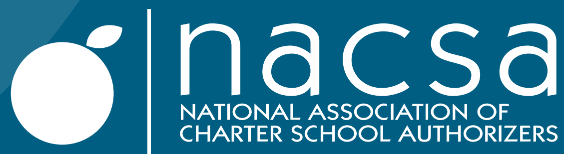

CLOSING THE DEI GAP IN AUTHORIZING

A toolkit for authorizers committed to improving their work cultures and making authorizing a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive field.

January 2023

What is the purpose of this toolkit? Who is it for?

This toolkit provides practical guidance and recommendations to authorizers who are ready to close the DEI gap and prioritize DEI in their organizations. The toolkit focuses on building internal systems, policies, and cultures where all people—but especially those who have been historically marginalized—can thrive. Why? A more diverse, equitable, and inclusive authorizing profession will result in stronger schooling and life outcomes for students.

Our recommendations and guidance stem from broad research, promising practices from the field, the experiences of NACSA's own staff from historically marginalized backgrounds, and interviews and focus groups with authorizers, especially authorizers of color. The guidance and recommendations were developed inclusively, engaging a wide range of people and resources. Our goal is clear and helpful guidance that is useful and actionable in a wide range of contexts.

We recognize, however, that authorizing institutions vary greatly across the country. What one authorizer has the autonomy and authority to do in one locale may not be possible for another authorizer in a different geography, due to a variety of barriers. Not everyone will be able to enact every recommendation or strategy in this toolkit. Any examples provided are meant to be illustrative, not prescriptive. We encourage you to focus on what you and/or your institution can do.

NACSA approaches the creation of this toolkit with humility and as an organization that has certainly not yet figured it all out. We have substantial work to do to realize a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization where all staff thrive. **We believe that, for the first time, NACSA is not only prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion, but has rigorous goals and commitments to hold ourselves accountable to them.** These goals include increasing board and staff diversity, equipping staff at all levels to effectively work with a wide diversity of people, and increasing use of our non-staffing resources with people and firms from historically under-resourced groups. Thus, we are also actively researching and learning alongside others, sharing our findings and experiences.

What is in this toolkit?

This toolkit presents a number of recommendations for closing the DEI gap within authorizing institutions. With each recommendation, we also include specific, evidence-informed strategies for consideration.

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DEFINING WHAT WE MEAN

Language matters. But often, people can approach words differently and assign different meanings to them, which can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication. These are the terms we use throughout this toolkit and our working definitions:

Diversity: the presence of people with diverse backgrounds and identities, with a wide range of perspectives and experiences, on your team. [i]

Equity: the process of removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor. [ii]

Inclusion: the experience of being welcomed and of authentic belonging. [iii]

Thrive: to prosper by creating systems that reinforce diversity, equity, and inclusion and remove oppressive systems, habits, policies, and practices. [iv]

DEI gap: the distance between good intentions for creating thriving organizations and the outcomes of those intentions. [v]

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THE DEI GAP IN AUTHORIZING?

Charter schools serve diverse student populations. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 68% of charter school students are students of color and nearly 59% come from lower-income households.[1]

Unfortunately, most educational organizations, including authorizing institutions, are not as diverse, equitable, and inclusive as their schools. For example, only about 21% of all public school educators identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx/e, or another racial minority.[2] And while the percentage of educators of color is higher in charter schools (32%), the sector doesn't reflect the diversity of the students served. Authorizing diversity is better (see below), but there is certainly room for improvement.

Why does this matter? The evidence is clear: more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organizations are better. More diverse organizations outperform their less diverse peers.[3] Decision making is stronger when diverse people work together effectively.[4] Student outcomes are better when diverse educators are present.[5] Communities often feel more seen and heard when they can connect with someone from a similar background.

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i Adapted from Promise 54's Unrealized Impact report (2017)
ii Adapted from Promise 54's Unrealized Impact report (2017)
iii Wilkinson, B. (2021). The DEI gap: Where good intentions meet true cultural change. HarperCollins Leadership.
iv Adapted from Wilkinson, B. (2021). The DEI gap: Where good intentions meet true cultural change. HarperCollins Leadership.
v Adapted from Wilkinson, B. (2021). The DEI gap: Where good intentions meet true cultural change. HarperCollins Leadership.

While the outcome advantages of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the nonprofit and education sectors have been less studied, the business sector has correlated diversity with increases in revenue and innovation. A 2019 McKinsey study found that companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity outperformed those in the fourth quartile by 36% in profitability.[6] Boston Consulting Group surveyed more than 1,700 companies in eight countries (including the U.S.) and found that diverse management teams were more innovative than less diverse teams (innovation in this study was defined as the portion of revenue from products and services launched within the last three years).[7] Companies with above average diversity had 45% innovation revenue compared to 26% for companies with below average diversity. The innovation advantage also resulted in better financial performance, with Earnings Before Interest and Taxes (EBIT) nine percentage points higher for those highly diverse.

Additionally, the Albert Shanker Institute, in its 2015 report, The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education, cited research that showed a variety of benefits to both historically under-resourced students and white students related to academic and social outcomes when teaching staff was diverse: providing more evidence that diversity is a boon to organizational and educational success.[8]

Authorizing, both staff and boards, could be reaping these benefits as well; but it does not, as a sector, reflect the diversity of the students served either. The most recent data on authorizing diversity indicates that 44% of authorizing staff identify as people of color (31% Black; 6% Latinx/e; 3% Asian/Pacific Islander; 2% Multiple Races; and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native).[9] Moreover, while 78% of authorizing staff say their organizations value diversity, only 30% say their organizations prioritize DEI.[10] A mere 24% said their organizations set DEI goals and measured progress toward those goals.

