League of Women Voters of the Bay Area

BAY AREA MONITOR

Overview

The Monitor is a bimonthly magazine covering policies, plans, programs, and legislation that affect quality of life in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. By raising awareness about these efforts, the Monitor aims to increase stakeholder involvement in their development and implementation.

Publication Schedule

February 1	April 1	June 1	August 1	October 1	December 1

Topics

Transportation
Air Quality
Energy
Water
Open Space
Housing & Land Use

Audience

Elected Officials
Government Staff
Nonprofit Organizations
Business Leaders
Engaged Community Members
League of Women Voters Members

Distribution

Bay Area & Sacramento
3,000 print copies
1,200 digital subscribers
Weekly "Notes" email newsletter
All-access website
Active Facebook page

People

The Monitor is overseen by the board of directors of the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area, and is produced by a 5-member team of publishing professionals.

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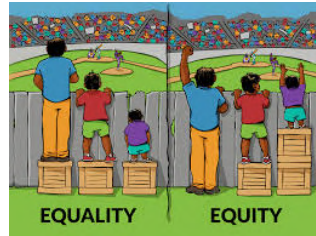Editor & Project Manager

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Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter

why dei matters: https://independentsector.org/resource/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter/

October 6, 2016

Monisha Kapila, Ericka Hines, and Martha Searby; ProInspire

Diversity, equity, inclusion. Nonprofit organizations use these words as they strive to become more diverse, yet many leaders are uncertain about the steps needed to turn dialogue – and intention – into action. ProInspire's work to develop leaders at all levels for the social sector has shown us that for many organizations, the desire to increase diversity isn't translating into the reality of an environment that enables people of different backgrounds to succeed, and diverse, mission-advancing perspectives to be heard.

There has never been a more relevant time to help organizations succeed in their efforts to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Independent Sector Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion focus area highlights information and tools to help leaders make the changes that will lead to more diverse, inclusive, and equitable organizations. In this post, we offer a foundational understanding of the issues: baseline definitions, the case for why diversity matters, and an introduction to the resources that you'll find in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion focus area.

Definitions

We define diversity, equity, and inclusion based on language from the D5 Coalition, Racial Equity Tools Glossary, and UC Berkeley:

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. While diversity is often used in reference to race, ethnicity, and gender, we embrace a broader definition of diversity that also includes age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. Our definition also includes diversity of thought: ideas, perspectives, and values. We also recognize that individuals affiliate with multiple identities.

Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. It's important to note that while an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group isn't always inclusive. Increasingly, recognition of unconscious or 'implicit bias' helps organizations to be deliberate about addressing issues of inclusivity.

The Case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Four key arguments make the case for diversity, equity, and inclusion:

The moral or social justice case asserts that each person has value to contribute, and that we must address barriers and historical factors that have led to unfair conditions for marginalized populations. For example, racial equity refers to what a genuinely non-racist society would look like, where the distribution of society's benefits and burdens would not be skewed by race, and individuals would be no more or less likely to experience them due to the color of their skin. From a moral perspective, nonprofits are created to improve society and as such they should be diverse, inclusive, and equitable.

The economic case is based on the idea that organizations and countries that tap into diverse talent pools are stronger and more efficient. Economists see discrimination as economic inefficiency – the result of a systematic misallocation of human resources. In fact, the Center For American Progress finds that workplace discrimination against employees based on race, gender or sexual orientation costs businesses an estimated $64 billion annually. That amount represents the annual estimated cost of losing and replacing more than 2 million American workers who leave their jobs each year due to unfairness and discrimination. In this argument, organizations should become more diverse and inclusive because it makes economic sense to leverage the talent pools of different populations.

The market case states that organizations will better serve their customers if they reflect the diversity of their market base. A dramatic demographic shift is under way in the U.S., which will be majority non-white around 2043 according to the Census Bureau. In the private sector, companies such as Deloitte recognize the buying power of minority populations and highlight that diversity is critical to growing market share and bottom line. In the nonprofit sector, clients are our customers, and they want to see themselves represented in the organizations that serve them. Donors are also customers, and organizations and their clients can benefit from the resources of different groups. What's more, organizations with diverse leadership are more likely to understand the needs of a diverse client base.

