



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Toolkit

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Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in the Workplace

As the voice of the rental housing industry, the National Apartment Association (NAA) recognizes that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) are imperative to the success of our workplaces and communities.

By embracing diverse, inclusive workforces, apartment owners and operators and industry partner companies are better able to serve their customers, as well as thoughtfully and more holistically engage their teams and stakeholders.

Simply stated, diversity benefits business, leading to:

- ◆ Increased and enhanced employee engagement, retention and satisfaction Broader, more creative problem-solving and ideas
- ◆ Stronger and more sound decision-making
- ◆ Improved company and industry reputations and public perceptions
- ◆ Increased productivity and profitability

Making a commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is only the first step in a long but rewarding DE&I journey, a process that leads to important company cultural shifts and meaningful change through education, collaboration and constant adaptation and accountability. It is essential for leaders to engage in and embrace the conversations around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, even if you cannot institute a full-blown plan. This is work that calls for learning to be "comfortable with being uncomfortable," understanding that ultimately the benefits will prove more than worthy of the unfamiliar and often uncomfortable territories that must be traversed to get there.

This toolkit serves as an introduction to establishing DE&I programs, committees and initiatives within your organization. On offer are the first—but by no means final—steps to achieving healthy, whole company cultures that thrive on embracing diversity and equity and ensuring inclusion. *(Please note: Resources contained within this toolkit represent tools from NAA's DE&I Resources; like all aspects of this toolkit, they are a starting point.)*

A Pathway to DE&I

We've all likely heard some version of the analogy of DE&I attributed to Verna Myers: "Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance." But one thing we all know about dancing: It can be daunting to take the first step.

This toolkit breaks down the process of incorporating DE&I into your organization and culture into easily digestible and adaptable phases. Contained within are phased guidance, key questions, resources and more to learn where to start and how to advance DE&I initiatives in ways that will lead to meaningful engagement, purposeful growth and thoughtful integration into a company's culture.

The first step in initiating a DE&I initiative within an organization is making the commitment to being a workplace that embraces Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. NAA has provided a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Pledge for affiliates and member companies willing to make this commitment (See Appendix B), as well as a guide to writing your company's DE&I statement.

The next step is creating a DE&I committee. What that committee looks like will depend on several factors as you establish a DE&I initiative within your organization.

Following are the basic phases of the process of ensuring a successful, productive DE&I initiative that achieves a company's mission and goals, which will be expanded on through the remainder of this toolkit:

Assess

Prepare yourself and your organization for this initiative. DE&I initiatives are most successful when leadership is on board. This process involves building awareness, assessing readiness and building buy-in from the top of your organization.

Vision

Develop an organizational vision of what your organization will look like when DE&I is embedded in all aspects of its works.

Plan

Begin to draft and develop your company's DE&I Action Plan and policies. Communicate your plan to your full team.

Engage

As you begin enacting your plan, ensure active accountability by regularly reviewing your progress and goals. Allow for feedback, questions and active engagement with a process that will surely change and adjust over time. As you learn and grow, be willing to circle back to strengthen your program and institute changes as needed to ensure continued progress.



Ready to get started? Following is a deeper dive into each phase of your DE&I implementation.

A Pathway to DE&I

Any DE&I initiative that hopes to be successful must begin with a thoughtful and intentional approach. As you start pursuing growth through DE&I, start with gathering information on a variety of assessments:

Assess

KNOW YOURSELF (SELF-AWARENESS)

Begin by focusing your attention inward. Engage in self-awareness exercises, implicit bias training and personal assessments to gauge readiness for engaging in the DE&I journey. As you learn about yourself, be willing to discuss what you learn with trusted colleagues to intentionally dig into self-awareness. Develop a personal development plan to ensure intentional growth and combat implicit bias; note how you will pursue continuous growth and both face and address blind spots as you uncover them.

Resources for Self-Awareness:

- A Conversation on Hidden Bias [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)
- [Unconscious Bias: Understanding Bias to Unleash Potential](#)
- Harvard University's Project Implicit: [Implicit Association Test \(IAT\) Database](#)
- TED Talks Playlist: [Bridging Cultural Differences](#)
- [Microaggressions: What I Say and How I Say It](#)

ORGANIZATIONAL AWARENESS

Your leadership team should conduct a review of your company mission, vision and value statements. Begin to develop DE&I goals, ensuring that the company mission, vision and values align with your Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals and objectives. Examine existing initiatives and identify those that relate to or advance your DE&I work.