> While DEI is the acronym for diversity, equity, and inclusion, DEI can also be understood as an "ethos that recognizes the value of diverse voices and centers inclusivity and employee wellbeing as central facets of success."

This disconnect between authorizers and other education support organizations saying they value diversity, but not experiencing the positive outcomes, has created a DEI gap. While intentions matter, impact matters more, and the impact is a sector that is not as strong and community-centered as it could be.

1. Focus On What You Can Do

Authorizer types vary. Some authorizers exist within a larger institution and as such, often must abide by that institution's policies and practices. Other authorizers are more autonomous and largely create their own guiding standards and rules. These differences have resulted in authorizers having different capacities for decision making.

Understand the barriers.

In an information-gathering session conducted by NACSA among authorizers of color, one authorizer said, "I'd like [our authorizing office] to be more diverse, but I literally can't." They described some of their institution's policies, including non-competitive appointments—the process of opening jobs to select candidates versus the general public, usually based on how long they've worked at the institution. In another authorizers of color focus group, a participant spoke about the lack of control over salaries and how that limited the hiring pool. In yet another, an authorizer spoke about the lack of value the larger institution placed on authorizing and inclusivity, despite their own office being committed to quality authorizing.

Barriers like these are challenging, and often frustrating for those seeking to make change. But they shouldn't be excuses to do nothing. In situations where extensive policy barriers exist, NACSA suggests two strategies:

Identify what is within your locus of control and start there.

Locus of control[11] describes the control a person believes they have over the things that happen to them. In the work setting, locus of control often refers to the areas where an employee has direct influence. There are many instances where an authorizer may not have much direct influence over official, institution-wide DEI decisions. In those cases, it's important to identify what you can influence and how you can take action.

One authorizer of color spoke about the high attrition rates for people of color in their organization. Since it was clear the institution did not plan to address the issue, the authorizer began an informal mentorship program. When people of color were hired, this authorizer took it upon themselves to regularly check in, even if they were not a direct report, and learn about their experiences, offering advice when appropriate. **This practice led to higher retention and resulted in more people of color advancing in the organization.**

Advocate for change.

In her book, *Inclusion Revolution*, Daisy Auger-Dominguez states, "...we cannot fix decades of structural inequity by tinkering at the margins."[12] While it is important and sometimes necessary to start small, playing small forever will ensure that the DEI gap persists. If you are in a position to make direct policy changes, make them. If you are not, you must be willing to agitate for change and advocate—for yourself and others.

What does agitating for a change look like?

What does agitating for change look like? According to HR experts,[13] the following five strategies can help grow organizational support for DEI initiatives:

Make DEI personal. For some people, DEI can feel abstract or irrelevant. Explain to leadership how the organization's culture impacts real people and how not addressing equity and inclusion issues impacts individuals. Breaking down DEI and helping leadership understand how people are impacted can result in leaders taking DEI more seriously.

Bring in the experts. For better or worse, outside perspectives can have outsized influence. Bringing in a DEI expert can help leaders internalize the importance of the work in a way they may not be able to from internal staff. Additionally, sharing DEI case studies and success stories from similar organizations or competitors can be convincing.

> One authorizer told us how their agency contracted with the Pacific Educational Group to provide Courageous Conversation training. As a result of that training, the department created an equity council which has become an integral part of ensuring the agency lives up to their DEI goals.

Understand others' motivation. Every leader has priorities for their organization; understanding what motivates them can help determine which data and talking points will best influence them as it relates to DEI. And once you know what motivates your leadership, know when to push. One authorizer we spoke to explained it this way: "Another concrete way to agitate for change is to resist the subtle and not-so-subtle pressure from hiring managers who want to hire their [person] to the exclusion of more qualified candidates."

Gather data. Data speaks volumes. Use demographic data and qualitative data gathered from staff to tell the story of the organization's culture and to explain how moving the data needle will help the organization meet its bottom line.

Tie DEI to your mission and your bottom line. Connecting DEI to both your mission and your bottom line can be convincing. Do your research and find out how DEI can help your organization accomplish its most urgent goals or help address its most vexing problems.

2. Know Your Data And Address The Gaps

How do you know you are making the right kind of difference? That question should be at the heart of re-designing systems and highlights the importance of using data and evidence to pursue ambitious goals. Despite knowing how essential data and evidence are, too many organizations do not have well-thought-out goals, nor do they collect data and track goal progress related to creating organizational contexts where a diverse workforce can thrive. Here are some strategies to consider in strengthening an evidence-informed approach to creating that kind of workforce culture.

Know where to start.

Simply collecting socio-demographic data, for example, and then randomly setting goals and pursuing DEI initiatives, is unlikely to result in the change you seek. In fact, this approach could have unintended negative outcomes. A more thoughtful, inclusive, and planned approach is required to know what parts of your organization are in need of attention, and how to effectively design remedies to create a stronger context.

Form a diverse planning team. Teams of diverse stakeholders can help in many ways, such as identifying where data collection and analysis are needed. Your planning team should include non-authorizing staff (perhaps from the broader institutions where many authorizers are situated), and external people from communities interested in stronger outcomes for students and families. Be intentional: include a wide range of backgrounds and experiences that will bring a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints,

such as expertise in equitable human resource practices and policies, political affiliation, experience with lower-income contexts or homelessness, supervisory and non-supervisory experiences, and more. Do not neglect having a racially and ethnically diverse group as race/ethnicity continues to be a key diversity marker lacking in many authorizing offices.

