



Association for Accounting Marketing

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Toolkit



**Empowering
Change.
Driving
Growth.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS



01	AAM DEI Statement
02	About this Toolkit
03	Definitions
04	Marketing's Role
06	The Business Case for DEI
08	Establishing Your Firm's DEI Program Organizational Structure
10	Strategy - Mission, Goals, Tactics & Metrics
12	Establishing Subcommittees
14	Getting Help - Bringing in External Resources
16	Establishing Communication Protocols
19	Technology Tools
20	The Go / No-Go Guide
22	Final Thoughts
23	Resources

— AAM Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement

The Association for Accounting Marketing welcomes and celebrates all people. We honor each individual and what they bring to the table. As an organization, we are against all forms of racism and discrimination. AAM is a better organization for its members when we encourage input and membership from people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and opinions.

We continually strive to educate and recognize where we can be better and do more as an organization. We also understand that there is still work to be done in our association, accounting marketing and the accounting industry to address diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and unconscious bias.

AAM is committed to taking action in the following ways. We will:

- Listen, and hold a safe space for our members to create a dialogue about diversity, discrimination and equality in all its forms so that we can learn from each other and address issues in a collaborative way.
- Use our platforms to lift up voices of all backgrounds and provide ongoing education on DEI and unconscious bias in our industry.
- Seek out actions and implement initiatives to improve diversity within our organization and industry.
- Educate and promote accounting marketing and accounting as a profession to all audiences.
- Foster a community of acceptance and welcome people from different backgrounds, perspectives and ideas.
- Create content and educational opportunities that will help members not only do their own internal work around diversity but provide ways to continue to address DEI in their own firms.



About this TOOLKIT

Members from AAM came together as a result of the Board of Directors and DEI Steering Committee's goal of creating a toolkit for member firms to serve as a potential roadmap assisting firms as they begin the journey of a DEI initiative, focusing on the role of the marketer in the creation, and sustainability of a DEI initiative. The Subcommittee members represent firms of various sizes, across many geographies, is multi-generational and are from diverse communities. We view a DEI initiative as a journey. It is not a one-and-done activity or exercise. It is a journey that will evolve, and at times it may be painful. But ultimately, if done with foundational research, passion, authenticity and commitment, our collective efforts will be part of the way forward in our profession and the accounting industry.

We recommend that you start by reviewing the [AICPA's Private Companies Practice Section, Driving Diversity and Inclusion in Firms; Your Toolkit for Change](#). This toolkit includes many resources, including data regarding building the business case for DEI, internal survey template to assess your current state, DEI glossary, recruiting and retention templates, among others. We also recommend accessing the resources provided by the Society of Human Resources Management or [SHRM](#). Another resource that many firms have found invaluable are the tools associated with the [CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion](#), the largest CEO-driven commitment to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace across all industry sectors. To date, nearly 2,000 CEOs have executed the [pledge](#).

We hope you find the information in this toolkit helpful. Our association is committed to being a part of the change as individuals, accounting marketers and as representatives the public accounting industry.





DEFINITIONS

— Let's begin by defining diversity, equity and inclusion as provided by [Human Resources Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#):

"Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."

- Stephen R. Covey

Diversity

Diversity is the sum of social, cultural and identity-based human attributes represented within a group. Diversity encompasses a wide range of individual backgrounds, characteristics and experiences. Diversity is differences based on age, ethnicity, gender, religion, ability, national origin and sexual orientation, as well as learning styles, work styles, communication styles, work-life issues, speed of learning and comprehension, personality, socioeconomic status, length of service and expertise and job function.

Equity

Equity is access to opportunity and advancement for all members of a group. Equity is distinct from equality and fairness. Equitable environments address disparities and strive to eliminate unique and systemic barriers that have prevented the full participation of marginalized groups. Such environments are free from discrimination, harassment and bias. Equity cannot be achieved without the foundation of diversity and the actions of inclusion. The three are intimately linked and necessary for a full realization of the potential of any group and organization. Each is in relation to individuals, small and large groups, informal and formal collectives, organizations and institutions. The three are also in constant flux as society and the academy discover and learn from our history and our complex present. Definitions will continue to evolve while the motivation for a just and humane society will remain unchanged.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which all members of a group are welcomed, respected, supported and valued. Such actions involve intentional and ongoing engagement with the diversity in and across various social, cultural and intellectual groups. Inclusive environments increase productivity, awareness, knowledge and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within groups. Inclusion is distinct from belonging and strives for belonging. Belonging is the sense that you can bring your full and authentic self to a group.

MARKETING'S ROLE

Like many firm operational functions, marketing teams work closely with all groups across their firm. Frequently, this puts firm marketers in a unique position to connect others, educate and share knowledge with internal and external stakeholders. When your firm commits to living and advancing DEI principles, marketing will play a key role in fulfilling the firm's mission.

Marketers are stewards of the firm's brand. Everything from content, internal and external communications, thought leadership, employer branding, market interaction and more. It's imperative that firm marketers understand how to integrate DEI principles into their marketing strategies and plans.

Marketers have expertise and critical insights that are integral to the DEI conversation. If a firm's DEI effort is HR-led, the marketing function must be part of contributing to and developing the firm's integrated DEI strategy. Any exception to this will jeopardize the firm's success.

The Ultimate Question: What is the Role of Marketing?

1. **The Influencer.** Stay apprised of industry/market trends that inform and influence diversity and inclusion. Be the coach or seek a coach. Initial conversations may be difficult. Identify allies within your organization and aim to influence others.
2. **The Gatekeeper.** Be the critical eye of the organization. Ensure that authenticity is apparent. Is your message in harmony with your external message?
3. **The Writer.** The chief communicator understands that words matter and messages have meaning. Look for opportunities to redefine the messages that firms share, whether intentionally or not. Review for inclusive language and craft appropriate external and internal statements.
4. **The Distributor.** For those entering the DEI space, education, training and learning opportunities can be found from any number of sources. Empower others by distributing valuable content and learning.

5. **The Owner.** (see "given the go") There is an opportunity here to lead the assessment process, formalize budgets and influence the organizational process.

