Including Disability in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Priorities: Building A Maturity Model

Introduction

According to an article in the Harvard Business Review, although more than 90% of companies surveyed report having stated diversity priorities, very few include disability in their diversity efforts. Similarly, although many research-based workplace practices focus on strategies to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), they often fail to include disability as an important part of these efforts. As a result, organizations often lack the information they need to make sure their DEI policies and programs include people with disabilities.

To be truly inclusive, organizations need to include people with disabilities in DEI efforts. The information in this brief marries new research on current DEI practices with recognized disability best practices. The goal is to help employers and diversity and inclusion professionals integrate research-based practices and measures aimed at disability inclusion and representation into their DEI efforts. This tool can also assist organizations in assessing their current practices against a research-based framework.

About the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies Research

Researchers at the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS) at Cornell University’s ILR School, an EARN Inclusion@Work Leadership Council member, worked with diversity, equity and inclusion leaders across 32 companies to understand current DEI practices. They also identified strategies that can help organizations integrate, sustain and measure those practices.

CAHRS' data analysis resulted in a framework of strategies utilized in a DEI "maturity model":

- **Emerging**
  (focused on initial strategy and infrastructure)

- **Advancing**
  (focused on execution and engagement)

- **Leading**
  (focused on integration and sustainability)
The Framework

CAHRS researchers examined general DEI practices to create this framework. Organizations may need more information to effectively integrate practices aimed at disability inclusion and representation, and to self-assess the maturity and effectiveness of disability-focused practices.

The adapted framework below includes the general practices CAHRS research identified, and suggests strategies for companies to align disability inclusion initiatives with existing DEI practices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Emerging: Developing strategy and foundational elements</th>
<th>Advancing: Executing clearly defined strategies and engaging employees</th>
<th>Leading: Integrating DEI across all business processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENERAL</strong></td>
<td>• Build out a clear DEI strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use data to identify gaps</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Develop DEI goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Infrastructure</strong></td>
<td>• <strong>Identify goals</strong> for disability inclusion</td>
<td>• <strong>Generate buy-in</strong> for disability inclusion initiatives across all business functions and units</td>
<td>• Identify and communicate the <strong>business case</strong> for disability inclusion across all functions/units</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Include disability-related items on employee engagement survey to understand employee experience</td>
<td>• Embed disability inclusion resources within internal policies and procedures</td>
<td>• Include DEI personnel in leadership roles with specific expertise in disability employment best practices</td>
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<td>• Participate in awareness raising activities such as National Disability Employment Awareness Month</td>
<td>• Use relevant employee resource groups to inform and advise disability-related decision making</td>
<td>• Identify a champion with a disability to lead and inform disability efforts</td>
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</table>
## INCLUDING DISABILITY IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION PRIORITIES

### Topic

| Emerging: Developing strategy and foundational elements |
| Advancing: Executing clearly defined strategies and engaging employees |
| Leading: Integrating DEI across all business processes |

### Diversity

#### GENERAL
- Develop employer brand
- Increase underrepresented minority representation
- Establish gender parity
- Focus on retention
- Establish leadership pipelines for diverse employees
- Deepen DEI integration into talent processes
- Measure and track progress against diversity goals across the enterprise
- Seek ways to expand the definition of diversity to include more stakeholders

#### DISABILITY-FOCUSED
- Consider disability representation in external facing communication (i.e., websites, career pages)
- Explore the intersectionality of disability, race/ethnicity and gender in the workforce
- Establish partnerships with state vocational rehabilitation agencies and community-based organizations serving job seekers with disabilities
- Develop and execute disability-focused hiring initiatives
- Use established metrics to evaluate the success of community partnerships
- Measure and track retention, advancement and professional development opportunities for employees with disabilities

### Inclusion

#### GENERAL
- Establish grievance procedures and compliance
- Conduct unconscious bias training
- Establish interventions needed to build a culture of inclusion
- Conduct microaggressions and allyship training
- Continue conversations about race and identity
- Hold conversations beyond race
- Conduct training focused on antiracism, systemic racism and building inclusive leadership habits
- Focus on intersectionality
- Expand inclusion initiatives worldwide

#### DISABILITY-FOCUSED
- Ensure all supervisors and managers understand the business imperative for disability inclusion
- Provide training on disability discrimination and attitudinal barrier awareness
- Support (and fully resource) disability employee affinity groups
- Connect affinity group mission with clear business objectives
- Scale up disability hiring initiatives in additional markets
- Hold events (virtual or in-person) to expand education and outreach efforts on disability in the workplace
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<td>Integration</td>
<td>GENERAL&lt;br&gt;• Tie DEI to company values and employee value proposition&lt;br&gt;• Ensure leaders have visibility, data and tools they need to drive DEI strategy&lt;br&gt;• Ensure DEI is embedded into HR practices</td>
<td>GENERAL&lt;br&gt;• Develop mechanisms for leadership accountability&lt;br&gt;• Develop methods to effectively measure progress against DEI goals</td>
<td>GENERAL&lt;br&gt;• Integrate DEI into every system and thought process&lt;br&gt;• Explore globalization of this work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISABILITY-FOCUSED&lt;br&gt;• Identify disability champions within executive leadership&lt;br&gt;• Include disability in all company values/EEO statements</td>
<td>DISABILITY-FOCUSED&lt;br&gt;• Create <a href="#">centralized accommodation</a> processes and funds&lt;br&gt;• Create explicit communications regarding disability inclusion and accommodation on company <a href="#">career pages</a></td>
<td>DISABILITY-FOCUSED&lt;br&gt;• Ensure physical and <a href="#">digital accessibility</a> of all systems, functions, processes and tools</td>
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<td>Accountability</td>
<td>GENERAL&lt;br&gt;• Develop mechanisms for leadership accountability&lt;br&gt;• Develop methods to effectively measure progress against DEI goals</td>
<td>DISABILITY-FOCUSED&lt;br&gt;• Include performance metrics on disability inclusion goals in evaluation processes of <a href="#">all people leaders</a></td>
<td>DISABILITY-FOCUSED&lt;br&gt;• Compare results to peers and research-based practices by participating in disability-focused benchmarking initiatives such as <a href="#">BenchmarkABILITY</a>, the <a href="#">Disability Equality Index</a> or the <a href="#">National Organization on Disability’s Employment Tracker</a></td>
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## Emerging: Developing strategy and foundational elements

### General
- View compensation from an equity lens
- Become a leader in fighting systemic racism
- Commit to an antiracist culture

### Disability-Focused
- Conduct pay equity analysis using disability status as a variable
- Join national consortia and disability inclusion leadership initiatives, such as Disability:IN or the National Industry Liaison Group

## Advancing: Executing clearly defined strategies and engaging employees

### General

## Leading: Integrating DEI across all business processes

### General

### Equity

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Adapted from: Puvar, D., Call, E. (June, 2021). The Evolution of DEI. Cornell University School of Industrial Labor Relations, Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies. [http://est05.esalestrack.com/eSalesTrack/Content/Content.ashx?file=bb0fbda-9669-455e-bca0-8f6581000223.pdf](http://est05.esalestrack.com/eSalesTrack/Content/Content.ashx?file=bb0fbda-9669-455e-bca0-8f6581000223.pdf)

Embedding efforts aimed at disability representation and inclusion into broader DEI practices can help amplify and improve the outcome of those efforts. Explore additional strategies for creating disability-inclusive workplace cultures while meeting your organization's diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) goals in EARN's Inclusion@Work Framework.

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