Identify areas to collect data. There are many different systems of internal culture where you could collect data—and be overwhelmed in the process of doing so. It's better to use your diverse planning team to identify the one or two systems where you should begin to collect and unpack data. Hiring, promotion, compensation structures, supervisory/management approach, and performance evaluations have been identified as some of the more common internal systems that limit a more diverse workforce from thriving and could be a starting list for investigation.

Gather initial data and evidence. After identifying the specific areas of inquiry, collect initial data on those systems. This data will likely be quantitative (e.g., backgrounds, experiences, and socio-demographics of new hires over the last five years) and describe the outcomes of interest. Such data is important to identify the magnitude of a potential problem and will begin to paint a picture of the system you seek to understand. One way to collect this data is through an equity audit: a study of the fairness of an institution's policies, programs, and practices.[14] Why an equity audit as compared to a traditional organizational audit? An equity audit specifically looks at policies, programs, and practices that impact students or staff relative to their race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, color, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or other socio-culturally significant factors. A regular organizational audit may have an equity component, but that is not its specific purpose.

A NOTE ABOUT GATHERING SENSITIVE DATA

There are a variety of challenges—both real and perceived—in collecting data on the backgrounds and socio-demographics of employees. In some instances, state law, current institutional policies, and staff unwilling to provide information can create challenges in understanding the issue you seek to address. While you should certainly follow state law and current institutional policies (always check with legal counsel first), and respect the employees' privacy rights, data access challenges should generally be addressed as a barrier to overcome, not an unsurmountable obstacle. If institutional policy prohibits collecting necessary data, ask questions and agitate for change.

A NOTE ABOUT COLLECTING DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION IN A THOUGHTFUL WAY

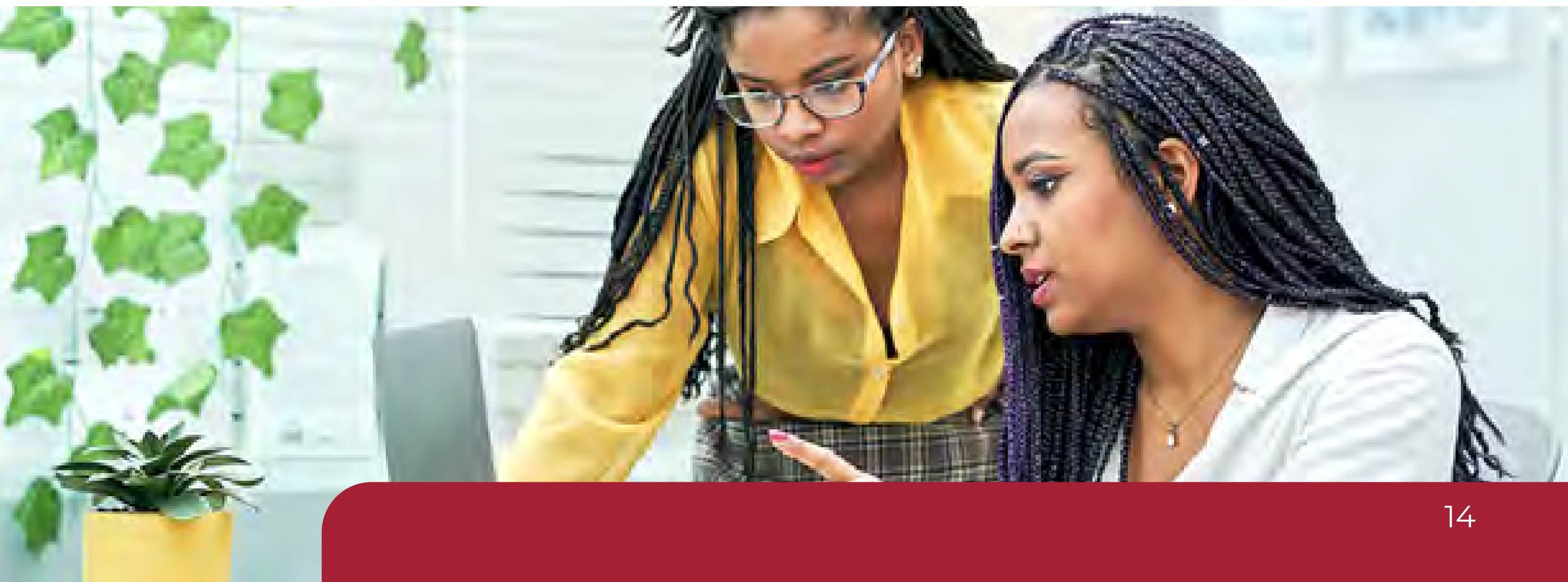
There are a variety oft ethnic groups not typically listed on demographic gathering forms, especially if the forms mirror the U.S. Census. In particular, **Middle Eastern and North African Americans (sometimes referred to as the MENA community)** often feel overlooked because no distinct identity category exists for them. One authorizer we spoke with said "...my ethnic group doesn't even exist [according to the form] and I usually have to mark 'Other'...which has been a struggle for me each time I have to fill out a form about race and try to fit in boxes that do not represent who I am." While no collection process is perfect, we encourage always including an opportunity for respondents to self-describe, in addition to the identity categories traditionally used in demographic data collection protocols. For more information on inclusive demographic data collection practices, please check out this tip sheet from Harvard's Office of Regulatory Affairs and Research Compliance.

Deeply understand the data and implications.