The results case is that diverse teams lead to better outputs. Scott Page, author of *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies*, uses mathematical modeling and case studies to show how diversity leads to increased productivity. His research found that diverse groups of problem solvers outperform the groups of the best individuals at solving problems. Diverse nonprofit organizations, and the diversity of perspectives within them, will lead to better solutions to social problems.

Why Does This Matter Now?

Nonprofits and foundations are talking about these issues in ways that we have not seen before. Multiple factors have influenced this conversation. First, recent social movements have pushed this issue to a higher priority; Black Live Matters, the marriage equality movement, and the movement to end mass incarceration all focus on inequities in our country. What's more, other industries are openly talking about their diversity and inclusion efforts and showing how they benefit the bottom line. The technology industry, in particular, has been spotlighted with organizations sharing data, individuals sharing experiences, and media scrutinizing progress. Finally, the philanthropic sector is starting to collect data so we can track our own progress, or lack thereof. The D5 Coalition conducted the first-ever, comprehensive collection of diversity data in philanthropy over the past five years. Their State of the Work report shows that more foundations are reporting their own demographic data, and collecting data from grantees, than when the initiative began in 2010. However, it also documents minimal to no progress around people of color at different levels in foundations in the same period.

Role of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion focus area

We believe that an organization that prioritizes diversity, equity and inclusion creates an environment that respects and values individual difference along varying dimensions. In addition, inclusive organizations foster cultures that minimize bias and recognize and address systemic inequities, which, if unaddressed, can create disadvantage for certain individuals. This is not a human resources issue, it is a strategic issue. These efforts should be reflected in organizational mission, vision, and values; incorporated into strategic plans; and cascaded throughout the organization.

The focus area will include resources tied to the nonprofit workforce: the current state of diversity, recruitment and selection, retention and diverse teams, leadership and boards, and programs and stakeholders. Where applicable, we highlight resources that apply to specific diversity characteristics. In summer 2016, we focus on race, ethnicity, age, and generations. During the rest of 2016, we will focus on gender, economic diversity, physical ability, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Leaders must invest time, resources, and courage to make progress on creating an inclusive environment. We encourage you to leverage resources in the focus area as you take action in your organization. We are all in this together, and through collaboration we can achieve better, and faster, results. We welcome your ideas, suggestions, and feedback via email to Marie LeBlanc.

Shur Fellow Guidance
September 2018
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the League

The following memo was created post-Convention and shared with state leaders and Convention attendees. The links within contain tools and resources helpful to all League members as we continue this journey to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive League.

"The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training sessions offered at the 2018 LWVUS Convention provided us with a comprehensive look at each component of DEI, and the value of engaging in developing a strong DEI program within the organization.

In addition, LWVUS Director & DEI Committee Chair, Deborah Turner, led an esteemed panel, including Dr. Alfreda Brown, VP for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Kent State University; Sarah Bury, Interim Vice President, LWV Lake Michigan; and Cecile Scoon, First Vice President, LWV Florida. These knowledgeable women each shared some of their amazing DEI related experiences with us. Dr. Brown discussed the need to find ways to come together for the benefit of the whole organization. Sarah Bury and Cecile Scoon encouraged all League leaders to do more listening and outreach to people of different backgrounds. Cecile Scoon emphasized the need for members to build real relationships *before* attempting to recruit members for the League. "We have to do better," she said.

The interest and excitement that so many of you experienced after attending the training sessions and listening to the panel is wonderful, and we understand your eagerness to get started on applying what you've learned. The follow up materials from the DEI training are available on the League Management Site HERE. Additionally, LWVUS has posted the definitions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion online, as well as our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy. For those looking for additional resources and tools, LWVUS has also provided continued learning and materials HERE.

There are many more helpful and reliable DEI documents on the Internet. An interesting website to visit is Nonprofits You Are The Champions. The site is hosted by the *National Council of Nonprofits* and it offers a wealth of information, including examples of how the nonprofit community is currently championing the values of DEI. The site also contains links to short videos, a *Nonprofits, Leadership and Race Survey*, and links to other resources and websites to help guide you on your DEI journey."

