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# How to Create a More Inclusive Office

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# Introduction

A truly inclusive office strengthens every level of the organization. It's a necessary part of any workplace, and should not be considered synonymous with diversity. It's important to understand how to build and sustain an inclusive work environment in a way that makes everyone in your company feel valued and supported. This ebook will help you do exactly that by giving you a clear map with action steps to create a more inclusive office.



# Understanding Inclusion

First off, it's important to be clear on exactly what inclusion means in this context and how it's different from diversity. **Diversity** is about bringing different and important perspectives into the workplace through hiring people from a variety of backgrounds – race, ethnicity, sex and also education levels, geographic background, socioeconomic status and ability.

Representational diversity became popular in the 1980s, but over time it was clear that in order to help diverse hires succeed, **businesses need to have certain processes and structures in place.** This is where inclusion comes into play. **Inclusion** in this context is how an employee perceives their level of belonging in the workplace. It's important to hire people from underrepresented and historically marginalized groups—but if your new hires don't feel like they belong, they won't succeed or will simply leave.

In an inclusive office, everyone is treated fairly and everyone has equal access to resources and opportunities to succeed both in their careers and within the company.

Now that we're clear on what inclusion is, let's get into how inclusion helps your organization succeed and the steps you can take right away to reach your goals.





# Why Inclusion Matters

There are many benefits to being an inclusive employer. When you commit to making your work environment the best it can be for your employees, everyone is happier and more productive.

**Studies have long shown** that increasing workplace inclusion improves a company's ability to market effectively to a more diverse customer base, which can have a direct impact on your bottom line.

Inclusive employers attract a broad range of applicants, which strengthens both your

recruitment and your business. When you are recognized as an inclusive place to work, you gain a wide pool of applicants to draw from with diverse skills, perspectives, enthusiasm and commitment to you as a supportive employer. Plus, top talent from underrepresented groups may be **more likely to accept offers from a company that has a reputation for being inclusive.**

In the next section you will learn exactly how to approach hiring in order to create and maintain a more inclusive work environment.



# A Framework for Inclusive Hiring

In order to create a more inclusive office, you need an inclusive recruitment process. That's why it's important to bring diverse perspectives into the process at every stage: when writing job descriptions, choosing who sits on the hiring panel, drafting interview questions and making the final decision on the successful candidate, sure you are gathering feedback from a diverse group of advisors and incorporating their input into your process.

To be a truly inclusive workplace, you have to actively and continuously bring underrepresented or marginalized people into processes and decision-making.

## Skills based job descriptions

To incorporate inclusive hiring practices, first take a look at what skills are necessary to get the job done and how key positions relate to each other. If you and your advisors don't have these answers, talk to supervisors and staff who will be working closely with the person in the role. Come up with a list of tasks, essential functions, skills and abilities to do the job well. And don't forget about how the job relates to other positions on the team and within the company. For example, **when hiring for a position that will supervise a number of Latinx employees, it would be useful to recruit someone who speaks some Spanish.**

When you review and draft job descriptions, make sure to stick to the skills required and steer clear of prioritizing "organizational fit". Remember, you're trying to create a more inclusive office, so helping diverse employees fit within the organization will be part of your job. That's all part of retaining diverse talent.

