



# Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Recruitment, Hiring and Retention

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## Background

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide guidance to hiring managers seeking to diversify their sustainability staff by applying an equity lens. Recent and historical studies have shown that sustainability and environmental fields lag in their ability to recruit, hire, and retain employees of color.<sup>1</sup> This can be due to a variety of systemic factors including access to social and professional networks and exclusion from the practices of environmental campaigns and organizations, as well as implicit and explicit racial bias in hiring processes.

As our nation, counties, and cities become more diverse and as the challenges that sustainability departments face in addressing climate change grow, it is imperative now more than ever that offices build cadres of professionals that can understand how to work with, support, and galvanize action amongst all diverse communities. The work of sustainability becomes relevant to more people when the perspectives of people of color and low-income communities are represented within the organization and individuals are situated to make decisions that are equitable.

The practices and tools provided in this fact sheet will support USDN members in their evolving practices to achieve increased equity, diversity, and inclusion in their offices by addressing historical discrepancies in recruitment, hiring and retention efforts.

## Recruitment

### Job descriptions

A job description outlines the responsibilities of the position and desired skills, experience, and abilities to complete a job effectively, but it also communicates the values of your organization. It is worthwhile and strategic to first evaluate how any position being recruited for can advance the equity goals of an organization and how such expectations and responsibilities can be integrated into the job description.

- If the position will work with racially, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse communities, consider adding language like the following:
  - Experience working directly with people from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
  - Ability to speak a second language or ability to speak \_\_\_\_ language (if the position will be working with a particular community)
  - Ability to flex communication style to multiple cultural environments
  - Excellent written and verbal communication skills, and ability to present to diverse audiences, specifically racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse communities.

Note: These qualifications are clearer if the cultural elements that are relevant are named. However, they must be written in a manner that does not appear to be a forced disclosure of a protected class<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Dorceta. Ph.D. "The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations: Mainstream NGOs, Foundations & Government Agencies." Green 2.0: <http://www.diversegreen.org/the-challenge/>. July 2014.

<sup>2</sup> The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is the federal resource to learn about discrimination law. The list of Federal protected classes is here: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/>. Your state may have identified additional protected classes.

- If the position will be focused on policy, consider the following language:
  - Experience incorporating the perspectives of multiple communities, including [communities of color], in the consideration of impacts and outcomes of a decision-making process.
  - An understanding of the concepts of institutional and structural racism and bias.
  
- Highly technical or specialized positions should consider how the position could be structured to support equity goals:
  - Experience considering the impacts of the work on multiple communities, including communities of color, in technical analysis.
  - Experience working on a diverse team
  - Experience working with different communication styles

**Member Spotlight: Portland, OR**

*“We have two outreach and engagement positions that were recently hired for that were designed using our equity lens. Both programs were intended to meet equity goals of the bureau and the Portland Climate Action Plan. One was a mid-level position for our Sustainability at Work program, and the other was an entry-level position for our Public Trash Can program. A depth of understanding of sustainability was less important than great communication skills and the ability to learn quickly and work with others. We realized that we could teach the sustainability components of the job, so it was important to emphasize the ability to build authentic relationships with racially and socio-economically diverse communities in the job descriptions. We also needed people who love engaging with the community and would be able to connect them to important topics in ways that are relevant while also attentively listening to and responding to their needs. Both positions were filled by people of color, and these staff have brought innovative and successful new methods for engagement. The Sustainability at Work Advisor holds office hours in the community at a local nonprofit, and the Public Trash Can program has become a community place making initiative.” – Susan Anderson, Portland, OR*

While member communities in USDN maintain a relatively balanced population in terms of gender, there are still gender disparities within science and technology fields, which many sustainability related positions include. The following guidance on language for position descriptions from the National Center for Women in Information Technology (NCWIT)<sup>3</sup> not only supports inclusion of women, but inclusion of different communication styles found across different cultures:

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<sup>3</sup> Full PDF of NCWIT Job Description Analysis can be found here: [http://www.ncwit.org/sites/default/files/resources/ncwittips\\_jobdescriptionanalysis.pdf](http://www.ncwit.org/sites/default/files/resources/ncwittips_jobdescriptionanalysis.pdf)

| BEFORE  | RECOMMENDATION   |
|---|--|
| <b>Manages the successful resolution of client issues, including competing demands, sensitive situations, and conflicts with other groups.</b>  | Thoughtfully works with the client to resolve issues, including competing demands, sensitive situations, and conflicts with other groups.  |
| <b>Mobilizes team, establishing the tactical plans, projects and objectives needed to accomplish these goals and ensure their attainment.</b>   | Mobilizes and encourages team, establishing the specific (or concrete, day-to-day) plans, projects and objectives needed...  |
| <b>Proactively manages the talent in their area, establishing performance goals and objectives, providing ongoing constructive and formal performance feedback and establishing and implementing development plans.</b> | Proactively develops (or nurtures) the talent in their area; co-constructing performance goals, objectives and development plans, and providing ongoing constructive performance feedback. |
| <b>Manages and resolves the diverse perspectives of stakeholders.</b>   | Is sensitive to (or understands) the diverse perspectives of stakeholders and works with them to resolve differences.  |

Another important strategy is to evaluate the job description for socioeconomic bias. Requirements related to educational background, particularly advanced degrees such as a Bachelor or Master’s degree, could be biased against individuals who have relevant professional experience but could not afford a college education.

If a degree is essential, consider if there is bias in the types of degrees mentioned. It may also be most strategic to not specify the type of degree or field of study, unless it is a highly technical position.

- Relevant education background – if you decide to include this portion, consider the range of fields that could be relevant beyond environmental science or ecology. Sustainability professionals come from a variety of backgrounds and benefit from interdisciplinary work environments. Examples of relevant skills from different paths of study:
  - Social work, psychology – important for behavior change and engagement work
  - Communications and marketing – important for engagement and outreach
  - Business management – developing the business case for sustainability work and communicating this to different audiences
  - Education – important for outreach and engagement work
  - Economics – data and research analysis centered on human experience
  - Public Health – systems approach to various factors impacting individual experiences that support well-being
  - Multicultural studies – culturally competent communication and cross-cultural understanding

**Bias checklist**

- ✓ Do the minimum qualifications include experiences that can be learned on the job?
- ✓ Are educational requirements being used as a proxy for specific skills that could be attained through some other means?
- ✓ Does the language incorporate communication and management styles that are culturally and gender inclusive?

## Diversity, equity, and inclusion statements

By law, you may be required to include an Equal Employment Opportunity Statement in your recruitment. Consider adding your department's equity/diversity/inclusion statement or a value statement that reflects your department's commitment to equity in hiring. This statement should not be added superficially. If one does not exist, work to develop one should be considered as part of a broader diversity strategy for hiring in your department. At the very least the position description should say:

- Department is committed to building a diverse staff and strongly encourages applications from candidates of color, and
- People of color are encouraged to apply.

### **Member Spotlight: Baltimore, MD**

*"We actively and consciously seek to create a passionate team of committed city employees who are representative of diverse backgrounds, points of view and experiences. When we have an open staff position, we turn to our large network of community, institutional and nonprofit partners in and around Baltimore to help us spread the word. We use language to inform applicants that we are looking for people of color, and we consciously target universities and organizations that specifically reach people of color who might be qualified for our positions. We ensure that people of color are represented when choosing applicants to interview and that people of color are on the interview panel. We also include 1-2 interview questions asking applicants to discuss experiences in working with populations of color. Our last 2 permanent hires and last part time hire were all people of color." – Anne Draddy, Baltimore, MD*

## Outreach

Focused outreach directed towards communities of color can be a highly effective mechanism for increasing the number of qualified applicants of color and balancing the impact of traditional forms of outreach. While broad outreach, like webpage posts and job listing boards, will get a large number of applicants overall, it's important to consider the quality of the reach for the desired pool of candidates — and therefore the return on investment of time and money if such avenues are fee based. Traditional forms of outreach (posts through environmental organization networks) serve to advantage white applicants because they use lines of communication that are expected for those who are already familiar with those networks and in sustainability professions. Relying on traditional forms of outreach can have the unintended outcome of decreasing the percentage of qualified applicants of color in the applicant pool. Such dynamics should also be considered with social media accounts and sending the announcement to schools and other large institutions that may be predominantly white.