Here are some specific ways marketing leaders can advocate for DEI in their firms:

- Follow processes to support diversity and inclusion principles
- Advocate for inclusion in our groups
- Extend the reach of our content to diverse audiences
- Include diverse team members in the planning and implementation of marketing strategy
- Challenge your groups to field diverse panels of speakers
- Evaluate brand representation in advertising and design projects to ensure consideration of inclusive design
- Boost the signal of content created by new voices
- Connect team members with opportunities to represent the firm
- Plan inclusive events
- Support industry associations and events focused on diversity
- Identify outlets, sponsorships and industry/professional groups for connecting colleagues with opportunities
- Suggest diverse team members to participate in prospect meetings, proposals, planning meetings, initiatives, etc.
- Propose and support efforts to create more inclusive content
- Develop, and/or review and approve all communications, internal and external
- Develop, and/or review and approve all templates
- Use and encourage team members to use appropriate and inclusive language
- In larger departments, support other marketers in innovation, concept testing and implementation of diverse programming
- Share best practices and ideas to improve our approach to inclusive marketing
- Provide RFP, proposal template, website DEI content
- Orals preparation- coach engagement teams to help effectively communicate firm's DEI initiatives
- Support DEI subcommittees assisting with goals, tactics, communications and collateral

What if **MARKETING** is Left Out of Your Firm's DEI Initiative?

— In an initiative where inclusion is the focus, it is ironic that some departments may be excluded from the team. If marketing is not represented at your firm, here are some suggested strategies to get a seat at the table.

1. Ask the team leader to be included and suggest some possible options for your Role. In the section What is the role of Marketing, on page 4, the toolkit describes five potential roles that marketers would be a natural fit.

2. Offer to head up a sub-committee and ask how the task force is organized. Share the examples of subcommittees, on page 13.

3. Offer to evaluate a specific process, event or activity at your firm related to DEI, and write a plan for related changes you would make based on their strategy for DEI. There is a great list to get you started on page 4, What is the Role of Marketing.

4. If your DEI team or task force is only made up of one department, for example Human Resources, explain how diverse job functions within the same firm offer differing perspectives and enrich the conversation. See Build a Diverse Steering Committee, on page 8.

5. Give your DEI team a copy of this guide.

6. If it still turns out that regular participation is not offered to you, offer to review any verbiage before it is sent out publicly or internally. This will allow you to make sure messaging is consistent on proposals, websites, social media, etc.



The BUSINESS CASE for DEI

- Evaluating the decision to intentionally work on DEI within your firm may not be as straightforward as analyzing your most recent marketing campaign with a simple ROI formula or financial statements for your clients. Quite possibly, the decision was prompted by the murder of George Floyd, and the Black Lives Matter movement, but any real effort may have faded, and you are now revisiting. The reasons that drive your “why” in crafting initiatives for DEI matter, because the journey is not a transitory effort and requires a strong commitment. DEI initiatives are linked to creating positive change in many areas of human resources management where public accounting firms face challenges.

This section of the AAM DEI Toolkit outlines many of the positive benefits seen from DEI efforts. It should help you make the case to invest the time and resources to explore how your firm can begin the journey and bring change within your firm.

Recruiting

Hiring and keeping good candidates is a universal challenge firms are facing. Building a culture that supports DEI will expand your pool of talented candidates and give them one more reason to choose your firm among their choices of potential employers. According to [Glassdoor](#), 67% of job seekers view a diverse workforce as an essential factor when evaluating companies and considering job offers.

Increase Employee Engagement and Retention

The top three drivers of employee engagement are examined in [The CPA Journal, December 2018](#) issue. These include 1. My job allows me to do what I do best, 2. I believe my personal values are aligned with my firm’s values, 3. I believe I make a difference at work. The authors talk about each of these characteristics and offer suggestions on how to improve these areas specifically. What these characteristics have in common is that they value diversity, meaning they utilize each employee’s unique experience and knowledge. Employee engagement will increase, as explained in Harvard Business Review’s “[Getting Serious about Diversity, Enough Already with the Business Case](#).” It’s not enough to have diversity; you need to listen to those diverse voices to reap the benefits of diversity.

Enter a New Market or Expand a Market

Public accounting has proven to be a relatively recession-proof industry. It’s also become an ultra-competitive industry, as many services are treated as commodities, and the lowest cost provider often wins. Diversity may offer a way to differentiate your organization and attract more clients. [Harvard Business Review](#) found that diverse companies are 70% likelier to capture a new market. They’re also 45% more likely to report increased market share year-over-year. A culture of Inclusion encourages creativity and problem-solving skills and contributes to your ability to differentiate and network into new markets.

Bolster Financial Performance

When you think business case, you think financial performance. If this is the case, [McKinsey & Company](#) measured economic performance among companies and found that ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. Gender diverse companies are 15% more likely to outperform their respective national industry medians.

The BUSINESS CASE for DEI (cont.)

Potential Clients Will Ask About DEI Efforts

Firms that serve government and nonprofit organizations may already be seeing a request to include a summary of DEI efforts in their proposals. Are you ready to answer this question and provide evidence you have incorporated these plans into your practice? If this is a differentiating factor the potential client is looking for, will you be considered? Will your engagement team be as diverse as the clients you are serving?

Marketing plays a critical role in crafting the RFP/proposal responses about DEI within your firm. Engagement teams should rely on the coaching expertise of marketers to be fully prepared to address your firm's initiative and other questions that may arise in Orals.


The Case for Starting Now

DEI should be seen as a long-term strategy, not a short-term fix. Results will not be seen overnight, so dedicating resources and budget will be important.

Argue the Human Case

Businesses that do the right thing are rewarded. As reported in [Forbes](#), in their article, "Doing the Right Thing is Just Profitable," JUST Capital, a nonprofit, performed a study and they found: "Stock market indexes based on the leaders of JUST Capital's 2016 rankings outperformed the Russell 1000 index throughout the decade ending in 2016 within a range of 1-4 percentage-points." Taking care of your people first and ensuring everyone is treated with respect, and that your work environment allows for their identities to be seen in their ideas and ways of serving clients is doing the right thing.

Catalyst, a nonprofit that works with companies on Inclusion and gender disparity issues, [surveyed 2,100 employees in 2019](#), and found positive experiences of Inclusion explained 49% of team problem-solving abilities, 35% of work engagement and 20% of intent to stay at the organization.