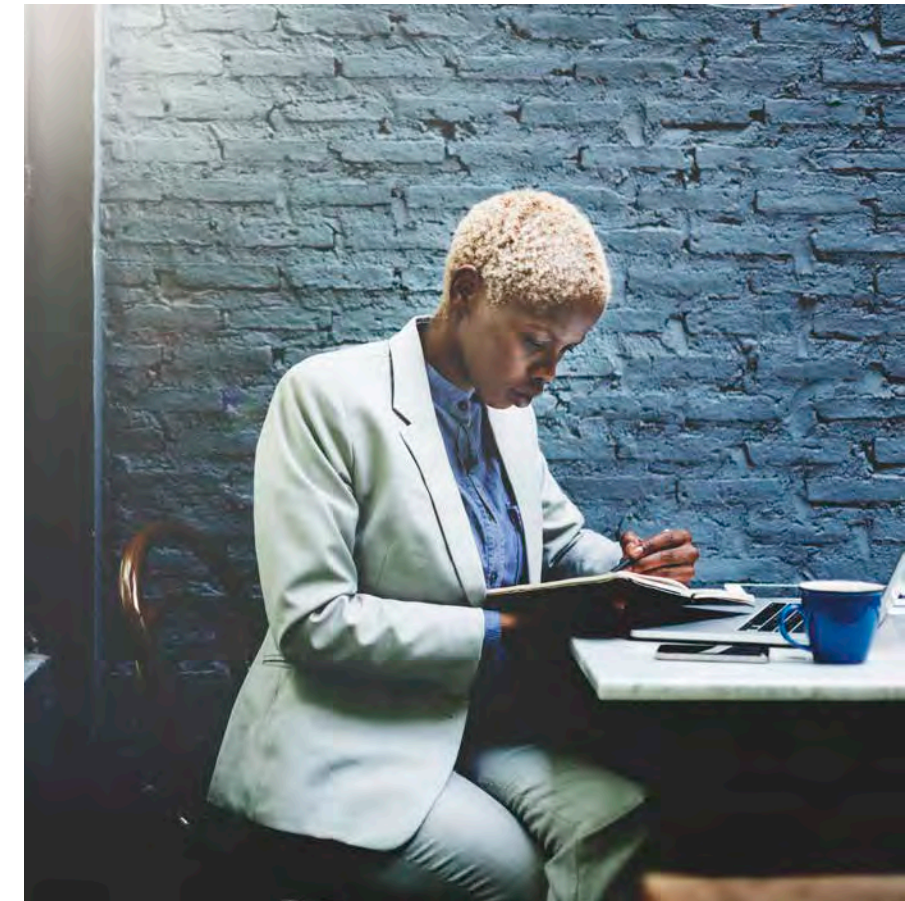
## Interview and selection process

Similar to focusing on skills-based job descriptions, it's important that your interview questions and tests are focused on evaluating the skills that will be required, or need to be learned, in order to do the job. Sure, this sounds obvious but a lot of interview questions and tests are recycled from previous competitions which may not have had a focus on inclusion. Some common skills tests don't accurately or fairly assess job related skills of underrepresented groups with a background different than the majority employees. This happens because test scores can be affected by things that are not actually related to job performance.

Take a step back and think: once the successful candidate is actually in the job, will their work involve timed tests? How often will they actually have to make decisions without any input from colleagues or supervisors? Skills tests should reflect the actual day-to-day work and context of the environment. Top talent from underrepresented groups may have the skills you need, or ability to learn them quickly, and they shouldn't be judged solely on their test-taking skills. Especially when those skills aren't all that critical to success in the role.

When developing your interview process, consider factors that could boost inclusion. For example, depending on the setting you might ask questions

or provide test instructions in various languages. You can also create scenario-based skills tests that include all the information that would typically be available in the day to day work environment, including the opportunity to consult with others who might have more information.

