

Guidance for Project Teams on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Plans

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Background and Frequently Asked Questions

The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Plan describes the actions your project team will take, if selected for an award, to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for groups underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and applicable workforces. The plan's goal is to advance equity and encourage the inclusion of individuals from these groups in future phases of the project.

Diversity includes a broad spectrum of characteristics including, but not limited to, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion, culture, language, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, family structure, geographic differences, diversity of thought, technical expertise, and life experiences.

Equity means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

Inclusion means recognizing, appreciating, and using the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds.

Accessibility means the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. Accessibility includes the provision of accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to employment and participation in activities for people with disabilities. This definition includes reducing or eliminating of physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities, a commitment to ensuring people with disabilities can independently access every outward-facing and internal activity or electronic space, and the pursuit of best practices such as universal design.

Creating a DEIA plan involves four basic steps:

1. Formulate **why** you are creating a DEIA plan for this project beyond funding requirements. Reasons for organizations to implement DEIA include: cultivating a workplace that attracts and retains top talent, aligning practices with the values that members hold, and acting on research that a more diverse organization or project can improve creativity and productivity.¹ Clarity on this vision for DEIA will help build buy-in for a plan that is implemented.
2. **Assess** the current state of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in your organization and your project. There are some guiding questions below that can help. This will be an initial assessment; if there are knowledge gaps, identify internal analysis needs and itemize those needs in the plan.
3. Develop **goals and desired outcomes**. What does success in achieving these goals look like? How will it be measured?
4. Develop **implementation strategies** to reach those outcomes. This includes specifying roles and responsibilities, defining required resources, and developing a timeline for executing the strategies.

How long should the plan be? What level of detail is required?

The plan should be a maximum of five pages. We recommend that the plan be focused on specific, measurable outcomes and implementation strategies. This table summarizes the deliverables in the plan.

Element	Description	Suggested length
1. Background	Short description of the context of DEIA in the project team and organization and any previous efforts to address DEIA	1-1.5 pages
2. Milestones and Timeline	Outcomes and implementation strategies, including SMART milestones and a timeline for execution.	2-3 pages
3. Resource Summary	Description of resources needed to support the plan	1-1.5 pages

¹ (AlShebli, B.K., Rahwan, T. & Woon, W.L. The preeminence of ethnic diversity in scientific collaboration. *Nat Commun* 9, 5163 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-07634-8>

How much of the written plan should be devoted to detailing each of these steps?

A general rule of thumb is that the applicant should devote less than half of the plan to assessment; it is important not just to measure the status quo but to spend time articulating outcomes and implementation strategies.

We already have a DEIA policy; how does it need to be modified for this FOA?

It depends on what your DEIA policy covers and whether it has specific, measurable actions to be considered a plan. Many organizations have DEIA *statements*. These often affirm an organization's values and commitment. DEIA *policies* often involve procedures for what to do when encountering workplace bias. These are actually different than DEIA *plans*, which involve measurable outcomes and implementation strategies. In many cases, the plan spells out what will be done to implement the policy.

Many DEIA topics sound like what HR deals with, but we as applicants don't control what HR does — so how are we supposed to write about changing it?

This is totally understandable; when it comes to hiring, retention, etc., focus on a project hires and other decisions, like collaboration or contracting, that you might have control over. It's also fruitful to focus on what you can do to foster an inclusive culture within your project. People often mistake DEIA for an HR matter; the aim here is to weave it throughout the whole organization and project. While you don't want to put things in the plan that you don't have control over, you can identify ways you might liaise with HR to suggest new practices.

Who can help us create a DEIA plan?

Many organizations, like universities or larger companies, have dedicated resources for DEIA work. Professional societies often do as well. Further resources are included at the end of this document.

Process for Creating the Plan

Formulating a vision for DEIA in your project

This step focuses on discussing why you are creating a DEIA plan. The internal process for formulating your vision will vary by institution, and if resources are available — e.g., if your organization has a DEI office — it may be useful to have an external facilitator work with you on a discussion of the DEI vision. Or it may just involve a team meeting. The key point is that team members are on the same page about why you are putting together a DEIA plan, as well as how it fits into existing efforts. It would be appropriate to include in the plan a few sentences on the outputs of that conversation (a DEI vision statement). Some advice for vision and mission statements, including DEIA, can be found at <http://www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org/building-inclusiveness-your-mission-and-values>.

Doing an initial assessment

In your plan, you should summarize the results of your project's initial assessment of DEIA. There may be aspects where you lack data. If this is the case, an explanation of how to gather that data and analyze it should be included in your plan. This should include specifying what data sources you will need, how to gather new data if you need it, who will gather the data and analyze it and how long it will take, etc. You will probably draw on both **internal and external data** (for benchmarking), as well as both **qualitative and quantitative data**.