We encourage you to review all of the materials and look for future updates on additional materials being added or trainings offered. We'll be highlighting various aspects of the training throughout the year starting with some information on Unconscious Bias below.

Unconscious Bias

What is unconscious bias?

Bias is a tendency or inclination that results in judgment without question. It's an automatic response, and a shortcut to interact with our world.

Unconscious bias is mental associations without awareness, intention, or control. These often conflict with our conscious attitudes, behaviors, and intentions.

The **function of bias** is to serve as our internal "danger detector," and to aid us in making instantaneous decisions in a world that inundates us with information and stimuli.

We all have unconscious biases and it is important to recognize what they are to begin to overcome them.

Following are five real world examples of unconscious bias from ELI. While set in the workplace, they illustrate universal lessons that could just as easily be applied to a discussion at a board meeting, conference call with coalition partners, or in a one-on-one conversation at a voter service event.

1. HELP! My video is upside down.
Many times we think of unconscious bias as being about race or age, but it covers a much broader spectrum and no one, it seems, is immune to stumbling over it. Google supplied an excellent example of how even a simple bias can affect your business.

When YouTube launched the video upload feature for their app, 5-10% of videos were uploaded upside-down, and Google developers were baffled. Could such a large percentage of users be shooting their videos incorrectly? "Incorrectly" was the key word. Google engineers had inadvertently designed the app for right-handed users. They never considered the fact that phones are usually rotated 180 degrees when held in a user's left hand.

With the help of unconscious bias, Google had created an app that worked best for right-handed users and never addressed the possibility of a left-hand user. We think Google needs a little more diversity on their team …any left-handed engineers need a job?

2. This candidate sounds great!
Resumes are a consistent source of unconscious bias. One particular study gave a group of managers a set of resumes. Some of them were exact duplicates where only the names had been changed. Resumes with the Anglo sounding names received substantially more callbacks that those with diverse names of other origins. Clearly it was the names and their associated biases that impacted the decisions instead of the qualifications and value they could bring to the company.

Activities were another source of assumptions. Those that sounded more prestigious, like polo or horseback riding vs. basketball or softball, skewed the perception of the candidate. Those engaged in more prestigious sounding activities were considered more refined and successful than their counterparts, simply because of their perceived financial status. These conclusions may have very well been valid, but they could just as easily been untrue. An interviewer's bias makes a substantial difference in the selection arena. Very talented applicants would have been turned away for unfounded reasons.

3. She's not great with computers.
Assigning a project with a significant technical component? The best choice is a Generation Y-er, not the Baby Boomer, right? This could be an accurate assumption, but it's not always the case. It's not wise to base a decision on an idea or belief that doesn't have the facts to support it.

There are many times when a manager or employee will frame their unconscious bias as common sense. However, your Xbox playing, mobile app developing Baby Boomer may be more tech-savvy than most. By assigning the project to a younger, less experienced employee, you could potentially sacrifice quality or miss out on an innovative idea. Evaluating competency based on age is a common mistake and one that could be costly to your company.

4. You remind me of someone I know.
Have you ever worked with or hired someone who reminded you of another person? It's a subtle, but real form of unconscious bias. The feelings and opinions you associate with another person can easily influence the way you see someone else.

Leaders have the responsibility to put aside past experiences and see the person as an individual. This can be difficult at times, so leaders should feel comfortable enough to ask for others' input. Letting a past experience shape your current decisions is unfair to you, the potential employee, and the company.

5. He speaks the language.
A manager has a high-profile urban project that needs a qualified project manager to get the job done and uses "common sense" to select an African American project manager. When asked about the decision, the manager states that his choice "is a great fit" and "speaks the language."

It's not overtly racist; it's simply an assumption that because this person is African American, he must be more familiar with the urban environment and the issues the community faces. The reality may be that this African American project manager grew up in the suburbs, went to private school, played polo and has had no experience living in an urban community. He may or may not be the best project manager for the job, but the choice could have easily been based on an invalid assumption completely unrelated to the requirements of the project.

These simple examples demonstrate how easily unconscious bias can creep into your organization, shape daily decisions, and impact your company. Recognizing its influence is the key to making objective decisions and avoiding these common mistakes.