One mistake some teams make is to jump from collecting initial data to designing solutions. When potential problems are identified, a critical next step is to deeply understand potential causes and if the gaps are a problem in need of remedy. This step is critical to designing effective action plans, when needed. You may find that you and your team need to spend the most time deeply understanding the data and its potential implications.

Gather additional data and perspectives, especially from those most impacted. Those closest to the challenges usually have the most insight into their causes and potential solutions. Seek explicit feedback from a variety of employees, prioritizing the people most impacted. This usually involves collecting qualitative information using a range of methods, including interviews, listening sessions, focus groups, anonymous surveys, and other methods. Your planning team can explore the pros and cons of doing this information collection work internally or through an external consultant. The other advantage of seeking potential causes and solutions from impacted staff is an increased likelihood of buy-in and sustainable solutions.

Combat confirmation bias. It's important to actively seek out information and perspectives that challenge your own thinking on the issue you are trying to understand. We all can fall into the trap of only listening to people and/or groups we are comfortable hearing from and/or are familiar with; however, when that happens, acknowledge it and course-correct by seeking other voices. Some of those people will already be on your planning team; but it is wise to also seek out additional feedback from other people or organizations who may have different perceptions, including people and organizations who may disagree that you have a problem at all. Actively seek those people and groups, and gather perspectives from them.



Digest, synthesize, and make informed hypotheses. After collecting a wide range of perspectives from those most impacted as well as from experts, and seeking out disconfirming evidence, you should have a robust picture of the system, including some ideas for how to effectively address it. Your planning team should be active in the process of digesting and synthesizing the additional data and evidence you have collected. The goal is to have a clear enough picture of the system for you and the planning team to make some hypotheses as to why the system is not working as intended and what actions you can take to address the root causes.

Boldly plan for action, evaluation, and success.

While progress may be incremental, your goals and solutions should be bold. Describe the optimum system: what will it look like if we have successfully re-designed this system so a more diverse workforce can thrive?

Action planning. An effective plan addresses the underlying causes identified, is inclusively executed with buy-in from a range of key stakeholders, and is tailored to your organization's unique way of working. Action planning can be dramatically strengthened through the use of logic models. Logic models are tools that help create road maps for change by describing the outcome desired, creating key outcomes and interim benchmarks, describing the key activities your team thinks will have the most impact and will pursue, and detailing the institutional resources you have (or need) to bring to bear. Logic models have been used in a range of effective planning and evaluation scenarios. Mathematica has a great brief that outlines the value of logic models in helping plan and evaluate complex initiatives.

Additionally, ensuring that your goals are robust is essential. While most people have heard of SMART goals (Strategic, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, and Time-bound), we encourage you to also reflect on how your goals will impact marginalized communities and/or create positive change. The Management Center has great resources on creating SMARTIE goals (SMART + the incorporation of Inclusion and Equity).

Flexible implementation, monitoring, and adaptation. Even if you have identified the right causes and contributing factors and designed a strong action plan, progress will be uneven (as it always is in complex systems changes). Treat your action plan as a living, flexible plan that you will modify and adapt as you learn more about how it intersects with the people implementing it. You may choose to adjust your planning team to include additional people responsible for the plan's implementation and execution.

One reason plans fail, in addition to being inflexible, is that they are not implemented well. That's why it's important to monitor implementation fidelity—the degree to which actors are implementing the plan consistently. If you see the plan not being implemented with fidelity, be curious as to why and be open to the degree to which you may need to revisit your assumptions, adjust your logic model, or seek out other data and evidence as to why you are not seeing progress. Importantly, seek to "fail fast" by identifying roadblocks and challenges early and addressing them as quickly as possible.

Public accountability. When you make your goals and progress towards those goals public, people know the organization is serious about achieving bold goals. (Depending on your context, "public" can mean the general public or the larger organization.) This builds in some informal accountability that can lead to stronger outcomes.

A NOTE ABOUT RESOURCE INVESTMENT

According to Dr. Amante-Jackson of the Disruptive Equity Education Project, it can take eight to ten years for an organization to fully achieve its diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.[15] DEI work is a long, difficult road. It can be easy to hit bumps and give up. That means the resource investments necessary for change—investments in staff time, consultants, operating systems, the creation and implementation of new policies and practices, and more—should not be underestimated or undervalued. It will be important for an organization to allocate resources commensurate with its goals, and think long term about those investments.

3. Build Purposeful Pipelines, Ensure Unbiased Hiring, And Build Paths For Advancement

Have you heard the phrase, "If you build it, they will come?" While that mindset may work in the movies, in reality, it's not as simple. To attract talent, especially historically under-resourced talent, you have to start with your organization's Employee Value Proposition (EVP): the reasons why someone would want to work for you. The most essential components of EVP are compensation and benefits, career (e.g., opportunities for advancement, professional development, and feedback), work environment, and culture. If your organization struggles to attract diverse talent, ask yourself if your compensation, advancement policies, processes for providing development and feedback, and work environment/culture signal to diverse communities that you value them and they would be set up to thrive. When asked or surveyed, do current employees articulate that they feel welcomed and set up to succeed? If not, then it's time to revisit your EVP.

Expand your talent pool.

Author Daisy Auger-Dominguez, states, "There's not a lack of talent; there's a lack of effort… Talent is equally distributed; opportunity is not."[16] Don't rely on your network alone. The U.S. is more diverse than ever, yet research shows that 75% of white Americans do not have any non-white friends. Furthermore, since 1990,[17] there has been a significant increase in low-income and affluent housing segregation.[18] That means that many people's personal and professional networks are not racially or economically diverse, making it essential to look beyond.

