:** Volunteer days, community service projects, charity drives supporting diverse communities
- **Employee Resource Group (ERG) Events:** ERG meetings, networking events, mentorship programs, social gatherings

- **Recognition and Awards Ceremonies:** Celebrating DEI&B champions, recognizing inclusive practices, awarding diversity scholarships or grants
- **Cultural Exchange Programs:** Language exchange sessions, cultural cuisine days, international holiday celebrations
- **Interactive Activities:** Diversity trivia nights, film screenings with discussions, storytelling sessions highlighting diverse experiences

## ENHANCING DEI&B THROUGH A STRATEGIC MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

### The Role of Mentorship Programs in Strengthening DEI&B Strategies

Developing a mentorship program is a powerful way to bolster an organization's DEI&B strategy. Mentorship provides employees from diverse backgrounds with the support, guidance, and opportunities they need to thrive and advance within the organization. By pairing mentors and mentees across different demographics, departments, and levels of experience, organizations can foster cross-cultural understanding and break down silos. This not only aids in personal and professional development but also ensures that diverse perspectives are heard and valued. A well-structured mentorship program can address equity gaps, promote inclusive leadership, and cultivate a sense of belonging among all employees, ultimately driving the organization towards a more inclusive and equitable workplace.



## ENSURING EQUITABLE POLICIES

As we look forward to the future of work, culture change is probably the most challenging part of this transformation as new behaviors from leaders and employees tend to oppose previous norms. As a business grows in response to technological advances and client demands, the environment must continuously adapt to meet employee needs and societal expectations.

Significant shifts tend to come through social movement and dissatisfaction with the status quo. While company culture lives in the collective hearts and everyday behaviors of its workforce, the change occurs only when people take action.

To effectively address racism in the workplace, it's important to gain consensus on whether there is a problem. More than likely, there is, as systems and processes were designed for and by the individuals who most benefit from them. Many white people reject the reality of racism against people of color assuming that racism is defined by deliberate actions motivated by malice and hatred. Yet, racism can occur without conscious awareness or intent. When defined simply as differential evaluation or treatment based solely on race, regardless of intent, racism occurs far more frequently than most white people suspect.

The root causes of racism in an organization can be based on many factors such as cognitive biases, temperament, worldview ideals,

psychological insecurity, perceived intimidation, or a need for power or ego boost. However, most racism derives from structural factors that include institutional practices and cultural norms. While these causes do not involve malicious intent, organizations can misattribute workplace discrimination to the character and actions of an individual, the “bad apple” rather than to broader structural factors.

“When we expose ourselves to other points of view, other cultures, and people who don’t look and think like us, we open ourselves up to innovation.”

—Kris Blackmon, AvePoint

Creating an equitable workplace for all means that leaders are willing to do significant (and likely uncomfortable) introspection on organizational culture, practices and processes. While most believe that their company does a pretty good job, it's always a good idea to do a little digging by asking employees their thoughts on policies i.e., promotion

criteria and whether they've ever felt passed over due to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc. Review the senior leadership team. Is it homogenous?

If so, why? Once there's an understanding of the underlying conditions, you can focus on correction. Consider the following recommendations:

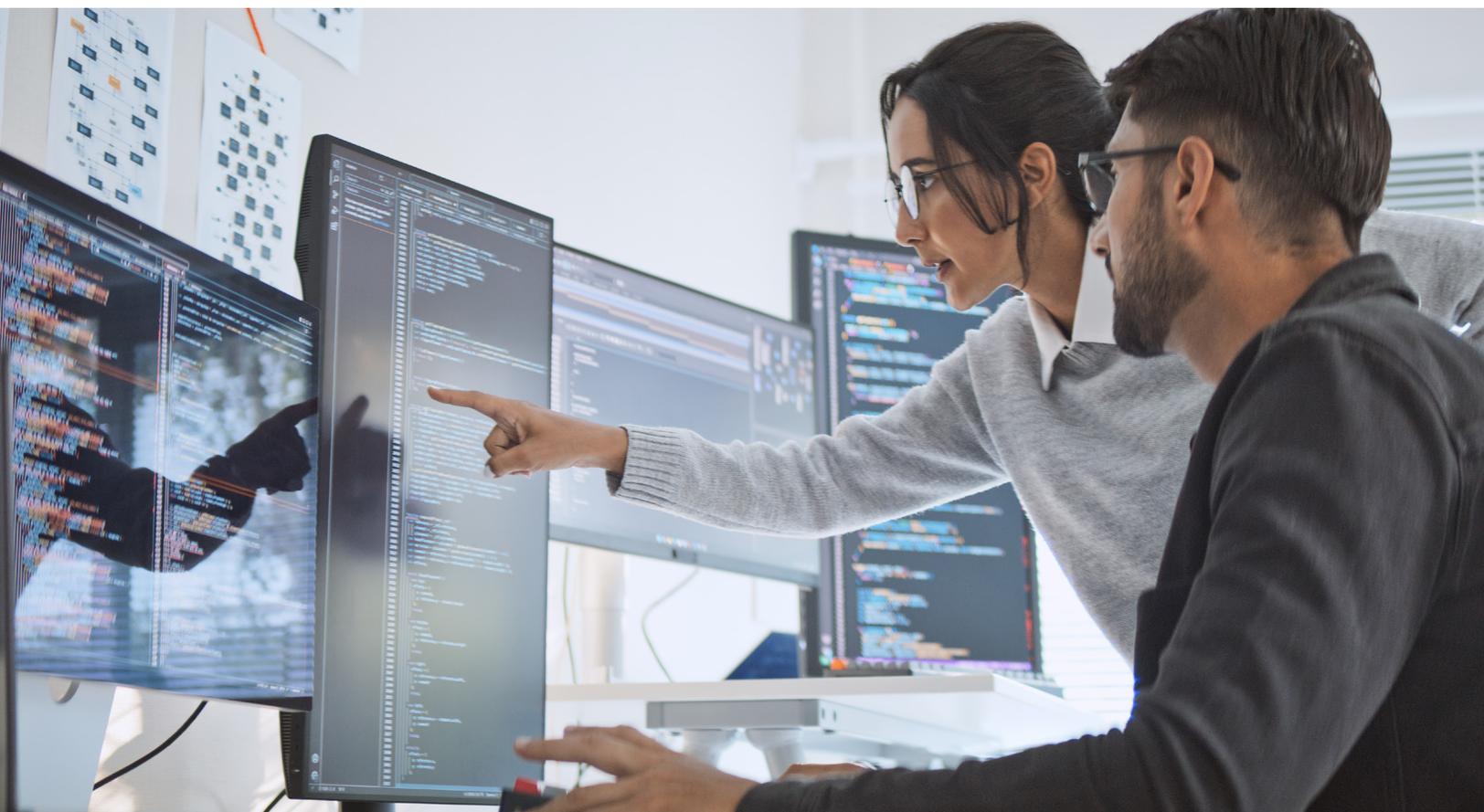
- Inquire and track whether marginalized employees feel they have voice within the company.
- Start by listening. Authentic, candid conversations are needed. That's something that can always be done, no matter what size an organization is.