Each of the following ways to reach a more diverse applicant base needs to be considered based on its ability to reach candidates with the specific experience and background relevant to the position.

- Community newspapers, news websites run by communities of color
- Multicultural centers or cultural studies departments at local colleges and universities. Ideally a relationship would exist prior to sending; one way is to offer to discuss jobs in government and sustainability with students.

- Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs), community colleges and schools with a large number of students of color, either graduate or undergrad, alumni associations or current job boards. Look for department contacts in sustainability, planning, or environmental departments.
- Job boards, websites, social media accounts and in-person job or community events hosted by organizations that serve communities of color
- Professional associations (i.e., the National Forum for Black Public Administrators), affinity groups within professional associations (i.e., Latinos and Planning Division, American Planning Association), networks of professionals of color (Environmental Professionals of Color local chapter). Member organizations like the National Society for Black Engineers (NSBE) are usually hosted by a college campus.
- Organizational partners that represent and serve communities of color.
- Affinity or employee resource groups (County Asian Employee Network)

### Member Spotlight: Knoxville, TN

Erin Gill from Knoxville shared how her City is addressing bias in the interview process:

*“The City of Knoxville’s Public Service Department implemented a new, more structured approach to hiring in order to help avoid “familiarity bias” or “similar to me bias”. In the new system, (1) Candidates receive a structured interview using a standard set of questions; (2) A diverse interview panel individually scores answers, (3) Interview scores are supplemented by a training and experience questionnaire to create an overall applicant score, (4) Applicants are ranked based on scores and the top five names are sent to hiring managers as openings occur, and (5) Job are again posted when the list of top-ranked candidates is exhausted.”*

## Hiring

### Resume reviews and interview panels

When the candidate pool is narrowed to those who are most qualified to perform the duties outlined in the job description, bias, regardless of intent, can often play a role in hiring processes. There are a few things to consider and be aware of through the resume review and interview process that can help neutralize the impact of an individual’s internal biases.

- Briefing session – For resume reviewers and interview panels, spend time to explain your goals for the position and how that ties to the equity work and goals of your organization as part of the criteria for consideration.

### **Self-Assessment: Do I have bias?**

*A great resource is the Harvard Implicit Bias Test. This 10 minute test can be included as pre-interview preparation for your hiring panel:*

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

- Resume reviewers and interview panel composition – Aim to have diversity on your panel and have a balanced representation of people of color and women at each interview stage. Seek out hiring panel participants from the communities that you partner with or that will be involved in the work the position is performing.
- Bias training – Require all hiring panel members to participate in bias training. This can be as simple as having them review content to make them aware of what bias is and the strategies for addressing bias in an interview process. This handout from the University of Florida serves as a good example: [http://training.hr.ufl.edu/resources/LeadershipToolkit/transcripts/Identifying and Avoiding Interview Biases.pdf](http://training.hr.ufl.edu/resources/LeadershipToolkit/transcripts/Identifying_and_Avoiding_Interview_Biases.pdf)

**Quick Fact:** A recent *Harvard Business Review* article found that if there is only one woman or person of color being considered for a job, the chances of getting hired are weaker. “The odds of hiring a woman were 79.14 times greater if there were at least two women in the finalist pool,’ they write. ‘The odds of hiring a minority were 193.72 times greater if there were at least two minority candidates in the finalist pool.’”  
[http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2016/04/28/if\\_you\\_re\\_the\\_only\\_woman\\_or\\_person\\_of\\_color\\_being\\_considered\\_for\\_a\\_job\\_you.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2016/04/28/if_you_re_the_only_woman_or_person_of_color_being_considered_for_a_job_you.html)