Many schools around the country, including charter schools, have faced teacher shortages for years. As they have tried new methods for expanding their talent pools, a variety of best practices have emerged.[19] With the connections between charter schools and authorizing, it is logical to believe that many of these lessons learned can be applied to authorizing as well.

> **Start with internal staff first and employee referrals.** Are there people of color ready for a promotion? Don't pass up an opportunity to reward in-house talent. Of course, you shouldn't expect that any internal staff will be prepared for a promotion unless they have been supported to develop along the way. Developing and retaining talent, particularly talent of color, requires a commitment to both good management and adequate resourcing.

Ask your employees more questions. Community-centered authorizing requires authorizers to ask questions of and seek feedback from the communities they serve to better understand the aspirations and needs of those communities. In the same way, authorizers should be asking more questions of their employees in order to understand their needs and how best to support them. Start by checking in with them one-on-one and asking about the skills they're most comfortable with, as well as those for which they would like more development opportunities. Opener questions might include:

What parts of your job are most interesting and rewarding?

What areas are you finding most challenging right now?

Are there any other projects, committees, or additional responsibilities you would like to be part of?

Create more on-the-job opportunities. Once you are aware of the skills your employees are seeking, act with intention. Look for opportunities to develop them, both big and small. For example, in addition to providing formal learning opportunities (i.e., paying for a staff member interested in developing their project management abilities to pursue project management certification), you should also provide more informal opportunities (i.e., if a staffer shares they are struggling to collaborate with a coworker and would like you to thought partner with them on how to handle the situation, consider role-playing how to have a difficult conversation).

Several authorizers mentioned the difficulty in seeing the pipeline for career growth through authorizing and understanding the impact an authorizer can have.

Consider asking staff members of color to be "recruitment ambassadors" and engage their networks to find talent. However, be thoughtful when asking women and people of color to take on extra work. There is a history of women and people of color being expected to take on additional labor without recognition and without compensation.[20] Most charter schools offer a "finder's fee" between $250 - $1,000 per hire, and we believe a similar reward system would be reasonable within the authorizing sector.

Check with partner organizations and universities. Authorizing organizations should also look to partner organizations and related industries for historically under-resourced talent. For example, authorizing institutions could consider looking to charter schools, school districts, and governmental agencies for additional talent with transferrable skills.

Further, authorizers—even those not associated with higher education institutions—should consider creating partnerships with local or national colleges. Many charter schools partner with universities that have teacher residency programs and identify high-potential graduates (i.e., students who have won merit awards) to recruit. Others offer volunteer opportunities at their charter schools and actively recruit people who demonstrate a strong fit with their school's values. For authorizers, parallel strategies might include working with universities to identify students with an interest in education and public service, or by setting up paid internships and fellowships that can serve as recruitment opportunities.

Online marketing is the new job fair. Researchers and experts agree that job fairs are not effective in hiring teachers, particularly experienced teachers.[21] Instead, candidates now are more likely to use social media and digital job boards to find jobs. Therefore, charter schools are investing more time and resources into improving their online marketing strategies. Authorizers should take note: research shows the following tactics as key components of a successful online marketing strategy.

Set yourself apart. What's your organization's Employee Value Proposition (EVP): the *why* someone would want to work for you? Take what sets your organization apart and shout it from the rooftops (i.e., include it in all marketing materials).

Target who you want. Market specifically to the demographic of candidates you're trying to attract. For example, if you would like to see more Black candidates in your pool, consider paid digital advertisements focused on Black users.

Update online accounts regularly. Keep all of your online accounts updated with your recent job openings and be sure to take down any postings for jobs that have been filled. Candidates may come across postings in a variety of ways, and inaccurate or outdated posts are a turnoff.

Social media is here to stay: 80% of all job searches are done online; more than 90% of professional recruiters use LinkedIn to search for candidates.[22] Use social media to help build your brand and strategically recruit. Be sure to check that your social media is diverse and reflects your organization's intentions. For example, consider your visual imagery: are you marketing to attract people of color but only share pictures of white staff?

Consider working with diversity-focused recruitment agencies for referrals. Feel overwhelmed? Don't have the time to focus on recruitment? A recruitment agency, specifically one that has a diversity focus, could be the solution. Talent agencies like Offor and Edgility have built expansive networks of talent and can help connect organizations with exceptionally skilled candidates of color. Organizations must commit adequate resources to the hiring process, as services like these can be expensive.

Watch the language in your job descriptions.

When done well, a job description can help attract more diverse candidates by telling a compelling story for why your organization is a welcoming place for all. But unfortunately, many job descriptions are stale at best and offensive at worst. Research shows that gendered language reduces the likelihood of women applying to those roles.[23] Of course, we all have our blind spots, and even many thoughtful people are not always aware of the way in which their language choices can cause others harm. For that reason, it's important to seek feedback on how digital platforms, like Textio, can help recommend bias-free language.

Organizations are far more likely to attract a diverse candidate pool if job descriptions focus on the core requirements of the job rather than a subjective list of qualifications. For example, is it truly necessary that someone have 10+ years of experience for a role? Perhaps it would be better to instead assess the person's ability to perform the day-to-day responsibilities via a performance task.

Rely on things beyond resumes, then hire for skills, not fit.

Employers on average only spend 7.4 seconds scanning a resume.[24] What can someone truly gather from looking at a resume for less than 10 seconds? Evidence suggests they tend to base their impressions on current job title and universities attended—both of which are poor predictors of success.