Think back to your recent encounters with someone new to your life and try to remember how unconscious bias may have played a role in your first impressions of them. What did you think about them based on what they looked like, how they talked, how they dressed, what their name was, or other small pieces of who they are? What have you since learned about them and how has your impression of them changed?
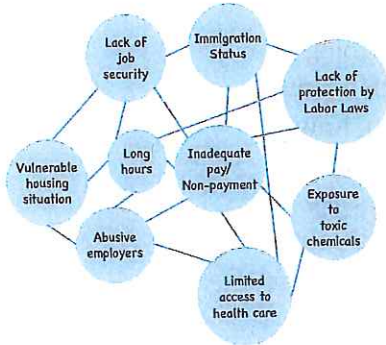
System Change: Personal & Organizational

- Broadening Perspective Inward and Outward
- Check List: Using Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lens to Strengthen Social Impact and Collaboration
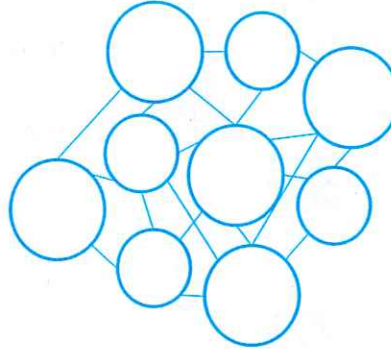- Tri-fold Brochure - BAAQMD

Exercise 2: Broadening Perspective Inward

Previous Example

What might your web look like?

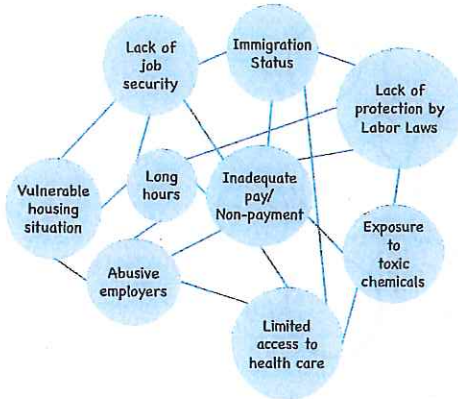*How might knowing this about yourself change your approach?*

Source: Powell, John and Connie Cagampang Heller. "Systems Thinking and Race: Workshop Summary." The California Endowment. 2011.

Intersectionality

- The interaction between different aspects of our identities

- How people experience advantages or disadvantages in society depends on their identities

- Our identities—race, class, sexuality, age—form our experiences, and we each can experience privilege and oppression simultaneously

Exercise 1: Broadening Perspective Outward

If you were going to partner with a new organization, how would knowing about factors like these change your approach?

Source: Powell, John and Connie Cagampang Heller. "Systems Thinking and Race: Workshop Summary." The California Endowment. 2011.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) Defined

Diversity is **being invited** to the party

Equity is making sure **your music is played**

Inclusion is **being asked** to dance

Bias is **why some weren't invited** in the first place

unintentionally or intentionally

LWV

**Using Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lens to Strengthen
Social Impact and Collaboration
Post-Training Checklist**

DIVERSITY
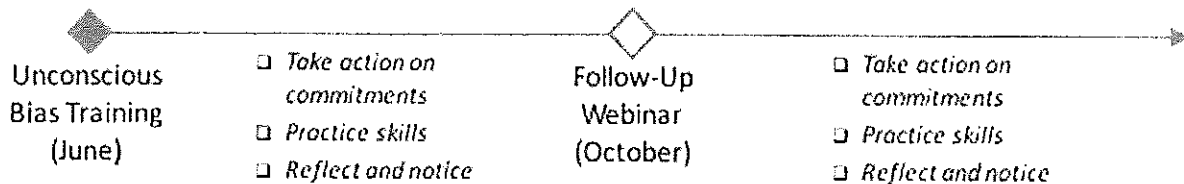Dimensions
Consulting

BACKGROUND

Embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is core to the League's mission to empower voters and defend democracy. Today's training focuses on the individual – raising awareness, offering skills to practice, and sharing tools and resources—because we recognize that building individual skills is key to meeting our larger organizational goals, including embodying a more inclusive, welcoming, and diverse organization.