## Interview questions

The questions asked in an interview are another way to identify a candidate’s skills and abilities related to equity skills sets and competencies. Below are example questions that could be included in an interview<sup>4</sup>:

- How do you see yourself contributing to our work on advancing racial equity? (Listen to see if the candidate has past experiences that will add to or enhance the jurisdiction’s efforts.)
- Please describe a situation in which you worked on a project with people who were from backgrounds other than your own. What was challenging for you in this work? What did you do to make your work together successful? (Listen to see if the candidate has reflected on the opportunities and challenges of creating inclusive workplace cultures.)
- Please provide examples of ways in which you have worked to eliminate institutional racism in previous jobs. (Listen to see if the candidate has a clear understanding of institutionalized racism and has relevant experience combating institutionalized racism.)

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<sup>4</sup> From: Nelson, Julia and Tyrell, Syreeta. “Public sector jobs: Opportunities for advancing racial equity.” Government Alliance for Racial Equity. <http://racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Public-Sector-Jobs-Final1.pdf>

### Member Spotlight: Johnson County, KS

Jasmin Moore from Johnson County, KS, was a host to a 2016 USDN Building Diversity Fellow. She shared this interview question, which challenged candidates to think about their own story and relationship to the project's health equity focus, while also introducing clear definitions of health equity and inequity from the department:

**“Health Equity:** Attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Health Equity means efforts to ensure that all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives. **Health Inequities:** Differences in health that are avoidable, unfair, and unjust. Health inequities are affected by social, economic, and environmental conditions.

*Take a minute to think about when you first became aware of health inequities. If you feel comfortable, please share your story. How did that affect you? Have you worked with or lived in communities who have experienced health inequities?”*

## Retention

### Onboarding

Once your candidate has been hired to a position, it's important to first onboard them with appropriate training to be successful for the job. Government systems often work well for permanent employees, but temporary employees and interns may miss important information in terms of regular onboarding if they are hired differently than other staff. It should go without saying, but ensuring they have access to a computer, a usable work station, are oriented to equipment, the office, and people is essential to a good start. A concerted effort to welcome a new employee to the team, and hosting opportunities for members of the team to get to know one another will accelerate relationship building. Other components of the onboarding process over time can include:

- Discussion on organization culture and norms (i.e., expectations for how to represent the department with the public, communication norms).
- Overview of racial equity work, organization functions, and how decisions are made in your agency.
- Connection with a “buddy” or informal mentor to help learn more about what to expect when working for the department and government.
- Connection to activities and networks like affinity groups, lunch and learn sessions, employee gatherings based on their interests.

Such onboarding practices are not specific to employees of color, but are important to establish a sense of belonging and welcome for everyone.



## Support strategies

Employees of color in predominantly white organizations can face a great deal of social isolation and bias within the workplace. It is important to be cognizant of the unique strengths that each employee of color has, the challenges they may face in the workplace, and methods to support them.