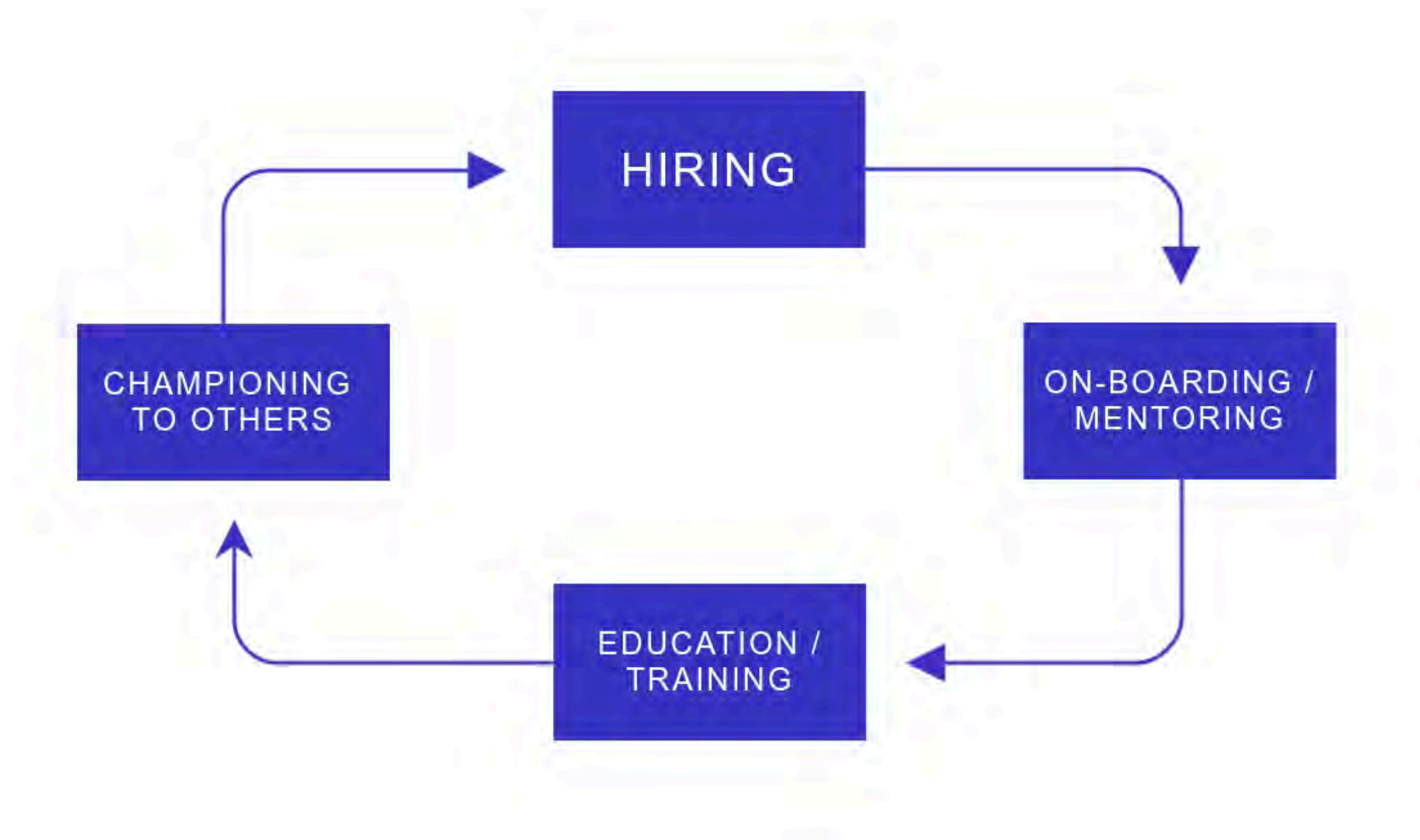




# Building an Inclusive Workplace Lifecycle

Now that you know how to revamp your hiring practices, it's time to shift your focus to inclusive practices that will help retain diverse talent within your company. Remember, an inclusive employer provides equal access to support and opportunities. Think about your inclusive workplace culture plan as cyclical: When you use inclusive practices to hire, on-board and educate, your employees will feel a greater sense of belonging and loyalty to you as an employer. When people feel good about their employer, word tends to spread. A benefit to a more inclusive workplace is happier employees who are also champions for your organization. Inclusion is critical to retaining diverse talent and building an inclusive workplace lifecycle.

Here's what an inclusive workplace lifecycle looks like:







## LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FOUNDATIONAL STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

### Implement programs to mentor new hires

Start a mentoring program to give new hires a point person to ask questions and get an informal understanding of the workplace. Remember, inclusion is about making sure employees feel a sense of belonging in the workplace. It's important that you don't expect new hires to form connections and support systems independently. This can put people from underrepresented groups at a disadvantage and, depending on the situation, can be very isolating.