Guiding questions for an initial assessment could involve the following. **We do not expect plans to answer all these questions; we list them here as a resource for you to draw from as you design the initial assessment.** Answering these questions can help you think about outcomes and implementation strategies.

Assessing DEIA training and culture in your organization

- Does your project or organization have an existing DEIA mission statement and philosophy?
- Do project leaders support this DEIA mission, especially as it promotes creating a diverse and inclusive work environment? Provide examples of how.
- What percentage of your organizational resources, in terms of staff, staff time, funding, etc., go to DEIA activities?
- Is there a reporting process that tracks DEIA milestones and metrics in your organization? Does the reporting process involve transparent, third-party reporting systems and incorporate employee feedback?
- What existing employment, salary, retention, and promotion data is tracked about your organization; is it disaggregated by race, gender, and other variables? Is this data shared with employees or made public?
- What are the DEIA training requirements and learning opportunities for employees? What mechanisms are used to measure the effectiveness of these training activities?
- How are participation and outcomes tracked, measured, and shared? Are there DEIA elements in staff performance appraisals and clear guidance and examples of how employees will be evaluated and what successful performance looks like?

For the above:

- Are these policies and practices well-known among the employees — what percent of employees are familiar with them?
- Are these policies and practices clear and effective?

Assessing hiring, including, collaborating with, and contracting with persons from underrepresented groups

Basic analysis:

- How many people are in your organization, and what is the breakdown between management and staff?
- What percent of people employed in your organization are from underrepresented groups?
- What percent of management is from under-represented groups?
- What percent of contracts are with minority, women, or veteran-owned businesses?
- What percent of collaborators (project partners, research collaborators, co-investigators, sub-contractors) are from under-represented groups? From minority-serving institutions (MSIs)? How are collaborations typically formed?
- How are current employment and diversity statistics benchmarked against appropriate comparison populations, such as existing employment data for specific STEM fields across the scientific community, not just the region, and existing graduation rates in specific fields, using, for example, the data available through the National Science Foundation's (NSF) National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, and NSF Science & Engineering Indicators, and scientific professional societies?

Recruitment:

- What percent of job applicants are from under-represented groups? What percent of hires are from under-represented groups?
- How diverse are your workforce recruiting networks (outreach programs and job groups)?
- What efforts are taken to remove bias from job description language and develop objective hiring criteria? (Examples could include using gender-neutral pronouns and job titles, scanning for gender-coding or other phrases that signal unconscious bias towards age, race, or culture, and evaluating language for being welcoming to applicants with disabilities.)
- What training is offered to address implicit bias and ensure effective interviewing? Do you conduct anonymous resume screening without candidate personally identifying information?

Retention and promotion:

- Are candidates assessed on their aptitude for supporting DEIA goals and inclusive workplace culture using standardized behavioral interview questions?
- How robust and transparent are your pay equity processes, and are these grounded in statistical analysis with annual reviews? Are there formal remediation protocols?
- What employee benefits, policies, resources, and initiatives exist to improve well-being and address the needs of employees across career stages and personal family circumstances (e.g., family support services/childcare, alternative and flexible work schedules, etc.)?
- What strategies are in place to retain workers from underrepresented groups?
- Are promotion strategies tracked with an eye towards equity? Are voluntary and involuntary separations tracked with disaggregated data to examine trends?
- Are there mentorship opportunities and programs? If so, are they currently utilized equally by individuals from different identity groups?

Assessing knowledge sharing

Note: There may be parts of this assessment section that overlap with work in Justice40 and Engagement Plans – this is a good time to cross-reference.

- How diverse is your target audience when disseminating details and research outcomes of your work? For example, do you prioritize MSIs, underserved communities, or organizations working with underserved communities?
- How transparent and accessible is the information you share? Do you publicly disseminate the information, and through what channels?
- Is data presented in meaningful ways for community engagement and interpretation?
- Could the communication channels and language be rendered more accessible? Are there different forms of communication that need to be employed for communities with varying levels of digital access? What about language accessibility for speakers of other languages?
- Is the process of disseminating results empowering to those communities involved? In other words, are our communities in a position to use the knowledge to pursue their priorities? If not, is there anything you could do to facilitate this?

Moving from goals to outcomes to implementation strategies

A goal is an aspiration, while an outcome is what it looks like when your goal is achieved. The implementation strategy spells out what needs to happen to reach that outcome, when it happens, and who will do it.