"What divides us pales in comparison to what unites us."
- Edward Kennedy

Establishing Your Firm's DEI Program

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- Implementing a DEI program that is strategic, authentic, and produces measurable results that illustrate success or opportunities for improvement is no easy feat. Every firm, regardless of size, needs a committed group of passionate, action-oriented individuals to bring these programs to life. Establishing a steering committee is an early step in your firm's DEI journey that will help you set the stage for long-term success. In addition to the role marketing plays in the creation and sustainability of a DEI initiative, listed below are some best practice considerations:

1. Top Leadership Must be Present and Engaged.

In this toolkit, we explain the importance of getting the buy-in of senior leadership to establish a DEI program. Once you have the support and approval of your firm's managing partner or CEO to move forward, you will need a leader, or leaders, that can commit to being present and engaged in the DEI program on an ongoing basis.

It's critical to have executive representation on the committee to:

- Ensure DEI continues to be a strategic priority for the firm
- Ensure that the DEI program is aligned with the firm's strategic plan
- Amplify the importance of DEI inside and outside the firm with other firm leaders
- Illustrate the firm is authentic in its commitment to advancing DEI principles

2. What is HR's Role? At its core, DEI is about people. The Human Resources (HR) function is responsible for the hiring, administration and training of what is many organizations' most valuable asset—its employees. It stands to reason that HR, in most firms and organizations, would lead any people-centric initiatives within a firm. That said, there are always exceptions to consider. For example, a smaller firm may not have an HR function. Larger firms may opt to have a Chief DEI Officer work as a peer to the HR function. If your firm's DEI program is HR-led, it's critical to have a collaborative, diverse, cross-functional team working with HR to create DEI policies and programming. Bottom-line: HR must be fully integrated.

3. Build a Diverse Steering Committee. As mentioned earlier in the toolkit, research shows that diverse teams produce better business results than non-diverse teams. The same concept applies to your steering committee. Your steering committee should represent the racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, generational and ability diversity in your firm and the markets you serve. For firms that operate in multiple geographies, having diverse geographic representation on your steering committee is critical as there may be local nuances to consider.

Beyond the aforementioned demographics, think about the makeup of your firm and how you can enlist committee members from across your organization. Steering committee members shouldn't be limited to those in HR and marketing. Billable practice team members, IT and finance, learning and development should participate. If your firm has a foundation or an individual that leads the firm's philanthropic efforts, include them as well. **Clearly define roles and responsibilities for your steering committee members.** The work of the DEI Steering Committee must be accomplished in addition to any regular responsibilities the participants have. This might be doubly challenging for those that have a significant, billable workload. Leadership must be fully supportive of the increase in non-billable time for all committee members.

Team members are most successful when they have a clear understanding of what their role is and what they are responsible for. People are busy and have multiple demands on their time. Being clear about roles, responsibilities and expectations will help everyone manage their time accordingly and maximize their contributions to the committee.

Establishing Your Firm's DEI Program

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE (cont.)

4. **Clearly Define the Approval Processes.**

Whether it's a policy, program, internal communication or external advertising, chances are your firm has an established approval process that allows firm leadership to review, comment on and approve the initiative. DEI is no exception. You may find that your firm may scrutinize DEI initiatives more closely because of the sensitive nature of some DEI topics.

Establish your protocol for approvals and follow them. Following an established process that you already have in place might be a great place to start. Be sure to get perspective from your managing partner or firm CEO on this issue. Some may want to be more involved in this aspect of the DEI program. A best practice is to include representatives from HR and marketing in the approval process.

5. **The Size of Your Committee Can Help or Hinder Your Progress.**

It's important that your committee isn't so small, that it's hard to make progress because there's too much work to do and not enough people to take on important projects. On the other hand, having too many steering committee members could hinder progress. When forming your committee, look at the candidates and assess the diverse perspectives (demographically and in terms of firm representation) they will bring to the program.

6. Be Transparent. Identify ways to regularly share the progress of your DEI team. Share your DEI goals and the firm's progress toward achieving them. Post updates on the firm intranet. Ask your managing partner, CEO or other firm leaders to share updates via established internal communications channels. Share what you're doing with the community through your website, social media channels and other external communication vehicles like an annual report. Invite feedback, both anonymous and not, to identify further opportunities to advance your firm's DEI program.

"When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become a wiser, more inclusive, and better organization."
- Pat Wadors



STRATEGY

Mission, Goals, Tactics & Metrics

There is not a “right way” to create a DEI program. Each firm is unique, driven by its unique culture, its mindset around DEI, its capacity and willingness to change, if change is needed. Critically important is the tone at the top. Like all new initiatives, a DEI framework follows a general structure including: Mission & Vision, Current State Assessment, Gap Analysis & Prioritization, Goals, Tactics & Implementation and Metrics & Outcomes.

Mission & Vision

Like any new initiative, it is important to set the mission/vision statement for the firm. The example from AAM is straight forward: "As an organization, we are against all forms of racism and discrimination. AAM is a better organization for all of its members when we encourage input and membership from people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and opinion."

A steering committee or subcommittee assigned to development of the mission statement works with diverse team members to create the statement. A DEI program is a business strategy, not merely an HR program and focuses on workplace issues, not personal issues. The DEI mission should directly align with the firm's overall business strategy and its core values.

Current State Assessment

After mission statement is developed, the next step is to develop the goals and tactics to drive realization of the mission. Sounds simple. This is where many firms are struggling. How to get started, how to prioritize, what goals are realistic, how can our actions result in quantifiable change?

Many firms have begun this journey by conducting a current state assessment, often called a climate survey. Some firms have broadened the scope to include overall employee engagement. The data from this assessment and resultant analysis will serve as the foundation of a firm's DEI roadmap.

From the AICPA toolkit, questions have been developed in these general areas and you can also consider the Accounting Maturity Model also found in the AICPA toolkit:

- Attitudes toward diversity, inclusion and corporate culture
- Discrimination and harassment
- Hiring and recruiting
- Your immediate supervisor
- Diversity training programs
- Belonging
- Evaluation and promotion

Other Areas:

- Demographic – Race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation
- Job satisfaction, employer pride, engagement
- Utilize questions similar to those found in a traditional net promoter score

STRATEGY

Mission, Goals, Tactics & Metrics

Gap Analysis & Prioritization

After completion of the assessment, analysis of the results will drive next steps and actions. Many firms have used survey tools to assist the organization of the data and the analysis. Tools include: Qualtrics, Culture Amp and Survey Monkey, among others.