- Build trust – Be open to learning about your employee and their perspective and worldview on sustainability and environmental issues. Be willing to engage on uncomfortable topics, which may include race. Be willing to receive feedback and also provide clear feedback on performance.
- Identify interests – Know what the employee wants to learn and be exposed to. For interns, develop goals that are both work oriented and experience oriented for their short term of employment.
- Build social networks – As a manager, serve as a connector to other individuals and organizations that align with the employee’s interests. Connect to affinity groups, professional associations, and other social groupings that support employees of color. Encourage informational interviews with people at different levels of decision making in the organization.
- Mentors – Identify individuals that can serve as formal or informal mentors to help navigate problems, but also provide assistance in thinking about how to develop professionally. Mentors can be identified through project work, cultural background, or experiences.
- Avoid putting the employee of color in the position to be the sole educator on race. Create an environment that normalizes learning about institutional bias and racism, including self-reflection about one’s relationship to these systems.
- If your employee is drawn to work on diversity and equity, sponsor their participation by endorsing it and supporting them to find balance in their work. Be careful that they are doing this work with a sufficient time and resources and with a group of collaborators to avoid burnout and frustration. Don’t press involvement if the interest isn’t clear.
- Check-in regularly on the experience they are having in the workplace, and if the employee feels they have what they need to be successful.
- Work to identify when dominant culture is impacting the ability of your employee to effectively participate, contribute, or be accepted in the workplace. (i.e., communication styles that favor linear presentation as opposed to non-linear; taking turns vs. jumping in to voice an opinion; responses to showing of different kinds of emotion; defensive responses to bringing up cultural blind spots).
- Normalize self-care especially when a traumatic event has happened or when there is a triggering environment. For example, racially motivated incidents are on the rise across the country and impact people of color differently than white people. Events, even if they are not local, can be very personal because of long-standing racial trauma. Triggering events can also come in the form of microaggressions.<sup>5</sup> Acknowledging what has happened and creating space for staff to process collectively or individually as they need to will help them to be more present and focused in the long-run.
- Support professional development. Support the employee to seek out and participate in opportunities for training and professional growth.
- Provide learning space. A management style that hovers or micromanages an employee’s work prevents staff from gaining confidence in their work product or feeling like they are trusted. Allow the employee to push themselves and focus on what can be learned if a mistake is made.

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<sup>5</sup> For a list of common microaggressions see: <http://sph.umn.edu/site/docs/hewg/microaggressions.pdf>

### Member Spotlight: San Antonio, TX

*"In my experience, retention is based on making sure the employee feels that they are a part of the team, they are able to share and contribute, they are acknowledged, have opportunity to grow and have some flexibility. I have experienced coworkers leave a position or project, because of the responsibility to be the designated "expert" to the Latino community and not being provided appropriate resources to be genuine or successful. People of color can sometimes be expected to be a cultural expert, a trusted community messenger, translator, and provide cultural training to fellow coworkers amongst other unwritten responsibilities. You feel like a tool instead of feeling empowered to make a genuine change or impact." – Eloisa Portillo-Morales, San Antonio, TX*

To be successful, she offered 3 recommendations:

- Dedicated time to build relationships with community organizations that you are expected to connect with. That can mean showing up to their events where we are not driving the agenda.
- Support services such as funding for professional translation services or review for outreach materials.
- Training or Continuing Education to build up cultural skills and competencies.

### Stay interviews<sup>6</sup>

Exit interviews occur when an employee has already decided they are ready to end their employment. Stay interviews are a strategy to identify ways to keep a valued employee from leaving. These types of meetings can happen regularly in check-ins, during performance evaluations, or at some other frequent interval. This is a valuable opportunity for a manager to get direct and useful feedback on how to support their employee in the way the employee needs support.

Sample questions:

- What kind of work culture do you work best in? What ideas do you have to create that kind of work culture here?
- What gets in the way of you being as successful as you want to be? What support do you need to get there?
- Do you feel connected to your team members? If not, what has been challenging for you? If so, are there things that we should be doing more of?
- Where do you see yourself growing professionally? Do you see yourself here long-term?
- What types of projects do you find fulfillment in? When are you challenged in a good way?
- What do you want to learn? What goals have you set for yourself?

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<sup>6</sup> For more information see the book: *The Stay Interview: A Manager's Guide to Keeping the Best and the Brightest*, by Richard Finnegan (2015).

## Institutionalization of Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

In implementing any of the above strategies, you may find that there are institutional barriers that prevent you from creating the internal systems and practices needed to support your endeavors in a replicable and scalable way.