- Train managers and C-level executives on mitigating biases and microaggressions, and how behaviors manifest with people of color in the workplace.
- Establish trust as an ally or advocate.
- Realize employees may be skeptical at first. (Example: Are professed changes or revised brand priorities simply a marketing ploy?)
- Assess if advancement opportunities for marginalized staff are actually being provided.
- Commit to conscious communication and intentional evolution based on new perspectives and ideas.
- Look beyond management by surveying staff to gain a more comprehensive view of employees' thoughts and feelings. (The resulting data may indicate areas that need immediate attention, new initiatives and/or other positive action.)

To measure progress toward your goals, consider:

- Implementing intentional mentorship and sponsorship programs specifically to help advance people of color into management or executive-level positions.
- Real change should be observable via demographical shifts in how companies are organized within a few years. A distinct change would be reflected in a higher number of people of color and other marginalized identities in management (by accounting for an increased percentage of high-level roles within a company rather than entry-level positions in the past).
- Diverse staff turnover will also be lower due to higher employee retention.





## PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE

Conversations about race and racism can be uncomfortable, but they're necessary for an equitable and inclusive workplace. The onus is not on employees of color to make people feel comfortable or provide the context to have a conversation about race.

Effective discussions require empathy, openness, and a safe psychological space for all.

Despite best efforts and good intentions, this may lead to discomfort as many employees are afraid to say the wrong thing or are fearful of being misunderstood or triggering a heated debate. The message you send by having the conversation outweighs the consequence of ignoring the feelings of traumatized employees. This is uncharted territory for most organizations, leaving them ill-equipped and unprepared to facilitate such conversations. It's important to know when to hire an expert.

Use these tips from tech industry experts to pinpoint the deep-rooted barriers keeping your organization from achieving true equity. Preparing now will better position you for success, rather than waiting for the next traumatic event.

## COMBATING RACIAL INEQUITIES

To combat racial inequities at work, Cal Jackson, executive director of corporate partnerships division at Courageous Conversation suggests the following:

### **Tips to Ensure Racial Equity in the Workplace**

Leverage cultural competence education modules

Understand the difference between equity and equality—and what they should look like within your organization

Implement equity as a core company value

Develop a brand toolkit for addressing and discussing racial equity

Do not burden or overwhelm marginalized employees

Don't expect or require "diversity" employees to educate fellow employees

Get an outsider's perspective to analyze DEI&B equity in your organization

Ensure that staff and facilitators can moderate equity discussions

Workplace discrimination can exist with well-educated, well-intentioned, open-minded, and thoughtful people who are oblivious to cultural norms and who severely underestimate the pull of the prevailing current on their actions, positions, and outcomes. Anti-racism means going against that prevailing current. It requires much more effort, courage, and determination than simply going with the flow.

Progress comes with consistent and sustained effort over time.

## CLOSING

Developing and implementing a DEI&B strategy is crucial for organizations of all sizes. Such a strategy fosters a workplace environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and included, which can significantly enhance employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity. DEI&B initiatives drive innovation by bringing diverse perspectives to the table, leading to better decision-making and problem-solving. Additionally, companies that prioritize DEI&B are more attractive to top talent and can better serve diverse customer bases.

However, creating a robust DEI&B strategy is a long-term commitment that requires sustained effort and continuous improvement. It involves setting clear goals, implementing policies and practices, and regularly evaluating progress. This ongoing process ensures that DEI&B principles are deeply embedded in the organization's culture and operations, adapting to new challenges and opportunities over time. By committing to this journey, organizations not only enhance their internal culture but also contribute to broader social equity and inclusion.