Best practice recommendation is to conduct a heat map of the results to help with prioritization. Consultants are also valuable resources to assist with this often-overwhelming aspect of the development of a road map. When scores are low in a given area, the most important element is to determine the root cause. Understanding the why is required to develop possible solutions and corrective actions that might include training, recruiting and retention, changes in processes and/or reallocation of budget, among others.

Goals, Tactics, Metrics & Outcome

Based on the internal survey heat map, or as directed by leadership, or a steering committee, specific goals should be established that are aligned with the business strategy of the firm, and the overarching mission of the DEI initiative. Simply put:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- How will we do it?
- What will we measure?
- What is the desired outcome of the stated goal?

An Example to Illustrate: Bias

- Goal: Understanding and reducing bias in our firm
- How: Firm wide implicit bias training
- Measure: Completion of training
- Outcome: Improvement in employee survey scores
- Other examples of DEI program goals can be found in the next section Establishing Subcommittees.



Establishing SUBCOMMITTEES

— Once your mission, goals and success metrics have been established, it's important to develop subcommittees to carry out these initiatives and help your firm divide and conquer. There are several methods to consider when dividing your overall DEI programming into subcommittees:

- Tie your specific initiatives and goals to each subcommittee
- Work with firm leadership to set subcommittees based on their directive
- Develop subcommittees based on internal survey results



Suggested Best Practices for Subcommittees

Each firm's subcommittees will look a bit different. Your firm may only have a few subcommittees in place, or it may have many that are narrowly focused. Whatever your firm decides, there are some basic principles that can help your subcommittees operate efficiently.

- Limit the size of your subcommittees. Smaller groups may lead to more accountability and specific roles for each member of the committee.
- Clearly define roles & responsibilities for each subcommittee. DEI initiatives and programming may be new to your firm, or you may have had a program in place for years, but clarity around each subcommittee's role in your firm's DEI strategy will help each committee set goals, develop programming and find their unique role.
- Find leaders for each subcommittee. Having one or two associates to help lead each subcommittee will provide added accountability and structure. It's also a great way to increase participation in the DEI initiatives your firm is embarking on, and to continue to build your firm's leaders.
- Set regular group subcommittee meetings. When more than one subcommittee exists, it can be difficult to keep track of what each subcommittee is working on, and the potential for duplicative activities, events or initiatives can develop. It is recommended that all of your subcommittees meet on a regular basis to discuss each subcommittee's current and future plans.





Examples of SUBCOMMITTEES

— Note that each firm and its DEI journey is different; no two firms will be the same. Below is a list of example subcommittees and their potential goal/objectives. We recommend tailoring these subcommittees to your firm based on the considerations mentioned previously in this section.

Internal Training & Education

- Implement companywide training programs for new and existing associates on DEI related topics.
- Allow associates to regularly share their experiences in written and verbal communication using forums, one on one sharing, and training on diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Equip associates with the skills and knowledge to recognize and respond to DEI related issues.

Recruiting & Retention

- Expanding your current recruiting platforms and consistently involving more minority associates in your recruiting process
- Identifying events and organizations for sponsorship
- Conducting structured interviewer training to alleviate biases and create a standardized process for hiring
- Create KPIs related to recruiting and implement leadership development, mentoring and sponsorship programs that include high performing diverse associates.
- Develop stay interviews and retention programming to understand gaps

Internal & External Communication

- Share your DEI journey with clients, prospects, referral sources, employees and potential hires
- Incorporate social media messaging that recognizes holidays, diversity celebrations, etc.
- Promote your DEI programming in relevant business development/external collateral materials

Community Outreach/Impact

- Creating a yearly report that shares your DEI story and key results externally
- Develop relationships with relevant community programs, initiatives and non-profits
- Track your impact and statistics relating to your firms' goals

Supplier Diversity

- Develop an RFP process that excludes bias and makes a level playing field for all associates
- Evaluate suppliers each year to ensure procedures are being followed

Affinity Groups

- Affinity Groups should be tailored to your firm and its unique goals, and associates base. These groups serve as internal communities of diverse employees and group champions to improve belonging, retention and enhance business outcomes. Affinity Group events should be safe spaces open to all associates and DEI events designed to create a culturally intelligent workplace.
- Best practices suggest that affinity groups should be associate-led. Highlighting your firm's extraordinary associates and creating leadership opportunities increases associates' engagement and creates a more inclusive culture.

Getting Help - Bringing in EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Marketers are asked to wear many hats, and we find adaptation and change management to be part of our operating system. We can bring a lot of value to the table when your firm sets a course for a DEI strategy. But just as with other firm priorities, sometimes an external voice can be the most helpful one – even if it's ultimately saying the same thing you are. In addition, asking a committee of untrained employees to build out a full DEI plan by themselves is not fair or ultimately productive. Even the most passionate supporters will run into capacity and experience roadblocks that will stall progress. Finding an expert to participate in your planning and implementation not only adds bandwidth and structure, but it increases your program's credibility.

The first thing you must do in considering outside help is gaining an honest understanding of your firm's DEI program goals. What is realistic for your team to take on, what pace will be acceptable, what level of support will the team have, and what does success look like for your firm? You have to ask these questions and answer them honestly – considering your firm's culture and record of change management – in setting your goals and charting a course. Firm size, generational distribution, location(s) and other factors should also be weighed. To achieve success for your firm, will it be a matter of compliance (recommended trainings and basic guidelines to “check a box” and be done) or are you envisioning an active level of engagement and ongoing programming (a robust plan with goals and metrics, touching on internal and external factors)?

Defining the scope upfront, and the metrics that you will be measuring along the way, is an important step. What indicators will ultimately show that you are making an impact? Here are a few potential items to consider:

- Personnel demographics
- Candidate demographics
- Leadership demographics and pipeline
- Title distribution
- Leadership opportunities (internal and external)

- Employee compensation
- Employee retention
- Training programs
- DEI programming budget
- DEI-related philanthropy
- Client mix
- Employee surveys

There are other factors that need buy-in from leadership if your program has a chance of being successful. Budget concerns are always top of mind. How much is the firm willing to invest to jumpstart the process, and then what level of maintenance spending will be possible in the future? Management will also need to commit to an investment of time to go through the process and gain proper training for employees. You cannot go into the process looking for shortcuts, or you will shortchange the results.