Instead of relying on resumes to filter candidates, put more emphasis on a cover letter and/or use skills-based screenings. Ask people to share why they want the job and what they would uniquely bring to the role. This can be an indicator of someone's eagerness and passion for a role, compared to a resume. Additionally, consider how the cover letter will be reviewed—is perfection or a complete lack of typos necessary? Or is the ability to enthusiastically convey passion and ideas more important? It's important to keep in mind that "worship of the written word" can be a tool of exclusion.

Then have candidates complete skills-based assignments—something similar to what they would be tasked to do in the actual role—to see candidates' work product. If the task is particularly laborious, consider paying candidates for their time.

What does it mean when someone says, "They're not a good fit"? While it can sometimes mean that the person doesn't share the organization's values, more often it means that the person does not share the hiring manager's background and interests. This is a biased approach: just because someone does not have a shared background/experience does not mean they lack the skills or values to succeed. Instead of relying on "fit" for decision making, rely on skills-based screenings and questions related to your organizational values as the determining factors for hiring decisions.

Build better interview teams, ask better questions, and standardize decision making.

Interview panels should be diverse in skills and responsibilities so they can thoughtfully, and more accurately, assess candidates' potential and capacity. Ideally, an interview panel should consist of a direct peer, a cross-functional peer, a direct-report, and the hiring manager. Of those people, at least one person, at a minimum, should be from a historically under-resourced group. More diverse panels can be helpful: first, because it can be overwhelming to candidates when they encounter a homogenous group, and they may wonder if they belong in that space. Furthermore, data shows that more diverse interview teams lead to more women and people of color being hired.

What should the interview panel do? Every interview panel and hiring manager should use a structured hiring approach. According to Auger-Dominguez, "A structured hiring approach is a step-by-step plan that applies a fair, consistent lens… and sets a list of clear, objective criteria to evaluate all candidates, uses a deliberate process and an evaluation rubric applied consistently to all candidates, and ensures hiring decisions are based on evidence, not subjective relationships." We would add that panelists should undergo ongoing bias training to help them understand their role, the power of their decisions in that role, and how best to reduce bias in the work.

Structured hiring processes will differ from organization to organization. A brief overview of some key components of structured hiring approaches is below, but for a more detailed framework, consult Candour's Inclusive Hiring Guidelines.

A structured hiring process generally consists of four components:

1 Kickoff Meeting

Review the job description and ensure all interviewers/panelists are familiar with the key job parameters and responsibilities for the role. Ensure that all panelists have received bias training and can demonstrate best practices related to reducing bias.

2 Rubric Definition

What are the essential skills and needs of the team? Include these skills and capabilities as part of a quantitative rating system, or rubric. Regularly review the rubric and revise if and when embedded bias is identified.

3 Interview and Question Planning

Standardize and align all interview questions with the rubric. Proactively discuss how the impact of bias will be mitigated.

4 Candidate Evaluation

Start interview debriefs with the question: "Where could bias be showing up in this decision?" This can feel uncomfortable at first but helps identify patterns that could lead to exclusion. When interviews are done, reconvene as soon as possible so you're relying on facts and not impressions. Have each person articulate the reasoning behind their scoring.

A NOTE ABOUT HIRING "FIRSTS"

Be transparent about where your organization is on its DEI journey. If you are hiring someone that may be a "first" in your organization, be honest about that. If appropriate (i.e., if it would not be a violation of privacy), consider sharing the results of your most recent equity audit or other data collected regarding relevant issues related to identity. Recognize that this is something that is important for someone to know as they determine if the organization is one they want to work in.

Pay people well.

Pay disparities persist for women and people of color (and most starkly for women of color) across almost every sector in our country. There are a variety of factors that play into such gaps, but one critical factor is salary negotiating. Even when women do ask for raises, the research shows they are less likely to receive them, and this is more significant of a problem for women of color.[24] One way to help reduce pay disparities is to do away with salary negotiations all together. Instead, conduct pay audits of comparable roles in the sector, set a salary or narrow salary range, and be transparent and firm that all candidates, regardless of their identity, will be offered that amount. Once an audit is completed, if you find that current employees are being paid below that range, "right size" their salaries to eliminate further pay disparities. Another potential way to promote equitable pay is to compensate people for significant work outside of their typical duties, such as participating as part of an interview or hiring panel.

"Given that we are state employees, we [have to] adhere to state regulations on [pay]. In the last few years, we have done a good job in the area of identifying potential pay disparities and adjusting them. Additionally, throughout my career, I have made it a point to support women in particular, but all employees, in finding their voice in pay negotiations and encouraging their personal advocacy."

Invest in performance evaluations and define paths to advancement.

Sadly, research shows that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People Of Color) employees, particularly women of color, are less likely to receive promotions and are most at risk of receiving harsh evaluations.[25] The most effective organizations recognize that talent is critical to success, and yet, far too often, the talent of women and people of color goes unrecognized and unrewarded.

Feedback. Women and people of color tend to receive two types of harmful feedback: (a) vague feedback that does not cultivate performance or growth, or (b) biased or racist feedback rooted in stereotypes (ex: Latinx/e women being told they're too feisty, or Asian employees being told they're not assertive enough to be "management material").

Vague feedback is often driven by managers who are uncomfortable giving feedback, especially across lines of difference. Research shows that men receive more effective, candid feedback than their female peers, and this is correlated with differences in advancement. All employees benefit when they receive specific and actionable feedback, but the lack of feedback especially hurts women and people of color.

