



**DOWNTOWN
LONG BEACH
ALLIANCE**

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS (DEIA)

The process that we spoke about is what we teach our executives and recommend to our Board Chairs Academy customers (which, by the way, has now topped more than 400 nonprofits!)

STEP ONE: DEFINING THESE TERMS

It is essential that the entire organization understand what is meant by the terms Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access. This is a process as this language means many things to many people and there is a whole bunch of literature about this which can cause some conflict about whose right and who isn't and it can easily turn into a wordsmithing process, and that's not the goal either. GOAL ... Everyone in the organization must buy-in to these "concepts" and then begin to have conversations about how they impact future structures, conversations, and decisions/policies. How this is accomplished is wide open, but our recommendation is that this begins with a staff discussion/retreat that includes a couple of board members. The outcomes of the process then lead into conversations with presenting these concepts to the board with the board members acting as primary facilitators along with some staff.

Once that has occurred, we believe ...

STEP TWO: ESTABLISHMENT OF A DEIA TEAM

In order for "real evolution" to take place, there must be a team of people who work throughout the year and in various capacities in the organization to discuss how to incorporate DEIA concepts into existing and new practices and activities. Everyone will approve a "job description" or "roles and responsibilities" statement about the work of this very important multi-disciplinary and diverse group of people.

One of the first things that the team must do ...

STEP THREE: TAKE A DEEPER PLUNGE INTO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT BIAS & LIVED EXPERIENCE

To get the DEIA team mobilized, a second round of conversations that is facilitated by them with some "outside help" takes the organization into a deeper understanding of the DEIA concepts and it gets a bit more personal. The organization must talk about "Implicit Bias" and "Lived Experience" as two fundamental principals that either enhance DEIA efforts or are the roadblocks. People need a chance to understand the biases they have and how that creates a culture of bias. For example, "All people who live in Bixby Knolls are a certain way" is an example of bias. Once enough people start thinking about BK in a certain way, slowly the whole organization starts behaving in a way that reinforces a Bixby Knolls stereotype and then starts excluding BK people and then come assumptions about what BK would say or act. The principle of Implicit Bias is the root of understanding stereotyping and its effects on people institutions and communities. To Austin's point, we don't want this to be "all about race" so the subject of Implicit Bias opens the doors for the whole organization to take good look at how generations of DLBA people have looked upon certain things and certain people in certain ways.

The results of that conversation should include ...

STEP FOUR: THE ADOPTION AN EQUITY STATEMENT

The DLBA is ready to put into words what they have learned and embraced as an organization which forms a pact with the community and with each other.

The statement is only the first step in the creation of ...

STEP FIVE: A DEIA ASSESSMENT

In this process the team looks at fundamental processes, activities, policies, structures, and communications language that might not reflect the commitment to equity that the organization has just stated. This is a critical step. So many businesses get the words down on paper and then it falls apart. There's no intention behind the piece of paper. An assessment reports out key opportunities to enhance some things, change some behaviors, stop doing some things, start doing some things, etc. The results should lead to another round of conversations at both the board and staff level for people to react the DEIA Assessment and converse about what to do with the information, taking into account ideas and reactions at both the micro- and macro-levels.

As this work is getting underway ...

STEP SIX: INTENTIONAL OUTREACH

It is here that DLBA admits to doing some things wrong and speaks with authenticity about what it has learned in the development, assessment, and application of its Equity Statement. This is a powerful and liberating moment for the organization. During this intentional outreach, you look to make sure that the "lived experience" of the community is well represented and well respected throughout the organization. Part of the intentionality is also making sure that DEIA is integrated into the strategic plan and not some segregated activity of the plan as though it was a silo'd set of tasks. If that happens, "that's a deal breaker" will be the reaction.

From here ...

STEP SEVEN: THE ON-GOING INTEGRATION OF DEIA STRATEGY

The DEIA Strategy Team continues to inform, discuss, teach, facilitate, and keep the IDEAL's going ... that's the acronym we use at Third Sector Company meaning Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access and Lived Experience.

What is exciting to me about what you are doing is that I think DLBA can serve as a model example for many of the businesses that sit on your board and are involved with organization about how they can about this in their organizations. If I were you, I'd look for ways to see how your conversations and what you are learning can have spill-over benefit to the businesses and communities around you who should be learning from you on this can be done. You should be proud to be a model for DEIA advancement in Long Beach. Knowing you as I do, however, you are going to have to very self-aware that this is a different timetable than a project and it's pieces aren't as well defined as though it's a matter of piecing together a puzzle. This is about truly changing from one culture into a new sustainable culture. It doesn't easily follow logic models and it is demands humility versus assuming privilege. It also mixes up hierarchy and recognizes that leadership comes from a variety of places besides segregating one class of people known as staff from another class of people known as volunteers or board members.

One of the things I encourage when providing advice on this topic is for the DEIA Team to form a book club. As odd this may sound to you, I have found people that people who really want to make a difference in equity and social justice work do better when they learn on their own rather than from a trainer and have a chance to express their reaction when they fell as though other people have had a similar "lived experience" as they have such as having read the same chapter. The magic is the conversation that arises from a group of people who read the exact same thing and have totally different reactions. When you get to this point, you are now doing the work of DEIA. There are lots of excellent books of the subject.

Recommendations

As for me, I would recommend to you that you need to put together an Advisory Council on this subject and invite some diverse people to be on that council on a volunteer basis. I highly recommend that you bring some people from Long Beach employers and institutions that have "Directors of Diversity." You also want a representative from a city initiative. I am happy to play an advisory role to this either "up front" as a "retained facilitator of the Advisory Council"

or as a behind the scenes “coach” to you and Austin or you and the internal DEIA team. I would love to be a resource to you on this. What you don’t want to do however, is every say, “We just hired a consultant to help us with DEIA.” There is a strong sentiment that farming that responsibility out sends a huge message that this isn’t serious and it’s all window dressing. When you hire a consultant you also are hiring a person who is a single demographic whatever that may be, and that, too, is not smart. When you hire a firm, you are getting a team, but you are not building a community of diverse opinions.

If I were addressing the Executive Committee the message is that DLBA desires to build its capacity to be a leader in the advancement of Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Access. That is a long-term commitment to understanding what these words mean, having tough conversations about some of the stereotypes that might exist within our organization, assessing what we’ve been doing that “isn’t walking our talk” and getting people comfortable in leading the way to have a truly rich organization because of the diversity of lived experience that goes into our work. It also means making a public statement and getting everything in place to walk our talk. It’s going to be a commitment, a process, and a new chapter in leadership as the DLBA can also do this in such a way that other businesses can learn from us so that ultimately we are an inclusive and equitable community overall.