Evaluating DEI consultants is an important step in the process, and spending time to get the right person in place is critical. In recent years, more and more existing business consultants have either added DEI to their list of services, or newer consultants entered the marketplace specifically for DEI with varying levels of experience. Choosing from the options can be tough. Who really has the right expertise? And what personality and skillset will be most effective in your firm?

Good consultants in this space will share some commonalities with other advisors you have hired over the years. Consultants who have done this kind of work with CPA firms, law firms or other professional services organizations may make for the best fit, as they will come in with a foundational understanding of how you operate. You should look for a DEI consultant that prioritizes:

1. **Keeping Current on DEI Best Practices.** You are hiring expertise, so ongoing education should be a priority, as should the communication of those ideas and policies to their client. Do they have certification in the topic, and are they active in organizations in the space? A well-rounded consultant will also have

Getting Help - Bringing in EXTERNAL RESOURCES (cont.)

a grounding in organizational structure and dynamics. This distinction will help foster more success when implementing change across the firm.

2. Learning Everything About Your Organization and Its People. “Kicking the tires” is unexciting, but for a consultant to give you actionable advice that reflects the context of your firm’s structure and culture, they need to spend time upfront reviewing data, reading through policies, speaking with key stakeholders and asking some uncomfortable questions. This work is the key to building the right DEI plan for your organization.

3. Data and Research Approaches to Planning. It is not enough to say DEI is important; for some stakeholders you will need to convince them with hard data and research. Find a consultant who incorporates this information to help engage some of the most skeptical team members.

4. Open Communication and A Willingness To Have Tough Conversations. We must have some very uncomfortable conversations along this journey if it is to be effective. Your consultant is working for you, but they should be able to push you past your comfort zone or register disagreement respectfully all in service of doing this important work.

5. Defining the Goals and Success Factors That Mean the Most for Your Firm, and Then Measuring Progress. A good consultant will help you better understand what you truly need to make progress, not just what you say you want. This distinction is very important, especially when managing leadership’s expectations and what they think they know. You also won’t know if you’re making headway if you aren’t measuring performance against your plan. An outside consultant can help with organizational accountability through regular progress check-ins, giving you the opportunity to tweak your plan along the way for greater success.

6. Delivering Services in A Professional Manner Consistent with DEI Values. Reliable communication, clear contracts, meeting deadlines, keeping to their commitments – you want in your consultant the same drive and professionalism you look for in employees. In addition, if they are selling you on DEI expertise, they should be demonstrating those principles in their dealings with the business community.

Culture is a big factor in building towards demonstrable change. Your DEI consultant should be able to gain a realistic take on where your firm stands, and what it will take to bring people along on this journey. Beware of consultants who make it sound very easy, or who say that a few seminars will get everyone on the same page.

DEI work is very complex, and even those on board with the overall goal may bristle at some of the concepts and programming if they are not well communicated. It takes a deft touch, and a professional who can take on that complexity and pivot when necessary to keep things progressing.

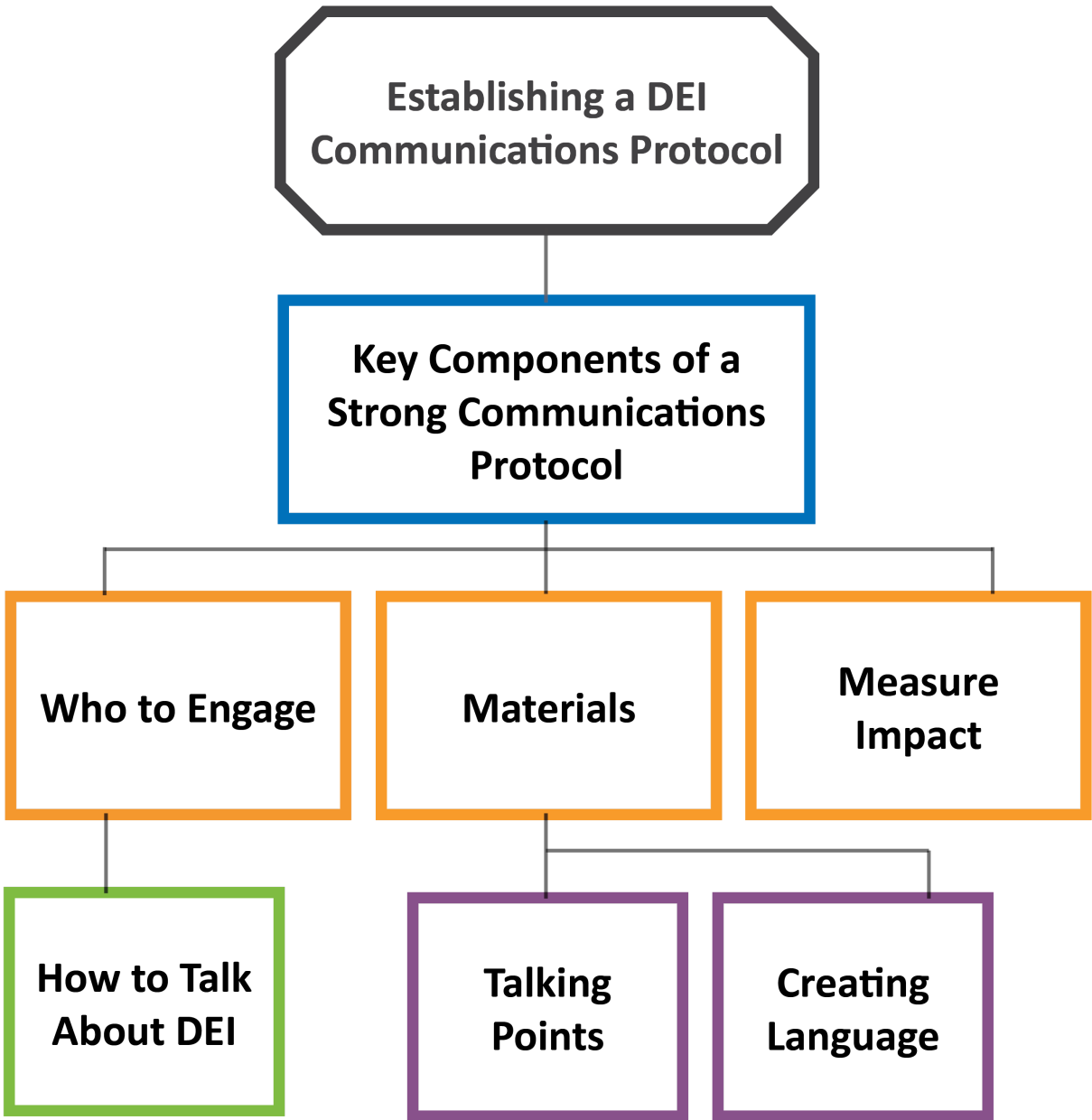
And when you think you may have the person identified, be sure to complete the circle of due diligence. Call the references and ask tough questions about how the consultant collaborates in your style of team setting. You are looking for someone who can move the needle with your leadership team and employees.

