

# Diversity and Inclusion: The Next Step in Social Responsibility

Until recently, the terms “diversity and inclusion” and “social responsibility” were used together primarily by environmental organizations as they grappled with legitimizing equity as part of the triple bottom line. Sustainable organizations use this measure to track ecological and social performance in addition to traditional financial performance. However, sustainability applies to more than the environment, and many organizations are now further pursuing social responsibility by launching diversity and inclusion initiatives as part of their business strategies.

This incorporation of social responsibility and diversity and inclusion has progressed to a growing understanding of how diversity and inclusion are vital to the core business strategy of a sustainable organization. Creating an organization that sees and uses difference as a competitive advantage establishes the foundation for that organization to thrive in the future.

In the 21st century, an association leader who wants to excel in social responsibility must embrace a new set of competencies and thinking about diversity and inclusion. A critical first step is an awareness of how one has been socialized and the various social identities one holds. This involves a searching look at your own values, beliefs, world view, and the biases and assumptions you have about people who are different from you.

Being socially responsible and creating diverse and inclusive organizations is a way of being. It’s a way of viewing the world and integrating diversity and inclusion into all aspects of one’s life. Association leaders must examine organizational culture to see how it is shaped by individual mental models that filter information and unconsciously shape our understanding of the world. Members of the dominant culture in an organization, and particularly its leaders, have an obligation to understand the ways in which people that are not part

of the dominant culture are marginalized and excluded. And then those leaders must do something about it.

For example, in working with white leaders, we have found it helpful for them to think about questions such as

- How do I ensure that the body of knowledge, norms, and world view associated with white culture are not simply accepted as the standard rather than being understood in reference to other cultures?
- How do I use my white social identity, and the unearned advantages it gives me, to weaken systems of advantage, and how do I use it to address white privilege and institutionalized racism within the association I serve?

**In the 21st century, an association leader who wants to excel in social responsibility and sustainability must define and embrace a new set of competencies and thinking about diversity and inclusion.**

- How do I create partnerships with people of color in the association I serve?

Another key dimension is being able to hold and value multiple perspectives. As Marcel Proust observed, “The real voyage of discovery consists not of finding new lands but of seeing the territory with new eyes.” Socially responsible, diverse, inclusive associations embrace the idea of “one mission, multiple perspectives” as a way to create a more sustainable organization.

On the path toward sustainability, you will encounter situations in which your formerly successful ways of operating simply no longer work. If you take a good look, though, you may be surprised to find that your volunteer leadership and staff have many skills and competencies that you have never drawn upon because the dominant culture in your organization has

previously shut them out.

Conversely, when people simultaneously examine the issues of dominance, power, and marginalization—and when leaders model a commitment to build a socially responsible and diverse and inclusive association—energy is unleashed. People come forward and offer to help. They step up to the challenges because they believe that who they are, what they know, and what they do matters.

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