Resources for Organizational Awareness:

- [Creating a More Inclusive Apartment Industry: Laying the Groundwork \(Part 1\)](#)
- [Creating a More Inclusive Apartment Industry: Implementing DE&I-Building Initiatives \(Part 2\)](#)
- [Overcoming Leadership Barriers and Bias](#)
- [Diversify Your Mindset: A 360-Degree View for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion within Rental Housing](#)



A Pathway to DE&I

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Honestly assess your organization's readiness before engaging in next steps. Ensure executive buy-in, which necessitates a clear statement of the organization's commitment to building and sustaining a diverse and inclusive workforce. Do not work in a vacuum; during this phase of organizational analysis, it is essential to seek input and feedback from all levels of your organization. It is also imperative during this phase to begin gauging your institutional buy-in: How willing is your full team to begin and engage in this work?

Resources for Organizational Readiness:

- ◆ [Forging a Path Forward to Becoming a Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Organization](#)
- ◆ [Leadership in an Era of Social Turbulence](#)
- ◆ [Inclusive Communities Improve Resident Living Experiences](#)
- ◆ [The State of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in NAA Member Organizations](#)
- ◆ [Taking a Stand on Diversity, Inclusion and Equity](#)

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Establish a baseline for your DE&I initiative by engaging company demographics through a diversity analytics review. Conduct a stakeholder analysis to understand the various people who will be engaged in this work. Review data analytics to understand where your company stands and how you compare to your market, geographical area and industry. Review company policies, practices and initiatives to understand how they relate to your upcoming DE&I work; this will include examining recruitment, hiring practices, employee development, advancement and benefit opportunities, etc. Review current training and engagement mechanisms through a DE&I lens. Look at your organizational and decision-making structures. Analyze the data gleaned from these assessments to identify the major DE&I challenges facing your organization. Completing your organizational assessment establishes a baseline for how employees feel about the current company culture and environment. Consider completing surveys, holding focus groups and otherwise engaging your team to gauge perceived levels of engagement, opportunities for and barriers to growth, the cohesiveness of various team structures and so forth.

Resources for Organizational Assessment:

- ◆ [Diversify Your Mindset: A 360-Degree View for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion within Rental](#)
- ◆ [Doing the Right Thing: Cultivating an LGBTQ+ Workplace](#)
- ◆ [Promoting Diversity in Promotions](#)
- ◆ [Improving Inclusion in the Multifamily Housing Industry](#)



A Pathway to DE&I

Assessment Tips

- Who should be involved in the assessment phase? Stated simply: Everyone in your organization should be engaged in this process.
- Ensure that your company's leadership team buys in and provides clear direction for this phase.
- Decide whether the gathering of data and analysis will be conducted internally or externally through a third-party company.
- As you conduct your assessments and analyses, be sure to begin identifying the diversity champions within your organization.
- Determine who in your organization will be responsible for each level of assessment. Remember that
- assessment is an ongoing process; be prepared to continue the monitoring and assessment of employee engagement, program results and areas for growth or adaptation.

A Pathway to DE&I

Vision

Your DE&I vision shares your boldest ideas of what your organization will look like when DE&I has fully been integrated into all aspects of your company culture. **Boldness** is key: Dream big when picturing the changes to your company culture and what it will mean for all levels of your company's operations. Set bold goals for your company that reflect the same passion with which you undertook this work!

NAA has provided a guide to writing your company's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement. This is a good starting point for establishing your full DE&I vision. Your DE&I statement will include:

- ◆ A reflection of your company's mission A statement of your company's values
- ◆ Your company's clearly stated commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- ◆ A positive and inclusive message reflected in positive, purposeful language
- ◆ An outline of your company's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals
- ◆ A vision of how your company will achieve these goals

CASTING YOUR VISION: WWWHWW Analysis

As you review your organizational analysis and assess your company's needs, your vision will take shape as you engage in a “Why, Who, What, How, Where and When (WWWHWW) Analysis” of your company:

- ◆ Understand WHY you are engaging in DE&I programming and cultural growth.
- ◆ Know WHO will be involved in the various conversations, programs, etc. your company will undertake and why they are imperative to the success of each stage of your program. This includes identifying who will be directly involved, who is missing from the table, who will lead various stages of implementation and who will maintain accountability.
- ◆ Define WHAT expected outcomes are and what your organization hopes to achieve through this work.
- ◆ Determine HOW you will engage in the various programs, trainings, etc. of your DE&I initiative, including Employee Resource Group (ERG) or Affinity Group (AG) development, training mechanisms (in-person, virtual, facilitated, self-guided, etc.), and so forth.
- ◆ Decide WHERE engagements will take place, keeping in mind space needs, group size, impact to company productivity, etc.
- ◆ Decide WHEN engagements will take place, including timelines for various implementations of program initiatives.