In a traditional mentoring program, a more senior employee will pair off with someone newer or more

junior who can benefit from their knowledge and connections at the company. This helps the person being mentored feel more comfortable and gives them someone to go to with any questions.

### Make inclusion part of your organizational development plan

To create a truly inclusive workplace, it's important to have ongoing structures and processes in place to make sure there are equal opportunities for everyone in the organization. Incorporate your inclusion programs into your company's organizational development plan.

**Organizational development** is an approach to organizational change that is system-wide, has support from management and is tied to long-term company goals. This means that inclusion is an organization-wide priority and incorporated into all aspects of your organizational improvement plan.

### **Link your goals to performance management processes**

Part of creating an inclusive office is making it clear that inclusion is an ongoing mandatory priority for your company, not a short-term HR initiative. You can emphasize this by tying your goals to performance and salary processes. Performance reviews evaluate how well people are doing their jobs and these reviews are typically tied to compensation. Depending on your organization, your performance management process may already include individual goal setting and measurement against your organization's goals. If you use a performance review template, add a section that reflects your inclusive and respectful workplace goals. This way everyone sees that inclusion is a priority, not only for the organization but also

for each individual. Some organizations even have executive compensation tied to reaching certain diversity and inclusion targets. This signals that inclusion is a priority for everyone in the organization, from the top down.

### **Create a committee or council chaired by Human Resources**

Create a permanent diversity and inclusion council responsible for promoting, monitoring and measuring the company's progress. Similar to the performance evaluation process, this signals to everyone in the organization that it's a priority to establish and maintain inclusion in your work environment. This also creates a group with accountability outside of your HR office. This makes it clear that inclusion is not just an HR initiative, but rather an organization wide responsibility. With that said, **it's important that the group is connected to the Human Resources office** for legal reasons in the case of a complaint or dispute, so make sure there's a chair or representative from HR on the committee.



## **Find a dedicated place to share resources**

Whether you're managing workplace inclusion directly through HR or a committee, or a combination of the two, find a way to share the resources you're using and the material you're developing with the organization. If you have an intranet, dedicate a section for resource sharing and to share information about programs, workshops and other events. If you don't have an intranet, use your employee newsletter or whatever internal communication channels your company has. This work should be visible to as many people in the organization as possible – again, it's everyone's responsibility to improve inclusion in your office but make sure to take the lead on sharing the relevant resources.

## **Launch a job rotation program**

Create a job rotation or job shadowing program to give all of the employees in your company the chance to take on different work assignments. This type of program helps to maintain motivation and gives teams more flexibility. Job rotation is a great way to create cross training opportunities while also supporting inclusion by giving employees the chance to experience the challenges, rewards and stresses of each other's work.

## **Create policies and reporting mechanisms**

As an inclusive employer, you're responsible for maintaining a work environment where employees feel safe from discrimination and harassment. It's important to have policies and channels in place so people can rely on these as a guide and resource. Make sure you include clear steps on what to do if there is a complaint and make the process as transparent as possible.

# Identify Potential Blind Spots

Intuitively we understand that inclusion is important but unintentional blind spots can hold you back from creating a truly inclusive office. Here are some questions to ask when considering potential blind spots:

## **Are your leaders educated about inclusion?**

The leadership team sets the tone for the organization. Leadership training can address unconscious biases and promote language that advances inclusion, from the top down.

## **Do you have a clearly defined process for feedback?**

There's no better way to find out about blind spots than by asking directly for feedback. It's important to have a clear communication process where your employees can feel comfortable sharing any issues they're experiencing and tell you what they need to succeed.



## **Do you acknowledge and celebrate different cultures?**

Take a look at your employee engagement events through the lens of inclusion. Many companies center celebrations around Judeo-Christian holidays by default. When planning company events, consider dates that are culturally significant to your employees. For example, avoid scheduling company-wide meals during fasting holidays.



# Action Steps You Can Take Today

**Look at your strategic plan.** How does Diversity and Inclusion relate to your strategic goals? Are there concerns you need to address or areas that need more immediate focus? Make sure to connect your workplace diversity and inclusion plan to your organization's strategic plan.