Example 1: Bench-stage example of goal -> outcome -> implementation strategy

You lead a research group and are applying for funding to test a bench-scale carbon dioxide capture process. You analyze your past deliverables and note they have been reported exclusively to your funders or highly specialized peer-reviewed journal articles.

Perhaps you develop the **goal** of disseminating your research to a more diverse audience.

You may set your **outcome** as developing one relationship with a minority-serving institution (MSI) near where you work within the next year and sharing your results and expertise with them.

Your **implementation strategy** may involve things like contacting a specified number of departments or programs within the nearest MSIs to see if they would be interested in a research talk, or if they would be interested in you sponsoring a research visit to your lab for their students to learn about your work and careers in your field.

Example 2: Bench-stage example of goal -> outcome -> implementation strategy

You lead a research group, and your recent work identified next steps should include a collaborative project with experts in areas outside of your university. You have also made a personal commitment to work towards advancing equity and justice and have recently been increasing your efforts to integrate these values into your academic work.

Your **why(s)** might include the need to initiate a collaborative research project outside your institution and your commitment to meaningfully advance equity and justice in your research.

Your **assessment** could involve learning about and identifying minority-serving institutions with expertise in relevant research areas. You might also assess if there are any minority business enterprises, minority-owned businesses, woman-owned businesses, and veteran-owned businesses to solicit as vendors and sub-contractors for bids on supplies, services, and equipment required for this project.

Perhaps you develop the **goal** of increasing collaborative research with groups or individuals underrepresented in your STEM field.

You may set your **outcome** as developing one or more relationships with relevant research groups at a minority-serving institution (MSI) and securing at least one grant to fund a joint research project with an MSI within one academic year.

Your **implementation strategy** may involve contacting a specified number of departments or programs at the relevant MSIs to see if they would be interested in a collaborative research project. After identifying interested partners(s), scoping out research roles, responsibilities, and funding in a way that would benefit groups equitably, and jointly applying to 2 upcoming grant opportunities.

Below is a list of actions that can serve as examples of ways the project could incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion elements. These examples should not be considered either exhaustive or prescriptive. Applicants may include appropriate actions not covered by these examples and should include a comprehensive set of specific DEIA actions anticipated in connection with the project.

A good DEIA plan will include **outcomes** and **implementation strategies** in one or all of these three areas. Please note that important DEIA activities may not fit into these three topical areas.

Below are some goals that may be identified through your initial assessment.

1. **Organizational and cultural change: Create or contribute to existing diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at your own or nearby organizations**

- Enhance or collaborate with existing diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at your home organization or nearby organizations;
- Implement evidence-based, diversity-focused education programs (such as implicit bias training for staff) in your organization.
- Dedicate time and resources for team members to engage in DEI training, networking, and learning opportunities externally.
- Institute or improve the reporting process for tracking DEIA milestones and metrics in the project.

2. Including, collaborating with, and contracting with persons from underrepresented groups

For research / early technological readiness level (TRL) projects:

- Include persons from groups underrepresented in STEM as principal investigators (PI), co-PI, and other senior personnel.
- Include persons from groups underrepresented in STEM as student researchers or post-doctoral researchers.
- Include faculty or students from MSIs as PI/co-PI, senior personnel, or student researchers, as applicable.
- Collaborate with students, researchers, and staff in MSIs.
- Identify minority business enterprises, minority-owned businesses, woman-owned businesses, and veteran-owned businesses to solicit as vendors and sub-contractors for bids on supplies, services, and equipment.

For demonstration / mid-to-late TRL projects:

- Identify minority business enterprises, minority-owned businesses, woman-owned businesses, and veteran-owned businesses to solicit as vendors and sub-contractors for bids on supplies, services, and equipment.
- Identify diversity workforce training programs hosted by the proposed project or nearby organizations to foster improved access to jobs for members of the community, including individuals under-represented in relevant industries and those facing barriers to employment, such as those with disabilities.
- Support **quality pre-apprenticeship** programs in the local community to improve access to career-track training and jobs for underrepresented workers, including returning citizens. Who will you partner with to ensure successful outcomes?

Plans can include information and commitments for *hiring, retention, contracting, collaboration, and workforce development*.

3. Education and outreach in your work: Consider DEIA when sharing knowledge or results

- Disseminate research and development results in MSIs or other appropriate institutions serving underserved communities.
- Make data available and accessible to communities that may be interested.
- Work with community groups to figure out how results or insights from your work could be useful for community priorities.
- Create educational opportunities for schools or other educational institutions in underserved communities where your project team could share their expertise on topics in which the communities are interested.

