Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services

Building a Diverse & Inclusive Workforce

Set Two- Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction- Recruiting and retaining a culturally and linguistically competent workforce

Careful planning in terms of research, message creation, content delivery, timing, location, media mix and understanding your target markets will help you to generate the desired response from top-notch candidates from underrepresented backgrounds such as minorities, women, LGBTQs, people with disabilities and veterans. Below are some time-tested tactics that really work.

Assess The Effectiveness of Process Already in Place. Before you develop a diversity recruitment marketing campaign, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the processes already in place.

Conduct an Analysis of Current Advertisements Used. Conduct an analysis of current advertisements used to target underrepresented groups and the media outlets used. Determine which are most effective using both figures about response rates and actual hires. Those media outlets that have been shown to produce the best results should be reviewed to determine what aspects of their editorial content, marketing or distribution are leading to your success. Take the information obtained from this evaluation to help you in the creation of more effective future targeted marketing and use of media outlets that are more successful at reaching the underrepresented talent you are targeting.

Identify What Differentiates Diverse Job Seeker Career Decision Making. To effectively position your organization to appeal to potential candidates from underrepresented backgrounds, you must come to understand what employment issues are important to these market segments and why. Standard motivations will appeal to most candidates like salary, benefits, bonuses, etc. But there may be other issues that are important which are not as evident to recruiting staff that are unfamiliar with diverse communities.

Deliver a Consistent Message. Use the organization attributes identified through your planning to create the recruitment messages that will be used to reach your target audiences. It is important to integrate the consistency of your display advertising with online banners, brochures, posters, career fair display materials and other diversity recruitment promotional tools used by your organization.

Align Campaign with Organizational Goals. Your diversity recruitment initiative will work best if it takes its direction from the overall goals of your organization. So it is a good idea to take your cues from the mission and how the organization defines its business.

Use Competitive Benchmarking. You should also use competitive benchmarking to develop or improve your diversity recruitment initiative. This can be done by studying the diversity recruitment initiatives of similar organizations that are recognized as leaders in diverse and inclusive practices.

Market Segmentation is Important. Market segmentation is an important part of diversity recruitment marketing. By breaking down a large heterogeneous market into small, more homogeneous segments, and developing separate marketing programs to meet each segment's particular needs, a better match between what a company offers and what the market desires can be created.

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Monitor Audience Response. Monitor audience response to your recruitment to make adjustments that maximize your impact. Evaluate the results by determining changes in responses rates with the previous period and the percentage of those changes.

Measure Results. One of the biggest causes of failures of diversity initiatives is neglecting to measure the results of your efforts. Accurate measurement can help you to determine which efforts are yielding the highest number of quality candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. Metrics can also help you set, as well as justify your budget.

Recognize Barriers to Success

There are a number of barriers that can impede a successful recruitment and retention effort to target diverse employees. Failure to plan ahead, garner support of leadership, provide management training, and ensure a sustained focus on the effort are all issues that can be barriers to full realization of your goals. But, there are also behavioral and attitudinal issues that can pose even bigger challenges. Research is showing us that unconscious or hidden bias is a significant barrier to the hindrance to the development of culturally competent and diverse workforce. Because these barriers can be difficult to identify, not addressed under existing discrimination policies, and harder to change, they require special attention to ensure success. Unconscious bias influences the hundreds of big and small decisions we make every day. Our bias can influence where we choose to post recruitment notices, what kinds of questions we ask in interviews, how we compare two qualified candidates, how we interpret candidate responses, along with many other recruitment and retention related activities. ***What is important to understand is that unconscious bias is not a concept that just "applies to "them", but rather applies to all of us.***

The problem is that bias is a naturally occurring phenomenon in all of us. Biologically we are hard-wired to prefer people who look like us, sound like us and share our interests[i]

The bottom line? We make assumptions and determinations about what is real every moment of every day. We sort out those 11 million pieces of information a day, we see what we see, and we believe that what we see is real. Only occasionally do we realize how subjective those determinations are, and how much they are impacted not by what is in front of us, but by what we interpret is in front of us, seen through our own lens on the world.[ii]

"Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? "

People with "white-sounding" names were 50% more likely to get a response to their resume than those with "black-sounding" names. (2003-US).