**Get leadership support and funding.** Support from your company's senior leaders will be key to your success. This support can come in the form of executive messaging, administrative support and budget to fund your programming.

**Launch a culture audit.** An assessment of your current state can help you define the most immediate areas to focus on. An audit can also be used to benchmark and help you plan events and training sessions and track your progress.

**Collaborate.** Talk to people who are supportive and interested in creating a more inclusive office and look for opportunities to collaborate and get them involved.

**Create accountability.** Inclusion is everyone's responsibility, so building inclusion goals into your existing accountability structures like performance reviews and key performance indicators will help create a level a personal accountability.

**Encourage continuous learning.** There will always be new developments in Diversity and Inclusion practices. Provide your employees with the tools and learning opportunities they need to help maintain an inclusive office.

**Track your results.** Use metrics as much as possible to understand what is working and what isn't. Send out surveys after your events and training sessions to get feedback. Take action on the feedback and report on your successes.

## Tech to Help Create a More Inclusive Office

Along with the actions above, you can also find support in the form of Diversity and Inclusion Technology (D/I Tech) designed to make workplaces more inclusive. These [technology solutions](#) help remove bias, assess culture, analyze positions, simplify reporting and more.

Here are a few tools to look into as you're creating a more inclusive office:

**Bias analyzer** – Why you need it: It's important to create inclusive processes, to build out training programs and accountability across your organization. With all of this in place, is it possible to still fall prey to unconscious biases? [According to research, it is.](#) Help navigate your way around these potential blind spots and leverage machine learning technology to identify and flag potential biases.

**Job Analyzer**, SAP's job analyzer functionality is embedded directly within the SAP recruitment management solution. This software supports hiring managers and HR professionals by [scanning and flagging language that reflects gender bias](#) during the application process.



**Harassment reporting software** - why you need it: According to [a study done by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 2016](#), only 10% of workplace harassment is reported, and 75% of reported cases result in some form of retaliation.

If you need help setting up a safe and transparent workplace harassment system, look into software programs like [People First RH](#). This software offers automatic escalations and anonymized harassment

data reports to encourage a more inclusive work environment. The People First RH app allows employees who believe they have been harassed, or witnessed harassment, an easy and transparent mechanism to submit a report. After the report is submitted both the reporter and HR have full visibility into the process leading up to the resolution. Resolution happens when the victim and company agree that the matter has been resolved.



**Communication analysis tools to preempt workplace bullying** – why you need it: so much of our workplace interactions take place over email and chat. There are technology solutions that use Natural Language Processing (NLP) to crawl text within Gmail and Slack to flag language that may indicate bullying behavior.

[Valued](#), an HR tech startup has a solution that preempts bullying using a combination of NLP, a Slack-based chatbot and data visualization to track and report on both negative and positive interactions.

**Diversity and Inclusion assessment tool** – why you need it: if you're not sure where your organization stacks up in terms of diversity and inclusion, there are technology solutions to help you assess, benchmark, define goals and correct in necessary areas.

[Exude Inc.](#) has a diversity assessment tool that can be customized to your organization's specific goals. This tool will assess and report on your company's current state of inclusion to give an accurate idea of where you need to improve. Exude could be a good solution for you if you want to both leverage technology and work with consultants who can customize the process to your specific requirements.

**D/I tech that helps you explore diverse talent pools** – why you need it: you know that you want to up your company's game when it comes to diverse hiring practices. You've put new processes in place for inclusive recruiting and retaining diverse talent and now you're looking to recruit from a pool with diverse, top talent.

[Mentor Spaces](#) is a professional network for high performing Black college students and new graduates who are looking to get into the workforce. Recruiters can post openings and connect directly with members, making the platform an efficient way to connect with diverse talent.





## Final Thoughts

Now you understand workplace inclusion and why it matters to your brand. You've identified potential blind spots that could exist in your company along with solutions for inclusive hiring practices. You've learned how to create an inclusive workplace lifecycle, and action steps and technology you can use to build a more inclusive office.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT  
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

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