



## **How Can We Create A Diverse And Inclusive Work Environment?**

Diversity and inclusion. These two words are often discussed but not always well-executed within a company. Policies are created, but managers are unsure how to effectively enforce those policies. Seminars are hosted to educate a workforce that lacks diversity. Employees may be respectful of coworkers of different identities but apprehensive to work with a coworker with a mental health condition.

According to research, employees who experienced feelings of inclusion in the workplace were associated with a positive workplace culture and increased employee engagement. The effort a company dedicates to executing meaningful diversity and inclusion policies and practices affects the company's culture, employees' confidence, and opportunities available to employees at all levels of a company. But what does it mean to create a diverse and inclusive workplace?

Creating a diverse and inclusive workplace where employees of all identities feel valued and represented is fostered through one or more of the following ways:

**Build a diverse workforce.** Weaving diverse populations into the fabric of an organization should be the first item on the agenda. The company's Board of Directors, executive leadership, and overall workforce should reflect a rich and diverse community representing identities including, but not limited to, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and those who identify as living with a mental health condition or substance use disorder.

The Board of Directors and executive leadership are the stakeholders and agents responsible for high-level decision-making for a company. Different voices should be represented without becoming the sole holder of that diversity perspective. To build a diverse Board of Directors, develop or review your company's diversity goals and recruit new members of the Board with those goals in mind. Collaborate with partners who increase the company's network of diversity and open up a larger pool of candidates for the Board. To build a diverse workforce, allow managers a longer timeline during the recruitment and hiring process to create a more diverse pool and find a qualified candidate who helps your company reach your diversity goals. Managers should be educated about potential biases and provided with clear guidance about how to interview candidates for their strengths and differences.

**Create an inclusive workplace culture.** Employees who feel represented and welcomed during the hiring process will be excited to join the company. But how can an employer retain and ensure new employees enjoy coming to work each day? In addition to recruiting new employees, employers should consider how to create a welcoming, inclusive, and psychologically safe workplace culture.

Look at what already likely exists in your company: the business model. Depending on the industry and region, the business model is often written in a way that appeals to diverse markets. Do you sell products that are sold internationally? Does the demographics of your clientele or customer base reflect that of the company's workforce? Think about how the plans described in the business plan can apply to your own workforce and contribute to your company's diversity goals.



Understand the makeup of your workforce and strategize how to celebrate and embrace a diverse and inclusive workplace with your employees' needs in mind. For example, while efforts made by employees all deserve recognition, highlighting the contributions made by women or people of color over the course of a company's history to celebrate awareness months or wearing a symbolic color in solidarity for a cause can contribute to a more inclusive culture.

**Have a voice as a company.** The employer should not only create an environment where all can feel welcome but actively denounces and condemns acts, ideologies, and policies that support or condone institutional systems of oppression. For example, are managers trained about how to speak to staff who are insensitive about mental illness, race, or gender? For marginalized communities, it's not enough for a space to be open and inclusive, but it is also important to actively denounce racism, sexism, xenophobia, anti-LGBTQ bias, and other systems of oppression and those who support those systems. By being accepting of all, an employer is also being accepting of these ideologies. Therefore, an employer is not creating a truly inclusive space but bringing marginalized individuals into another dangerous space by accepting all, including their oppressors.