There are many reasons for this approach:

- Recruiting and retaining new members and volunteers and serving constituents from diverse backgrounds is ultimately about building relationships through conversation and interaction. This training focuses on how we can all best prepare for these conversations and interactions.

- The League is working to weave DEI into the fabric of everything we do. This is paramount to the Transformation Journey and meeting our ambitious organizational impact goals for 2020.

- This work takes time and practice. Its success hinges on actions at every level—from how we incorporate DEI approaches into nationwide initiatives, right down to how individual local League leaders interact with new volunteers, partners, and voters.

- There is no one or right way to achieve DEI "success"—rather a series of individual and collective reflections and actions that combine to move the needle that is unique to every organization. DEI programs that proceed without raising individual awareness have limited effectiveness.

- This work is individual and personal. The work of learning about DEI—and ultimately about yourself, your presence, and your role—is about a willingness to broaden your perspectives, challenge assumptions, and deepen connections.

- This journey takes time and practice. While many people have a natural tendency to jump to the "end" (i.e., the action or state that they want), the journey is critical. This training is the first step on a longer path of learning and practice that focuses on building those near-term fundamental skills:

Unconscious Bias Training (June)	❏ *Take action on commitments* ❏ *Practice skills* ❏ *Reflect and notice*	Follow-Up Webinar (October)	❏ *Take action on commitments* ❏ *Practice skills* ❏ *Reflect and notice*

DEI Initiative in Action over the Next Biennium

National Level

- Ensure the League's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion vision is integrated into our mission impact work.
- Train staff and leaders at all levels to understand how their own perceptions, norms, patterns of behavior, and biases can undermine their impact on effective mission impact work and their desire to work more effectively with diverse populations.
- Socialize common definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion as a foundation to future work.
- Communicate to state and local Leagues how DEI approaches can be effectively applied in achieving the League's mission impact work.

State Level

- Develop quantitative monitoring techniques in partnership with LWVUS to measure progress on recruitment, retention, and other DEI elements.
- Integrate DEI into planning, including member/volunteer orientation and leadership development programs.
- Encourage local Leagues to articulate goals for implementing DEI programming with specifics related to numeric targets.
- Engage in honest conversations about how to support local Leagues to improve interactions with new and diverse audiences, using skills learned in DEI training(s).

Local Level

- Participate in additional DEI training and activities via webinars sponsored by LWVUS.
- Integrate training tools, exercises, resources, and material into regular League operations.
- Identify clear examples of the distinct value LWV offers diverse communities and how the organization complements the efforts of diverse partners.
- Engage in honest conversations about how to improve interactions between League leaders and new and diverse audiences, using skills learned in DEI training(s).
- Encourage individual members to incorporate DEI skills into interpersonal interactions.
- Gather stories that reflect LWV mission in action and share them.
- Build the capacity to engage in honest conversations to bridge dimensions of difference and create openings for learning.

USING THE CHECKLIST

This checklist is intended to be an accessible resource anytime you wonder, "What can I do?" There is no right way to use this checklist, nor do you need to complete every step. Each potential action offers a beginning, an invitation for you to step into this journey wholeheartedly.

We encourage you to select potential actions from the list below that represent the commitments you wish to make to your DEI journey. As you complete an action, check the corresponding box. We will host a webinar after the Convention to hear about your progress, learnings, and additional support you may need. Additionally, more resources and ideas will be posted online after Convention.