Recommendation letter study

- Letters for women differed from those for males
- Letters for women were "shorter, less assuring, raised more doubts, and portrayed women as students and teachers while portraying men as researchers and professionals." (Trix and Psenka 2002).

These decisions are not made by "bad" people with bad attitudes, but rather by people unaware of the unconscious process that they use to make decisions about people.

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Ways to Combat Hidden Bias

- Recognize that we all biased and becoming aware of our own biases will help us mitigate them in the workplace.
- Reframe the conversation to focus on fair treatment and respect, and away from discrimination and "protected classes".
- Review every aspect of the employment life cycle for hidden bias – screening resumes, interviews, onboarding, assignment process, mentoring programs, performance evaluation, identifying high performers, promotion and termination.
- Ensure that anonymous employee surveys are conducted to understand what specific issues of hidden bias and unfairness might exist at your workplace.
- Offer customized training based upon survey results that includes examples of hidden bias, forms of unfairness that are hurtful and demotivating, and positive methods to discuss these issues.
- Offer an anonymous, third-party complaint channel such as an ombudsperson; since most of the behaviors that employees perceive as unfair are not covered by current laws – e.g. bullying, very subtle bias – existing formal complaint channels simply don't work.
- Initiate a resume study to see whether resumes with roughly equivalent education and experience are weighted equally, when the names are obviously gender or race or culturally distinct.
- Distribute stories and pictures widely that portray stereotype-busting images – posters, newsletters, reports, speaker series, podcasts. Many studies show that the mere positive image of specific groups of people can combat our hidden bias.
- Identify, support and collaborate with effective programs that increase diversity in the pipeline.

Don't forget to explore what you mean by "a good cultural fit"

- People who conform to the organizational culture?
- People we feel comfortable with?
- People whose behavior is similar to ours?
- People who look like us?
- People who have the same values?

Could it be that "Cultural Fit" means "just like me?"

Recruiting for Cultural Competence

Many times we put unnecessary barriers in place for recruiting qualified candidates. It is important to step back and think about how this process enhances or inhibits your ability to find the right candidate. Below are some questions you can as yourself to review your process.

Think about…

- What do your job descriptions say? (Do they REALLY reflect what you want without limiting your pool?)
- Where are you looking? (Are you only looking in one or two places?)
- Who recruits for you? (Do they have a large and diverse network?)
- Who gives you referrals? (It is the same groups all the time?

The same issue often occurs during the selection and interview process. We often fail to reflect on this process and how it impacts our selection.

Ask yourself…

How are resumes screened?
Who/how many conduct(s) the interview?
How is the evaluation done?
How is debriefing done?
How are questions determined?
How do you determine language skills?

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Cultural Competence in Retention

Many employers feel that success comes once employees of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are hired. They feel they can sit back and relax and consider that they have accomplished the goal of diversity. This can't be further from the truth. There is a link between a supportive and inclusive organizational culture and all workforce retention. This same is true for employees from diverse communities. Because they are often in high demand and may have a variety of employment options, skilled staff from diverse communities may decide to leave if they encounter an organization and a workforce that is closed off, inflexible, and unreceptive to new ideas and new ways of operating. Here are some tips to support workforce retention as a whole.

- ***Walk the walk!*** Having diversity and inclusion policies is not the same as practicing these concepts in day to day operations. Be sure that your organization takes these policies seriously and demonstrates their commitment on a regular basis.
- ***Develop diversity-friendly programs and support initiatives***. Don't spend all your energy just on recruitment. Use some of those resources to create programs and initiatives that support new employees integrate and bolster long term retention. Solutions such as mentorship programs, ongoing cultural competence and language access training, and special multicultural support initiatives will help target and enhance the job satisfaction and loyalty of your established employees.
- ***Tap diverse candidates for leadership training and development***. Diverse and skilled talent often decides to leave an organization because of a perceived lack of advancement opportunities. You can counter this trend by establishing leadership training and development initiatives that focus specifically on these employees, singling out and cultivating your most talented assets.
- ***Open Door Attitudes***. Studies have shown that diverse employees often feel like their opinions are overlooked in the workplace. Over time, this kind of frustration can grow more acute, eventually contributing to the decision to seek employment elsewhere. You can increase by establishing a liberal open-door policy and making it clear that their opinions and ideas are always highly valued.

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