SMART milestones are a tool to move from goals to outcomes to implementation

The plan should include at least one Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) milestone nominally per year, supported by metrics to measure the success of the proposed DEIA Plan actions.

In project management within DOE, SMART milestones have historically been related to technical achievements. But more generally, within management studies, the formula has been adapted to various goals.

Some tips for SMART milestones:

- For “specific,” make your goals narrow and concrete—this will enable the measurability of the goal.
- For “measurable,” identify what data or evidence you can use to assess whether you are progressing or achieving your goal.

- For “achievable,” knowing your benchmarks and where other companies or organizations are at can help you calibrate what is achievable. This should also consider the time and resources available to implement this goal.
- For “relevance,” refer back to why your organization is pursuing DEIA to tie the milestone to relevant things for your organization.
- With “time-bound,” consider setting interim milestones on the way to a larger goal.

Brookhaven National Laboratory has some advice on SMART goals related to DEIA at <https://www.bnl.gov/training/docs/pdf/ID-Goals-Toolkit.pdf>.

Structure of the Plan / Deliverables

The output of this planning work will be summarized in a document that you submit that is up to 5 pages long. This document should be sure to cover:

1. **Background:** Context and findings from initial assessment
 - This is recommended to be short and no more than half the document
 - It can describe how the project team's DEI work fits in with the larger organization's strategy.
 - It can also cover key data points and include charts or graphs as useful.
2. **Milestones and timelines:** Outcomes and implementation strategies, including SMART milestones and a timeline for execution.
 - This could be presented in a table or graphical form or as a narrative.
 - The DEIA Plan schedule should:
 - Propose when the team will begin implementing this plan, which will be no later than 90 days into the project.
 - Define the timeline on the same schedule as the Project Management Plan. Pivotal points in the DEIA plan's schedule are included in the Project's Statement of Project Objectives (SOPO).
 - Include a description of future DEIA activities for future work either under DOE awards or the lifecycle of the storage facility.
3. **Resource summary:** A description of the resources required to support implementing the plan. Include information about:
 - The number of staff, their time on the project, experience, educational qualifications, and people trained in DEIA, facilitation, or social science.
 - Contracting or partnering with organizations with relevant expertise.
 - Facilities, equipment, and capabilities: Physical buildings and meeting spaces, specialized equipment for research, scientific, and DEIA work, and the abilities of staff, facilities, and equipment enabled for the project.
 - Budget (both federal and cost share aligned with activities in the plan).
 - The risks to achieving specific goals, such as lack of organizational support, funding, expertise, etc.
 - A discussion of how any identified barriers can be overcome/how the required resources will be obtained

How you structure this material is up to you—we also recommend organizing the plan in a way that makes sense for the people in your project/organization and will be read by them. Typical sections might include Background, a Vision / Mission / Goals section that sets out what you hope to achieve (but keep this relatively short), Outcomes, and Implementation Strategies, including roles and timelines. The main thing is that it contains the three elements mentioned above.

Further Questions

How do we know if our DEIA plan is well developed?

An inadequate DEIA plan might include a few vague commitments to values without specific, actionable items.

A good DEIA plan will include SMART milestones, roles and responsibilities for whom is executing the plan, and timelines. This includes identifying targets by which success can be measured.

A good DEIA plan is also one your organization will act upon to implement. This means there should be good prospects for buy-in with all the people with roles and responsibilities for enacting the plan; evidence of having begun or mapped out those conversations can be helpful.

How do we avoid creating additional burdens for members of underrepresented groups?

There is a history of well-intentioned but rushed and not-fully-considered DEIA work that creates additional harms or burdens for underrepresented groups. Often people from underrepresented groups are asked to take on this work in a volunteer capacity or are informally consulted on various DEIA topics without compensation. It is critical to analyze who is being asked to carry the load, how other work responsibilities are shifted to accommodate it, and how compensation is negotiated. Recognition for DEIA work should not just be financial; it comes at the expense of other activities and should be considered in review and promotion.

Resources

National Labs Diversity Goals: <https://nationallabs.org/staff/diversity/>

Promising Practices: <https://science.osti.gov/-/media/SW-DEI/pdf/Summary-of-SC-DOE-Laboratory-DEI-Promising-Practices-2020---vpublic.pdf>

Guide to Minority Serving Institutions: <https://diversitytoolkit.com/minority-serving-institutions/>

DOE Energy Workforce Division: <https://www.energy.gov/diversity/energy-workforce-division>

Diversity, Equity and Inclusions Definitions: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/06/30/2021-14127/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce>

Common Mistakes When Creating a DEIA Policy: <https://www.fastcompany.com/90537483/avoid-these-8-common-mistakes-when-creating-a-di-policy>

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