Using an equity lens on hiring efforts can be a helpful tool to advance change at a larger institutional level. These efforts take time, but will support your long-term equity objectives. Here are a few suggested actions to get you started:

1. Ask for disaggregated data from your HR department for all of the hires for the last ten years. This information should exist to be compliant with Civil Rights law.
  - a. What does the data show across race? What is the nature of the recruitment, hiring, and retention disparity?
  - b. Does the department workforce reflect the racial diversity community served?
  - c. Are management and leadership racially diverse?
  - d. Do employees of color stay with the organization?
    - i. How much are employees of color paid in comparison to white counterparts in similar positions?
    - ii. How frequently do they get promoted? How long does it take to get a career advancement opportunity?
  - e. How does this compare to the jurisdiction as a whole?
  - f. What information has already been collected to understand the disparity and why it exists?

### Member Spotlight: Dane County, WI

Lisa Mackinnon from Dane County shared that in 2016 they created and funded a new Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI), a freestanding county department. The purpose of OEI is to improve the county's efforts in promoting racial, gender and disability equity in its workforce, contracting and service opportunities. OEI centralizes equity and outreach efforts throughout county departments and provides support for departments to take on equity initiatives.

The impetus for creating the Office for Equity and Inclusion was a recommendation in the 2015 [Dane County Racial Equity Analysis](#) conducted by the Center for Social Inclusion and the Government Alliance on Race and Equity at the request of the Dane County Board of Supervisors. The Equity Analysis comprehensively examined government operations, policies and practices from a racial equity perspective and enumerated the steps necessary for Dane County to transform into a racially equitable institution. The analysis outlines actions and strategies that, if implemented with urgency, will move the county toward eliminating racial inequities. Among its findings were that there were hiring disparities in hierarchy, function, job classifications and across departments. One of the key steps OEI will take with respect to hiring policy is to attract a more diverse pool of applicants for jobs.

2. Identify current tools and initiatives that are intended to support equity, diversity, and inclusion.
  - a. What are the jurisdiction-wide strategies and goals around recruitment, hiring, and retention?
  - b. What has been accomplished so far?
  - c. If it isn't successful, why not? Do efforts specifically address institutional racism and bias?
  - d. How does your jurisdiction's Affirmative Action framework support or hinder your efforts?
3. Develop a strategy
  - a. Develop a narrative that uses data (quantitative and qualitative) as the base for describing the problem and the need. Incorporate your experience as to why the current system is not current meeting your needs, and what you would like to see done.
  - b. Identify who are potential partners in other departments in advancing equitable hiring that can help you in your department.
  - c. What goals can your department set and implement for itself beyond diversity training?
  - d. How will you evaluate your progress over time? What data do you need to track?
  - e. What do you need to advocate for to strategically advance your efforts with Human Resources?

## Conclusion

Good management practice is also an active mechanism for advancing equity. The resources listed above are relevant to all employees, regardless of race and can improve talent retention and performance. However, bias and institutional racism will affect employees of color differently than white staff, and may even affect each employee of color in the workplace in a different way. So, it is important that any hiring manager who has staff of a different race continue to advance their own learning on cultural competency and systems of privilege and power. This ongoing education will support effective management of high-performing teams and individuals.

### **Eight conditions for successfully fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace:**

1. Leadership must accept and value that a diverse workforce will bring a diversity of perspectives and approaches to work.
2. Leadership must be committed to persevering in the face of inherent challenges that these different perspectives and approaches will bring to an organization.
3. There must be an expectation of high performance from everyone.
4. The organization should design jobs that allow people to grow and be educated.
5. Openness and tolerance for debate must be encouraged by the organizational culture.
6. All workers must be made to feel valued and empowered.
7. The organization must have a clear and well-recognized mission that includes diversity.
8. The organization must be structured to promote the exchange of ideas and welcome constructive challenges as a part of its culture

*From: Thomas, David A., and Robin J. Ely. "Making differences matter." Harvard Business Review 74, no. 5 (1996): 79-90.*

## Resources

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