

RACIAL & HEALTH EQUITY: Make It Your Business

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Learn: Why Does Policy Matter?

You have probably seen the statements. The tweets and ads. Many brands express sadness, anger and a solemn tone over the racial unrest surrounding the murder of George Floyd. They may even express support for Black Lives Matter.

However, undoing racism at work requires more than statements and charitable donations. Dismantling structural racism in the workplace means applying an equity lens to all aspects of an organization's systems, policies, procedures and norms. It will demand long-term commitment from organizational leadership at both the executive and board levels.

It will not be easy or straightforward. But creating a workplace free of discrimination and one in which everyone feels a sense of belonging is worth striving for.



Policies Define Who We Are and Aspire to Be

Every company or organization operates according to rules, whether informal or formal, that govern how it conducts its business, how its employees do their work and even how employees communicate with one another. From hiring practices and vendor and supplier contracting, to strategic plans and how meetings are conducted, these rules – either codified as policy or reinforced as a norm – both reflect and shape what the company's priorities are and what and sometimes, who, it values.



Hiring & Retention Policies

Often, companies beginning the work to embed racial and health equity into their policies and practices start by examining their hiring and retention practices. They review job descriptions to ensure they are written to give opportunities to those with the right experience and not just educational or other professional credentials that can be out of financial reach. Salary ranges are clearly listed to ensure that bias doesn't play a role in salary negotiations.

Companies also expand their recruitment efforts, such as where they publish job postings. It may be the Black community newspaper or a career fair specifically for job seekers of color. Companies can tap into Black fraternities and sororities, which have a robust network of alumni representing many professions.



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Who, How and Why

Corporate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are another way that companies seek to demonstrate their commitment to addressing racism. DEI work can be defined in the following ways:

- **Diversity** is the representation of multiple races, cultures, ethnicities, gender identities, abilities, religions, socioeconomic levels and lived experiences. Creating diversity in the workplace is done through hiring but retention is equally important. Diversity addresses "who" is at the table.

- **Equity** attempts to address the different needs of employees based on who they are and their lived experiences. Equity is often defined by contrasting it with equality, which shows up as addressing all employees' needs in exactly the same way. Equity is "how" we treat people at the table.
- **Inclusion** is the felt sense of belonging to a larger group based on mutual respect and trust that is reflected in decision-making and how changes are communicated. When employees feel included at their company, they are more productive and experience greater job satisfaction. This improves business outcomes and, inevitably, helps the bottom line. Inclusion is "why" we need to hear from everyone at the table.

(For more on diversity, equity and inclusion, visit this [page](#).)



Policies Outlast People

While CEOs come and go, the policies, procedures and norms that govern a company can linger long after. Creating workplace policies that address structural racism is one of the most critical factors to changing a company's culture from the status quo to one that is committed to racial equity.

Reflect: What Do Your Organization Policies Tell You?



What does diversity, equity and inclusion mean to you?

What does it mean to feel excluded? What does it mean to feel included?

Have you ever looked at a workplace policy and wondered how it applied to you?

If you were creating a new policy, how would you go about it? Who would you consult?

Change: Steps Toward Progress



Conduct regular policy/procedure audits with an equity lens

Companies often create policies and procedures with the intention of offering a consistent way of addressing the day-to-day employee and consumer experience. However, we know that no employee or consumer is the same. Applying an equity lens to both existing and new policies means that we consider what employees and consumers actually need, as opposed to treating them the same, even if their needs are different. This may result in changing long-held policies or getting rid of them altogether. It also may mean creating new policies that offer accommodations for different groups of employees or consumers.

Doing a policy audit will likely not look the same for any one company. Some useful questions to consider:

- Who is this policy intended for? Who does it leave out?
- Does the policy offer accommodations for employees with different needs? For example, a travel policy might require employees to purchase the cost of a hotel or flight out of pocket and request reimbursement. This unfairly burdens employees with fewer financial resources.
- If it's an existing policy, is it still necessary? Sometimes, policies are borne out of a certain time and context, which are no longer relevant. Consider removing policies that no longer address employees' or consumers' needs today.



Bring people to the table through an equity committee

Hopefully, your company has done work on increasing diversity in leadership positions and implemented diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. As a result, you can bring diverse voices together in an equity committee that can play a role in creating new equitable policies or reviewing existing policies with equity in mind.

It is important to have representation from all company levels – management and individual contributor – as well as BIPOC employees, employees with disabilities and employees that represent all lived experiences.



Get regular feedback

Many companies large and small ask their employees for feedback on aspects of their work experience but they may not hear about their feedback on workplace policies and how they may affect job satisfaction or even engender a sense of inclusion or exclusion. Consider asking your employees whether workplace policies promote a sense of belonging or validation. For example, knowing that your employees would like certain religious holidays recognized could be helpful in changing your holiday policy.

Learn More



- “Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture,” Equity in the Center, <https://equityinthecenter.org/aww/>
- “Journey to becoming a truly antiracist organization through lens of a Boston leader,” Boston Business Journal, October, 12, 2020, Sabrina Williams, <https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2020/10/12/journey-to-becoming-anti-racist-organization.html> (accessed February 8, 2021)
- “Restructure your Organization to Actually Advance Racial Justice,” Harvard Business Review, June 22, 2020, Evelyn R. Carter, <https://hbr.org/2020/06/restructure-your-organization-to-actually-advance-racial-justice> (accessed February, 8, 2021)

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