THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A SUCCESSFUL D & I INITIATIVE

A successful diversity and inclusion program requires clear focus, strong implementation of activities to meet delineated goals, and responsibility assigned to key players to effectively lead and engage in these activities. Whether your organization is looking to start a new D & I program or reenergize/resolve an existing one, the Alliance’s building blocks provide guidance for a successful initiative. By following each step in this path – ASSESS, ARTICULATE, ALIGN, and ACTIVATE – your organization can achieve a strong D & I program with specific objectives, focused activities, and measurable outcomes.

**ASSESS State:** The first critical step is to assess the current state of your organization’s D & I needs with respect to attracting, retaining, and advancing top talent. Organizations often look to see new programs and policies their peers are implementing, but you want to make sure those programs and policies meet the specific needs of your organization. To truly understand your organization’s unique D & I needs, start by analyzing various data points. For example, assess the demographic breakdown at each level of the organization to gain insights into any glass ceiling effects, review exit interviews to see if there is a disproportionate turnover rate with women and/or underrepresented demographic groups, analyze employee opinion surveys to see if there are any D & I issues raised, and review your organization’s check-in meetings with new hires to recognize challenges with recruiting top diverse talent. In addition, you should further investigate any red flags through focus groups and one-on-one interviews in order to gain essential first-person perspectives.

**ARTICULATE Purpose:** After getting a clear sense of your organization’s areas of focus, develop and communicate your D & I strategy. Highlight the unique business case for why D & I is necessary for your organization to move forward. Articulate your definition of diversity and inclusion so everyone understands why it’s important from a business perspective and what the organizational focus is with achieving these objectives. After you develop your strategy, put it in writing and communicate this message to the organization.

**ALIGN Activities:** After communicating the strategy and securing buy-in from leadership, you should delineate specific activities that your organization will engage in to meet the objectives of the initiative. These activities should address the D & I issues and challenges raised during the ASSESS stage. This way, leadership across practice groups, business units, and offices can work together to further the organization’s mission. In addition, you should ascertain the support needed for these activities to be successful and provide the necessary infrastructure. For example, if one of the activities involves sponsoring women in order to resolve the gender gap at the leadership level, then think through the resources needed for a successful sponsorship program. You may need to budget for hiring outside advisors and speakers, and you may need to put a coordinator in place to oversee the program.
ACTIVATE Accountability: Finally, make sure your leadership is accountable for effectively engaging in activities to advance D & I. In order for your program to have teeth, your leaders, managers, and supervisors need to be held responsible for participation and outcomes. First, your key players need to clearly understand what they’re expected to do and how they will be measured. Next, the organization will need to put processes in place to monitor results so leaders can be measured fairly. There are a number of ways to make sure your leaders feel ownership. For example, organizations can include participation in D & I activities in performance evaluations, make participation a factor in determining compensation, share success stories to motivate others to become engaged, and ask key players to report results and next steps to the executive team.

The Diversity & Flexibility Alliance is a think tank dedicated to creating work environments centered on inclusion and innovative thought leadership. We provide practical solutions that increase organizational effectiveness and create high performance cultures. We are dedicated to empowering organizations with the tools to solve their unique challenges and promote inclusive work cultures. To learn more how we can help your organization, please contact Manar Morales, President & CEO, at manar@dfalliance.com.