Spending time, money, resources and goodwill moving in the wrong direction with the wrong consultant would be a nightmare to a firm of any size. The stakes are too great to shortchange the process. Doing your homework, having uncomfortable conversations with the leadership team about their ultimate goals, and exploring how the right consultant could help shape strategy will help you chart the right course for your DEI journey.

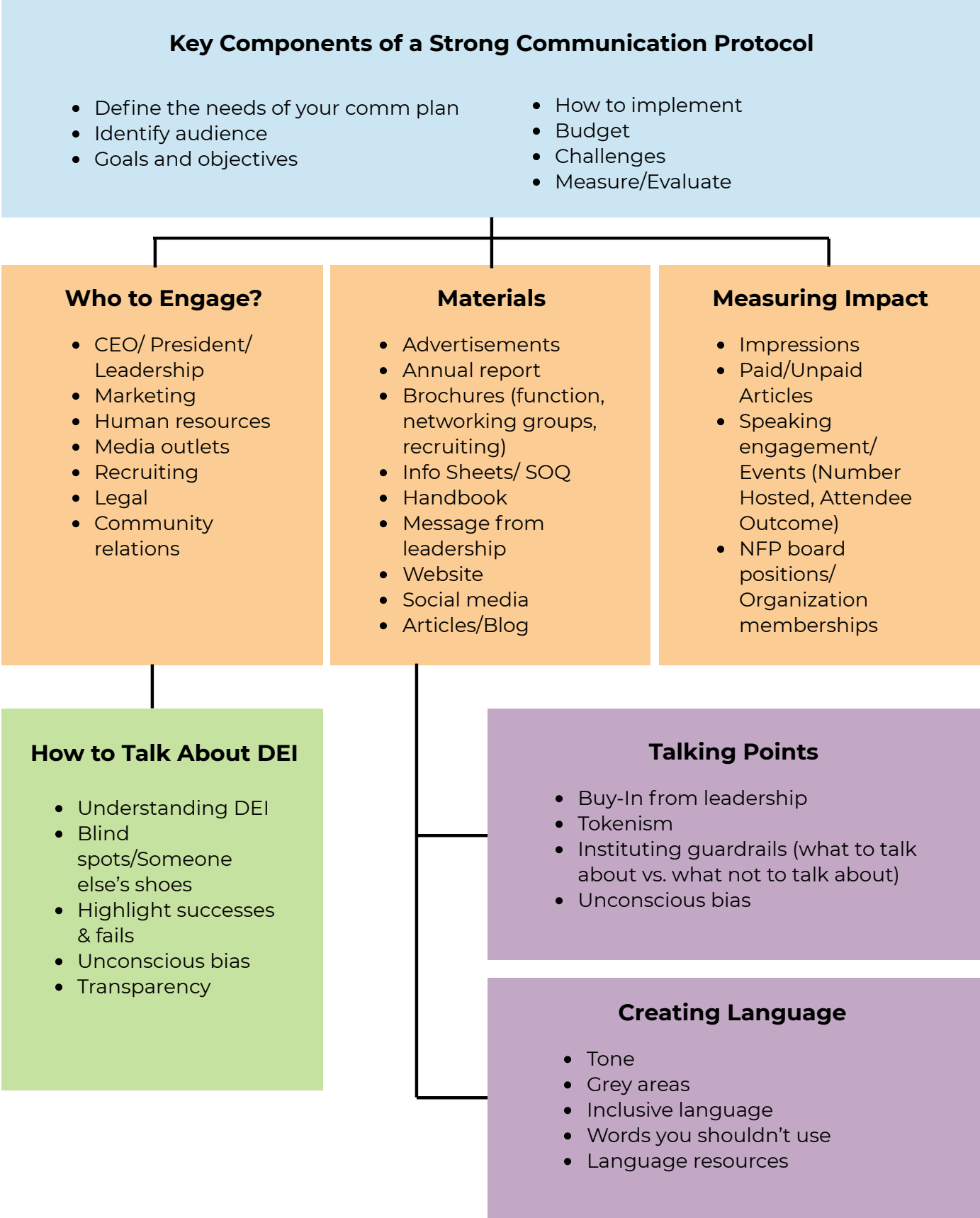
Establishing COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

What are communication protocols?

— A Communication Protocol is a road map that guides the key message of a professional organization to an intended audience. Guidelines within a communications plan establish a clear, strategic and specific message with measurable results.



Establishing COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS (cont.)





DOS & DON'TS

of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

DO

- Continue to educate yourself
- Accept that this process is inherently painful and face the truth of that pain
- Actively discuss your own personal journey
- Realize you will make mistakes
- Practice empathy
- Establish a sense of belonging for everyone
- Agree DEI is ongoing, not a onetime training
- Seek support from our leadership
- Revisit your policies
- Create a culture where inclusion is a mindset and not just an organizational goal
- Build a solid foundation of understanding you can build upon
- Examine your talent management practices
- Hold yourself accountable

DON'T



- Focus just on diversity
- Neglect any employee group
- Overlook senior leadership as an area of improvement
- Copy another company – find out what is best for your firm
- Have too many cooks in the kitchen – be strategic about your team
- Assume diverse people in your company will want to lead your DEI efforts
- Be overly prideful of your company's DEI efforts – you can always do better
- Write policies to change employee behavior – educate!
- Expect for this to be done in a year – this is ongoing
- Use hiring quotas to change the culture
- Expect your leadership to be on board right away but don't drop the topic just because everyone isn't ready

TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

- Using the right tools can help your team stay connected, increase awareness and help share resources among your associates. The following platforms can be used:

Firm Intranet/SharePoint

Using your firms' internal intranet/SharePoint offers a way to meet associates where they may already be accessing other firm resources and tools. A DE&I page or folder can be created, where resources, promotion of DE&I events/programming and other items can be shared with the firm as a whole.