What do I do next?	*Where do I begin?*
Recognize and accept that you have bias	
❑ Notice your filters	❑ Consider what makes you "you" and write about it. • What in your background and identity is informing the biases that we hold? • What are some of the rules in your book of rules as to what qualities make someone a "good" person or a "good" family? And what makes a "good" job, employee, team member?
❑ Remove the stigma of good vs. bad person related to unconscious bias	❑ Identify a vulnerability partner to share apprehensions and fears about making mistakes when interacting with people of diverse backgrounds. ❑ Share and discuss: • What behaviors "get in the way" of you connecting meaningfully with people from different backgrounds? • Think about instances where, in spite of positive intentions, your actions, and behaviors had a negative impact or consequence. What did you learn? What other actions were possible?
Develop the capacity to use a flashlight on yourself	
❑ Reflect on what matters to you	❑ Consider your core values as an individual. What are they? ❑ What makes each one important? ❑ What roles do diversity, equity, and inclusion play in your values?
❑ Observe yourself in different interactions and write down what you notice	❑ For two weeks, notice which interactions "trigger" you in some way and jot down when they happen. ❑ Consider how emotions, feelings, or reactions "trigger" you. ❑ At the end of the two weeks, look at what you wrote. What patterns emerge? What role did your lens play?
❑ Notice your voice of judgment	❑ What prompts your voice of judgment to surface? ❑ What if you show compassion in these moments? ❑ What is good about that voice, and how does it serve you? ❑ What about it needs to go to make room for wisdom?
Practice Constructive Uncertainty	
❑ Ask open-ended questions	❑ Practice using Powerful Questions.
❑ Foster a curious mindset ·	❑ What do you know about racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc. and how they affect marginalized communities? What do you want to know? ❑ Create a list of questions and potential sources of information for each question.
❑ Check your assumptions and "truths"	❑ Write down your assumptions going into a situation. Which ones are grounded in reality? Which ones need testing? Which ones need to go? ❑ What stories surface time and time again in explaining reality? How are they serving you?

WHAT DO I DO NEXT?	*WHERE DO I BEGIN?*
❑ Practice Level 3 listening	❑ Schedule time to meet with a volunteer or League member you don't know well to learn more about their background and values. Practice listening without interruption and with intuition. Play back what you heard and look for common connection. ❑ Use engaged, connected body language in your interaction (e.g., gentle eye contact, open arms and hands). Notice your body and what you feel during the conversation. ❑ Take time to reflect on the experience. What did you notice about the experience? What challenged you? What surprised you?
Explore awkwardness and discomfort	
❑ Begin a new body practice	❑ Identify something easy that would nudge you in a new direction by doing something different physically--a body practice (e.g., brush your teeth with your other hand). ❑ Consider integrating a new practice in your routine (e.g., taking scheduled breaks from your computer, walks outside, yoga).
❑ Begin a new pause practice	❑ Identify a simple way to practice quieting your mind--a pause practice (e.g., taking three deep breaths for a count of five). ❑ Consider integrating a new practice to build in time for reflection.
❑ Begin a sharing practice	❑ Lead a discussion, make a presentation, or write a blog/newsletter article on a diversity, equity, and inclusion issue that integrates new knowledge and perspectives.
Engage with people who are different from you and expose yourself to positive role models in that group	
❑ Set an intention for your conversations	❑ What's most important for you to learn? To share? ❑ What do you wish for? ❑ How do you want to show up?
❑ Engage more fully with people you consider to be "others"	❑ Attend a local town hall/convening where your social identity group is in the minority. Write down what issues are compelling to that group. What values emerge? What feelings emerge for you? What were you most curious about? What surprised you?
❑ Talk to members and volunteers about what is important to them	❑ Engage in informal conversations with new members, volunteers, and target individuals from diverse backgrounds to better understand the compelling issues they are talking about and what matters in terms of values, lifestyle, and workstyle.
❑ Have a difficult conversation	❑ Consider your behavioral style related to conflict (e.g., engage, avoid, freeze). What does success look like for your difficult conversation? ❑ Acknowledge that there will be differences in how you and others see things. Look for common ground and connection.
Get feedback	
❑ Understand how your behaviors impact others	❑ Ask someone how they perceive you, and listen. ❑ Share back what you heard. Ask, "Is there anything I missed?" ❑ Offer insights you have gained.
❑ Understand your emotional triggers	❑ Ask someone for feedback on your interpersonal interactions and decision-making in an emotionally charged or uncomfortable situation. ❑ What did you do? ❑ What impact did your behavior have in the situation? ❑ What insights did you gain?