A Pathway to DE&I

Key Vision Questions:

- Why is engaging in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion important to you and your organization?
- What are the benefits of adding DE&I to your company's culture?
- What would your company look like if DE&I became fully integrated in all aspects of your work and operations?
- Do DE&I champions already exist within your company? If so, who are they?
- What are some key initiatives and undertakings you hope to establish in your company within the next... month? Six months? One year? Five years?
- Who are your key stakeholders in your DE&I plan and program?
- How committed are you to the work you will need to undertake to ensure your program's success?
- What will it take to ensure buy-in from all levels of your team?
- Who is missing from the table? Who have you not heard from, and what can you do to ensure they are given a voice in this process?
- What are your key DE&I goals? What are your desired outcomes? How will you measure the success of your program and initiatives?
- What tools and resources might you use to bolster your DE&I initiative? Who directs your program? Who directs each initiative?
- What mechanisms will you engage to enable both direct and anonymous team member feedback?
- What will you do if you begin to receive negative feedback about your program? How ready and willing are you to pivot and redirect to avoid harm?

Resources for Developing Your Company DE&I Vision:

- [Writing Your Company's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement](#)
- [NAA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Pledge \(Appendix B\)](#)

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Plan

It is now time to start crafting a framework for your DE&I initiative through the drafting and development of your company's DE&I Action Plan and policies. Remember that while you are crafting your DE&I mission and vision, it is important to keep your company's current mission and vision in mind; aligning your DE&I mission and vision with your overall mission and vision helps provide cultural context and frames your DE&I work as advancing and enhancing the overall work of your organization.

The planning phase is also where you ensure that this work is more than just lip service. Having a documented DE&I plan and expressed DE&I policies engrains both your commitment and accountability into your process and establishes a clear path to instilling DE&I into your company's culture. While vision work expresses where you want to be, developing your plan defines exactly how you plan to get there.

CREATE A DE&I ACTION PLAN

Your action plan serves as the framework for your DE&I initiative. Include vision and mission statements, measurable goals and benchmarks for analyzing and evaluating data sets to ensure accountability and organizational impact.

The number one way to enhance team buy-in for your DE&I strategy is to involve your team in the process from the beginning. Seek the input, feedback, guidance and advice of team members from all levels of your organization, working to ensure that diverse voices are heard from throughout your company. It may seem counterintuitive, but this also includes those who may not share your vision or valuing of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in your organization. Understanding their objections will help you identify the major DE&I challenges facing your organization and integrate approaches to mitigating roadblocks or concerns encountered along your DE&I journey.

When drafting your DE&I Action Plan, remember to include:

VISION: A concise, high-level statement that captures the essence of your organization, states strategic goals and priorities, expresses who will be included and affected by the work and looks forward to what your company will be once you achieve your goals.

MISSION: A statement that considers what you want to do and who you want to be, as well as outlines how you will get there, giving purpose to your DE&I strategy.

GOALS: Specific, strategic and measurable objectives, specific to the unique needs of your organization, that will ensure your company sees meaningful progress and growth.

BENCHMARKS: The major milestones, performance levels and standards the organization will reach to measure achievement of your DE&I goals as well as individual, team and company growth, by comparing your baseline to your current progress.

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ORGANIZE YOUR DE&I STAKEHOLDERS

Creating a group of DE&I stakeholders at this stage of your DE&I process helps ensure that you have representation reflective of the diversity of your organization guiding your policy development. Your company leadership (President, CEO, Managing Partner, etc.) should share the vision, mission, goals and benchmarks of your DE&I Plan with your stakeholders to both ensure shared understanding of your objectives and gain their insights into the path you are setting forth for the company. Work to ensure your DE&I stakeholder group represents the diversity of your company through as many levels of the organizational structure as possible. Your initiatives and policies will have little meaning to the various levels of your organization if the specific needs of those levels are not recognized throughout your process.