TEAMS Channels

Setting up a separate TEAMS channel for DEI offers several advantages. The chat function is helpful for quickly sharing resources or announcements. The various subcommittees can also develop their own TEAMS channels, allowing for more nuanced communications and resources to be shared.

Others

Based on your firms' unique technology tools, you may have other ways to collaborate and communicate on DEI. Perhaps your regular firm surveys can include a DEI component for regular feedback. You may be able to incorporate DEI programming into your yearly required firm trainings through purchased software tools like [Pulsely](#) or [Workday](#), which offer tools and insights into your DEI programming.



“Diversity is about all of us and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together.”
- **Jacqueline Woodson**

The GO / NO-GO GUIDE

Framework

While accounting firms recognize the value of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), our industry has generally not been at the forefront of advancing workplace best practices to create a culture within firms that fosters the principles of DEI as a business imperative. Some progress, however, has been made and attitudes are evolving within the accounting industry. This trend was underscored by a DEI survey of accounting marketing professionals that was conducted by the Association for Accounting Marketing (AAM) in October 2020.

The survey found that nearly two-thirds (63%) of firms currently support DEI through some activities or a formal program. On the other hand, over one-third (37%) of respondents reported that their firms have no such activities or programs in place.

Of the 63% of firms that reported having DEI activities or a formal program in place there was significant divergence in how those efforts were characterized by respondents in terms of breadth and depth. Fewer than 12% of marketing professionals said their firm “has well-established and active DEI programming” in place. This was the highest level of ongoing DEI engagement measured by the survey. Another 30% characterized their firm as having some specific “initiatives underway.” On the other end of the DEI journey spectrum, 35% indicated their firm’s DEI efforts were nascent or “just getting started.” And about two percent of the respondents reported having started DEI initiatives but currently having no ongoing action or specific programming in place.

The GO / NO-GO GUIDE (cont.)

Whether Accounting Marketers are Given the Go/No-Go

Like any issue or discussion, support for DEI as an organizational goal may be varied. Each firm and each professional are on its own journey and a one size fits all approach will be difficult to follow. Moving DEI forward in accounting firms may not be a green light or red light. There may be many starts, stops and even shades of gray along the way.

Given the Go

Moving forward is likely based on a spectrum of variables and the areas listed below are designed to provide inspiration and guidance. For firms that are interested in moving forward with a DEI initiative, in what ways can marketing-led efforts to build a culture of belonging and inclusivity?

- Formalize DEI budget
- Identify and nurture affiliate DEI partners
- Formalize DEI strategy with measurable goals
- Support efforts for a diverse workforce
- External communication strategies
- Recognition of holidays
- Leverage outside consultants

Given the No-Go

Competing priorities, stalled efforts, misdirection or a vision that is not unified, and are barriers to implementation. If those challenges take precedent in firms, what opportunities do accounting marketing professionals have to support diversity, equity, and inclusion? What areas of influence can marketing leverage?

- Understand and communicate [the business case](#) for promoting diversity and inclusion in the accounting profession. Statistics, success stories and data driven spotlights may be the education that rally's leadership towards action.
- Internal training for team members. Professional development may extend to communication, awareness, inclusion and the leadership space. Understand that is a commitment to long term learning.
- Involved in the proposal process? Identify times that a diverse team or firm position on DEI may have played a role and share those insights.
- Support underserved communities and businesses. Examine external relationships. Seek suppliers, community organizations, etc. that support that mission.
- Provide "talking points" for firms that decide to not formalize a DEI initiative.

— Final Thoughts

This toolkit represents the collective efforts of many. We hope you found the information useful and that it provides you with the tools to build or reboot your DEI journey as we all commit to being part of Empowering Change and Driving Growth for our firms, public accounting, accounting marketing and our communities.

“We will all profit from a more diverse, inclusive society, understanding, accommodating, even celebrating our differences, while pulling together for the common good.”

- **Ruth Bader Ginsburg**



RESOURCES

Ruszczuk, Bonnie. "Defining Diversity, Equity & Inclusion." Presentation to the Association for Accounting Marketing Diversity Equity & Inclusion. Bonnie Buol Ruszczuk, bbr companies

AAM Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement

"About AAM: Mission Statement: Accounting Firm Growth." Association for Accounting Marketing, www.accountingmarketing.org/aboutaam/about-aam.

About this Toolkit

"PCPS Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit." AICPA, AICPA.org, www.aicpa.org/interestareas/privatecompaniespracticesection/humancapital/pcps-diversity-and-inclusion-toolkit.html.

CEO Action for Diversity, www.ceoaction.com/.

"Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources." Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources | MIT Human Resources, hr.mit.edu/diversity-equity-inclusion/resources.

Marketing's Role

SHRM. "Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan." SHRM, SHRM, 18 Aug. 2020, www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-forms/pages/guide-to-developing-a-strategic-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-plan.aspx.

"Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Training Is More Important than Ever." Training Industry, 14 Jan. 2021, trainingindustry.com/wiki/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei/.

The Business Case for DEI

Team, Glassdoor. Glassdoor's Diversity and Inclusion Workplace Survey, 30 Sept. 2020, www.glassdoor.com/blog/glassdoors-diversity-and-inclusion-workplace-survey/.

Johnson, Steven, and Byron Pike. "ICYMI: Employee Retention: The State of Engagement in Public Accounting Firms and Why It Matters." The CPA Journal, 14 Jan. 2020, www.cpajournal.com/2020/01/16/employee-retention-the-state-of-engagement-in-public-accounting-firms-and-why-it-matters/#:~:text=The%20survey%20results%20indicate%20that,engagement%20in%20the%20general%20workforce.