Biased feedback happens when managers focus on style—for example, the way in which an employee communicates or how they dress—not substance, or the content of their work. Tone policing is a good example of a type of biased feedback. Tone policing can be defined as a "conversational tactic that dismisses the ideas being communicated when they are perceived to be delivered in an angry, frustrated, sad, fearful, or otherwise emotionally charged manner."

Feedback should always be focused on developing a person and helping advance their growth. Before giving feedback to anyone, managers should first stop and investigate their intentions and then, only deliver that feedback if their intentions are genuine. If it is in fact genuine, it is still important to focus on substance, not style. Committing to using a feedback framework, such as Situation-Behavior-Impact framework,[26] can help ensure that everyone understands what effective feedback looks like.

Performance Evaluations. People are notoriously bad at rating others. There is a lot of research that shows that between 55 - 71% of a person's performance rating is impacted by the Idiosyncratic Rater Effect, or the "unique rating patterns of the individual doing the rating."[27] This means that, when we look at a rating, while we think it reveals something about the person, it actually says more about the rater. Thus, it is not surprising that many people, especially women and people of color, find performance evaluations and promotion criteria unfair. Unfortunately, research shows that it is extremely difficult to combat the Idiosyncratic Rater Effect. However, there are some strategies to lessen the impact:

Base performance evaluations on specific goals and expectations. That way, the evaluation is based more on whether a person achieved an objective goal rather than more subjective criteria.

Base advancement decisions on multiple—not single—performance reviews. Normalize continuous feedback.

Consider using 360-type of evaluations. Having multiple views of a person's performance can help dampen the impact of a single person's bias.

Transparent Pathways for Advancement. One of the top reasons that people leave their jobs is the lack of opportunities for advancement.[28] Promotions, pay raises, and any other earned incentives should have well-defined pathways. This includes making sure that for advancement, all employees are aware of what skills will be needed, how long sustained performance is required, and what is required to demonstrate a willingness to grow. Further, each employee should have an individualized and personalized plan to help them prepare for possible advancement.

4. Cultivate Culturally Competent, But Humble, Leadership and Teams

Build cultural competence.

There is a saying that people don't leave bad jobs, they leave bad bosses. Research supports the importance of relationships between managers and staff;[29] one of the best ways to create a more inclusive and equitable work culture is to become a manager who is culturally competent—someone who actively embraces an inclusion mindset. According to *Inclusion on Purpose* by Ruchika Tulshyan, an inclusion mindset:

> *"...depends on us to work hard, strategize, and seek input from others, especially those who have experienced exclusion and bias at work...We must believe that we can grow, learn, and adapt to include a rapidly changing, diversifying workforce."*

Often, managers and others in leadership positions may not even realize that they lack an inclusion mindset and/or cultural competence. While their intent may not be malicious, the impact of their actions and words on others can still be detrimental. Thus, it is important for leaders to be introspective and think about where they are in their journey to an inclusion mindset. Anyone unwilling to put in the effort to grow their mindset should restrain from supervising and/or mentoring others.

Another resource that can benefit some leaders is the BRIDGE Framework.[30]

Be Uncomfortable.

Reflect on what you don't know.

Invite feedback.

Defensiveness doesn't help.

Grow from your mistakes.

Expect that change takes time.

Be uncomfortable.

Confronting bias and developing awareness of our own privilege and prejudices can be incredibly uncomfortable. Push through the discomfort. A lack of discomfort likely means there is not enough learning taking place.

Reflect on what you don't know.

Even DEI experts know that they do not know everything. What communities are you a part of and know deeply? What perspectives are you less familiar with? The communities you are less familiar with may experience exclusion or bias in a way that is different than you realize. Once you've identified the community perspectives you are less familiar with, make a plan for how you will learn more about each. Then be sure to use what you have learned to create more inclusive spaces.

Invite feedback.

While it may be uncomfortable, seek feedback from your direct reports and other employees about how you could better facilitate an inclusive workspace. Start by announcing that you will be seeking candid feedback on creating a more inclusive work culture so that the expectation is established and no one is caught off guard. Smaller organizations can ask for feedback in regularly scheduled check-ins, while larger organizations can survey to ensure all voices are heard. Be sure to prioritize feedback from historically under-resourced people. Some questions to consider include:

Do you feel like you belong here? Why or why not?

Was there a time when I made you feel included? What did I do to foster that?

Was there a time when I could have done more to make you feel included? How?

How can I create a more inclusive environment on this team?

What would you like to see me committing to in order to create a more inclusive team environment?

What could I do differently now and in the future?

Of course, inviting feedback means little if nothing is done with that feedback. So, be sure to take action once you've received the insights from staff. If possible, anonymously share the learnings with full staff and let everyone know how you plan to make change.

Defensiveness doesn't help.

Feedback doesn't always feel good. It can bring up feelings of hurt and anger, especially if the feedback implicates us in perpetuating bias or hurting someone else. But as the saying goes, "You cannot grow from what you do not know." Working through defensiveness is hard but essential.

Grow from your mistakes.

Expect to make mistakes. Everyone does. Be willing to admit to them and then take action to correct those mistakes.

Expect that change takes time.

Organizational cultural change will not take place overnight and it is not linear. There is no "one and done" process when it comes to building an inclusive mindset. One must constantly and consistently return to the basics of the BRIDGE Framework.