Allies and Opportunities

- Article: The Importance of Being an Ally – Forbes
- Article & Exercise: Recognizing and Selection Allies
- D.E.I. and Allies Cluster Break-outs

- LWVC Coalition Advice and Policies
- DEI Ally, Coalition and Partner Introduction Letter
- DEI Ally, Coalition and Partner Building Survey
- Powerful Questions

- National Disability Voter Registration Day Information Sheet
- 5 Actions Toward a Better Census
- Partners Play Pivotal Role in Increasing Census Response Rates
- United States Census Information Sheet
- League submits Comments Regarding Citizenship on 2020 Census

The Importance Of Being An Ally - Forbes

In the months since I became the North America diversity leader for Strategy&, many people have approached me to ask, "What can I do to help?" And I'm always happy when they do. But I've found that, more often than not, people are thinking big picture. They want to get involved with planning an event or starting a new initiative. This type of engagement is important — we need people to step up and to dedicate their time and resources to the cause of diversity. But there are other ways to make an impact.

Consider this: How many times have you been in a meeting and realized that the woman across from you wanted to make a point but wasn't speaking up? How many highly skilled women have you known that haven't put themselves forward for promotion because they don't feel "100 percent ready" (whereas research has shown that men feel comfortable [going for it at 60 percent](#))? How often do you attend a panel and notice that the panelists look a lot alike? In these and many similar scenarios, it's important that people not just sit on the sidelines. Instead, they need to be an ally.

If we start with the most simplistic definition, **an ally is anyone who supports or empowers another person or group.** Opportunities to do this are peppered throughout our work and personal lives. But we may not see them, or we may think that we don't have anything to contribute.

I've mentioned in previous posts that I have mentored many junior women over the years. This made sense for me — I can relate directly to the kinds of challenges women face. But I wasn't serving as an ally for other groups, because I didn't necessarily understand the issues they were confronting. I didn't know how I could make an impact. This came to the forefront early in my tenure as a diversity leader, when members of two of the firm's affinity groups came to me with a problem.

One was Forum, our African-American affinity group, and the other was Spectrum, which represents the interests of our LGBT staff. These groups told me they lacked funding to represent the firm, particularly at recruiting events. When they asked for money to pursue these activities, they explained, they were told none was there. When we looked at funding across the board, we discovered that another affinity group, for women, was overfunded because it often "gave back" money at the end of the year. We rebalanced the budget to enable all of the groups to function effectively.

This may seem like a small thing to do — and in fact, in terms of my time and effort, it was. But it made a big difference. Being an ally isn't necessarily about dedicating large amounts of time or money. It can simply be taking a moment to really listen: to recognize and understand the challenges facing someone or a group of people. It means empathizing with their situation and giving them the tools they need to solve a problem for themselves.

Consider how powerful a modest action can be, leading to an outcome that supports not only your existing staff but future colleagues. If you watched the 2015 Oscars, you may remember John Legend and Common performing the theme song from the movie Selma.

It might not be obvious at first, but if you look closely at the choir, you'll see that only the African-American members are singing. The others are marching silently, showing their solidarity — acting as allies.

How do you get started? Being an ally is a skill: You build the capability over time, and have to be willing to make mistakes. First and foremost, know the issues. Talk with your colleagues to understand the challenges they face. People are often afraid to take this step, because they don't want to be presumptuous or risk offending a colleague. But I've found that people are open to conversation and appreciate being engaged. This may feel unnatural or comfortable; to help people feel at ease, try starting off by talking about a challenge you've faced or an experience you've had.

Second, know yourself. Relate to the issues that you've seen based on your own personal experiences, and understand your biases.

Third and finally, take action whenever and however you can. It can be as simple as stopping an inappropriate joke, encouraging broad participation in a team discussion, or ensuring inclusion on dinner invitations. Or it can be more dedicated, such as joining and participating in an affinity group or acting as a mentor or sponsor for a skilled employee from a group underrepresented in leadership positions. For example, in my practice, digital business and technology, we've actively tried to make gender a part of the conversation. We've had dialogues about traits common to women that can benefit the way we work, we've incorporated gender as a standard topic in our post-project-completion discussions, and we've added a "diversity champion award" that is given to one member of the practice each year.

Big or small, every positive action helps foster an environment in which diverse groups can ask for what they want — and feel confident that they will have the support they need to get it.

June 10, 2015   by **Kelley Mavros**

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