Ely, Robin J., and David A. Thomas. "Getting Serious about Diversity: Enough Already with the Business Case." Harvard Business Review, 20 Oct. 2020, hbr.org/2020/11/getting-serious-about-diversity-enough-already-with-the-business-case.

Hewlett, Sylvia Ann, et al. "How Diversity Can Drive Innovation." Harvard Business Review, Dec. 2013, hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation.

Hunt, Vivian, et al. "Why Diversity Matters." McKinsey & Company, McKinsey & Company, 12 Mar. 2021, www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters.

Georgescu, Peter. "Doing the Right Thing Is Just Profitable." Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 26 July 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/petergeorgescu/2017/07/26/doing-the-right-thing-is-just-profitable/?sh=50893c317488.

Travis, Dnika J., and Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon. "Getting Real about Inclusive Leadership: Why Change Starts With You." Catalyst, 2019, www.catalyst.org/research/inclusive-leadership-report/.

RESOURCES

Establishing Your Firm's DEI Program

SHRM. "Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan." SHRM, SHRM, 18 Aug. 2020, www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-forms/pages/guide-to-developing-a-strategic-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-plan.aspx.

Strutner, Suzy. "Diversity and Inclusion Is a Revenue DRIVER. Here Are 5 Steps to Improve Yours. - Suzy Strutner's Articles: Learn How to Grow Your Business with Grow Wire." Grow Wire, Grow Wire, 13 Aug. 2019, www.growwire.com/improve-diversity-and-inclusion.

"Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Training Is More Important than Ever." Training Industry, 14 Jan. 2021, trainingindustry.com/wiki/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei/.

Lewis, Kristen. "Marketing Representatives, Principles of Diversity & Inclusion." EisnerAmper LLP

Strategy: Mission, Goals, Tactics, & Measures

"PCPS Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit." AICPA, AICPA.org, www.aicpa.org/interestareas/privatecompaniespracticesection/humancapital/pcps-diversity-and-inclusion-toolkit.html.

Steps for Developing a Diversity & Inclusion Strategy. www.ceoaction.com/media/4178/steps-for-developing-a-diversity-inclusion-strategy.pdf.

Establishing Subcommittees

SHRM. "Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan." SHRM, SHRM, 18 Aug. 2020, www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-forms/pages/guide-to-developing-a-strategic-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-plan.aspx.

Williams, Joan C., and James D. White. "Update Your De&i Playbook." Harvard Business Review, 15 July 2020, hbr.org/2020/07/update-your-dei-playbook.

Diversity Primer Employee Networks and Affinity Groups Chapter 10 Diversity Primer, Diversity Best Practices-Diversity Primer, 29 Sept. 2009, www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/import/embedded/anchors/files/diversity_primer_chapter_10.pdf.

Creating a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee in the Workplace, 4 Point Consulting, 15 June 2020, www.4pointconsulting.com/resources/2020/6/15/creating-a-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-committee-in-the-workplace.

D & I Chapter Toolkit, Public Relations Society of America, May 2021, www.prsa.org/docs/default-source/about/diversity/prsa-2020-d-i-toolkit---saved-7-27_2020.pdf?sfvrsn=233ad52a_0.

Getting Help—Bringing in External Resources

Rinderle, Susan. 8 Things to Expect From a Highly Competent Diversity Consultant, Workforce.com, 2 July 2018, www.workforce.com/news/8-things-to-expect-from-a-highly-competent-diversity-consultant.

Samuels, Dena. "5 Things to Consider When Hiring a Diversity & Inclusiveness Consultant." Dena Samuels Consulting, 14 Feb. 2021, www.denasamuels.com/5-things-to-consider-when-youre-hiring-a-diversity-inclusiveness-consultant/.

"4 Questions to Ask before Hiring Your Next Diversity & Inclusion Vendor/Trainer." Diversity Science, 16 Mar. 2019, www.diversityscience.org/resources/4-questions-to-ask-before-hiring-next-diversity-inclusion-vendor-trainer/.

RESOURCES

Establishing Communication Protocols

Perez, Nereida. "Diversity Primer Communication and Marketing Chapter 12." Diversity Primer Chapter 12, Diversity Best Practices-Diversity Primer, 29 Sept. 2009, www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/import/embedded/anchors/files/diversity_primer_chapter_12.pdf.

Gravagna, Nicole, and Follow. "9 Dos and Don'ts OF DEI." 9 Dos and Don'ts of DEI, 7 Sept. 2020, www.linkedin.com/pulse/9-dos-donts-dei-nicole-gravagna-phd-she-her-/.

Leader's Edge Staff Posted on November 14. "14 Do's and Don'ts of DE&I: Leader's Edge Magazine." Leader's Edge Magazine |, 28 Jan. 2021, www.leadersedge.com/brokerage-ops/14-dos-and-donts-of-di.

Technology Tools

SHRM. "Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan." SHRM, SHRM, 18 Aug. 2020, www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-forms/pages/guide-to-developing-a-strategic-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-plan.aspx.

Florentine, Sharon. "Diversity and Inclusion Technology Tools on the Rise." CIO, CIO, 22 Mar. 2019, www.cio.com/article/3374838/diversity-and-inclusion-technology-tools-on-the-rise.html.

The GO / NO-GO

Ruszczuk, Bonnie. "AMM Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Survey 2020-Analysis."

"The Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion." AICPA, www.aicpa.org/career/diversityinitiatives/dibusinesscase.html.

DISCLAIMER

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher. The Association of Accounting Marketing (AAM) expressly disclaims any liability or responsibility with respect to any content contained herein. AAM cannot guarantee the validity of information contained in this publication, including the hyperlinks. As a matter of convenience to the user, AAM has provided links to websites owned and operated by others (Third Party Sites). AAM does not have control of the Third Party Sites. AAM is not responsible for the content on the Third Party Sites and makes no representations or warranties regarding privacy policies, computer viruses, or other damage that may be caused by downloading information from Third Party Sites.



Association for
**Accounting
Marketing**™
growing people and practices

www.accountingmarketing.org

The Association for Accounting Marketing (AAM) is a national trade association and a one-of-a-kind network of marketing, business development and growth strategists. The association was formed to provide education, community and resources for accounting firms, CPAs, consulting firm marketing and sales professionals, partners, firm administrators, and representatives of businesses offering products and services to the accounting industry and marketing professionals.