5. Build In Supports

As a leader, make sure you are giving your staff opportunities and not just chances. As Lucinda Martinez explains, “A real opportunity is an endorsement that also comes with support… A chance is when you throw the person out there and hope that they can make it, but no phone calls are made. They are thrown in to fend for themselves. When you get a chance, it comes with no support, and if you make a mistake, you’re counted out. That’s why many people of color don’t make it to the end.”[31]

So, what kind of supports are needed to help ensure people are being given authentic opportunities? Certainly, supports will look different depending on your organization and resources, but some helpful supports include:

Employee Resource Groups. These groups, sometimes called affinity groups, are employee-led and formed around common backgrounds, offering staff opportunities for camaraderie and connection. Unfortunately, affinity groups are often under-resourced and not given any sort of power. To ensure such groups have what they need to be successful, be sure to:

Assign an executive sponsor to the group. That person does not need to identify within the group, but they would serve as an advocate for the group at the most senior levels of the organization.

Reward leaders of affinity groups. Leaders of these groups are disproportionately women and people of color—those who are often underpaid for their work contributions. If your organization can offer financial compensation, do that. If not, consider what other kinds of rewards can be offered to show appreciation for the time and effort that goes into managing employee resource groups.

Be an ally. Even if you don’t identify within a particular affinity group, you can be an ally. If invited, volunteer to participate. Take what you learn and act on it.

Mentorship and sponsorship. While some people use mentorship and sponsorship interchangeably, author Daisy Auger-Dominguez argues that there is a difference: "Mentoring is about upskilling; sponsorship is about putting your professional equity at stake to help someone succeed. With mentorship, you're advising someone; with sponsorship, you're sharing your access and privilege..." Leaders in authorizing should commit to mentoring or sponsoring others within the field. Furthermore, if you manage others, be your team's cheerleader and especially lean into sponsoring those direct reports from historically under-resourced groups.

If your organization has a mentorship program in place or is considering implementing one, be sure to learn from the research and best practices in the field.[31] While no two mentoring programs are the same, authorizing institutions should ensure the following basics are in place:

Analyze areas for improvement. What does your institution hope to improve or accomplish through a mentorship program? Mentorship programs need clear goals: understanding your *why* for the program is the first step.

Gather employee feedback. In addition to the goals of the institution, mentorship programs should fit the needs of those participating. Ask employees what they hope to get out of the program early on in the process so responses can be incorporated into program goals and programming.

Carefully select leaders; be thoughtful how you pair people. Being a mentor is a big commitment and responsibility. Obviously, it's important to pick people with strong leadership abilities, but it's also important to choose people who will make sufficient time for mentoring and who understand the weight of the responsibilities.

What do your mentees want from their mentoring experience? Some may want to "learn the ropes" of their specific role within authorizing, while others may be looking for guidance on how to advance into leadership roles. Whatever their interests, try and pair them with a mentor who can offer relevant advice. Use a simple survey at the beginning of the process to help you gather the data you need.

Develop rules for the program; train everyone on those rules. While no one wants to be micromanaged, strive for a relatively consistent experience across all mentees. Have basic rules to ensure a baseline of expectations. For example, you may want to create a monthly evaluation form for both mentees and mentors to establish a regular cadence for communication.

Once rules are established, train both mentors and mentees on any related procedures, processes, and rubrics. Transparency is essential; by training everyone, any uneven power dynamics due to unequal access to information can be avoided.

Inform staff members of the program. This may seem obvious, but it must be said: get the word out about your mentorship opportunities. Don't rely solely on the typical communication channels. To ensure that historically under-resourced groups are aware of the opportunities, ask employee resource groups and other affinity spaces to help spread the word.

Recognize mentors' and mentees' successes. One way to encourage employees to participate in a mentorship program is by recognizing their efforts. For example, if a mentor helps a mentee improve your office's renewal process, acknowledge that publicly.

Review employee feedback and performance, and implement improvements regularly. After a mentorship program has been launched, review what's working and where improvements are needed. This might include sending a follow-up survey, reviewing employee performance metrics, or asking for feedback. Whatever the results/feedback are, be sure to act on them. People will only continue to participate if they see that the program has value and that participants are respected.

Remember, while formal mentorship and sponsorship programs are great, this type of coaching doesn't always have to be laid out in policy. Multiple authorizers we spoke to discussed how grateful they have been for the informal mentorship they have received from colleagues in their offices or even in other authorizing institutions, as they learned to navigate the field.

Many authorizing offices are small, so it may not always be possible to provide all the supports in-house that your team needs to excel. Luckily, there are a variety of professional development opportunities, as well as affinity groups and fellowships/leadership development opportunities within the education space. Local or national, identity-driven or identity-agnostic, authorizing-specific or more broadly focused on education—there are more opportunities than can be named here. Look for opportunities that can help your employees meet the goals they have for themselves, as well as benefit your organization. Remember, there are numerous supports available for leaders and managers, as well, including fellowship programs through organizations like the Pahara Institute and EdLoc.

CALL TO ACTION

Diversity is an evidence-based asset for organizations. Given the available research, as well as personal and professional experience, NACSA knows that the field of authorizing would benefit from addressing its diversity gap.

But to do this, authorizers cannot just focus on hiring more people from historically marginalized backgrounds (though that must certainly be part of the strategy). They must also focus on building more equitable and inclusive work cultures, where ALL people can thrive.

This is not an easy task, and most authorizing institutions won't be able to incorporate every recommendation in this toolkit. However, we believe that every authorizer can find and do something to improve their workplace cultures. Our call to action is that: assess your culture, determine where your gaps are, and do what's in your power to address these gaps.

In addition to this toolkit, NACSA is hosting a variety of related, relevant workshops. Be sure to stay in the loop with NACSA and our resource offerings by signing up for our newsletter. Go to qualitycharters.org and enter your email in the Subscribe section.

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