Keep in mind that this group may go by many names. A **task force** is often created on an "as-needed" basis to fulfil a temporary role within your organization. A **workgroup** or **working group** is typically an investigative group that examines specific problems and provides suggestions for dealing with them. A **commission** or **council** acts under the guidance and authority of a governing body (i.e., your company's leadership team) to carry out a specific task. A **committee** is a group that meets and deliberates according to fixed rules to produce specific results (i.e., the development of a document, reaching decisions on specific matters entrusted to them, etc.). Your leadership team should determine which group type meets your company's current needs and be mindful that the group structure and makeup may change over time as your company culture shifts and grows more diverse, equitable and inclusive. (See Appendix C, "Don't Go It Alone")

DRAFT YOUR DE&I POLICIES

While a DE&I Policy may feel prohibitive or prescriptive, establishing policies helps to ensure accountability. Having a solid DE&I Policy builds your Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives into your company culture by setting standards and assuring all team members are working within the same understanding and toward the same goals.

When setting your DE&I policy, ensure the conversations include the entire organization. Your company's CEO, President or Chief Diversity Officer should be the visible leader and spokesperson for your initiative. Your leadership team should be involved early and engaged in your policy creation process to ensure continued buy-in. Engage your DE&I stakeholders to gain broad perspectives as you develop your policy. Engage in conversations and exercises with all employees to get their input and use their feedback to drive your policymaking process. You might also consider hiring a consultant to assist with the planning and development of your DE&I program.

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YOUR DE&I POLICY MAY INCLUDE:

- ◆ Your company-wide understanding of the benefits of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
- ◆ Expectations for engagement, setting a tone that allows your full team to know that they have a voice in your initiatives, programs, culture and growth.
- ◆ Commitments to question current systems, explore and address unconscious bias, advocate for change, acknowledge existing inequities and continually adapt to the changes that will drive your company toward a diversity and inclusive culture.
- ◆ An all-levels' commitment to transparent communications and respectful leadership and engagement.
- ◆ The various standards your company will adhere to in order to ensure safe, thoughtful engagement with and progress towards your DE&I goals, mission and vision.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

It is essential to communicate your organization's DE&I goals, objectives and plans to your employees. Continue to pursue buy-in from all levels of your organization by leading your initiatives in a way that ensures all voices are engaged throughout the process.

Resources for Developing Your DE&I Plan:

- ◆ [50 Ideas for Cultivating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace](#)
- ◆ [B Corp: Best Practice Guide: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Your Workplace](#)
- ◆ [Illumination Proclamation - A Fireside Chat about Disability and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)
- ◆ [Greystar's People and Culture Podcast Interview with Israel Carunungan](#)
- ◆ [Vendor Discussion – Grow Your Revenue through Supplier Diversity](#)
- ◆ [What to Do with Progress Stoppers in Your Organization](#)

A Pathway to DE&I

Plan

Enacting your DE&I program involves numerous key activities and considerations. While this is not an all-inclusive list, below are several levels of engagement to plan for as you adopt your DE&I initiatives, plans and policies.

TRAINING AND REPORTING

As you launch your DE&I program, include training and reporting as part of your DE&I plan initiatives. Provide training that increases self-awareness and understanding of unconscious bias. Remember that as you learn together, you are better able to engage in conversations and growth from a place of mutual understanding. As you incorporate trainings into your company, remember to engage in conversations and periods of reflection afterward; this both helps engrain the training material into your company culture and helps you evaluate the efficacy of the trainings you adopt.

CELEBRATE AND PARTNER

Enacting a DE&I program also includes celebrating diversity and supporting allyship. Provide your team with various ways to share the culture they bring to your organization and celebrate the culture others bring. Recognize, embrace and celebrate the differences that exist within your company to encourage and foster cultural appreciation, inclusiveness and a stronger sense of connection with team members at all levels of your organization. Support allyship by encouraging your teams to get to know other team members who are not like them and champion the celebration of what they bring to the table. Encourage team members to speak up if they see someone who is not included. Keep in mind that while we should never speak for others without permission, some team members might not feel comfortable speaking to certain issues on their own and may appreciate having an ally or "accomplice" to join them in raising a concern.

TALK THE TALK AND WALK THE WALK

Ensure that you follow through on your stated commitments and initiatives. Allow for open, safe and "bold" conversations. Continuously communicate to ensure all team members know that this work is a permanent part of your organization's culture and growth. Reflect on and share outcomes honestly and humbly; share both successes and failures with your team, openly communicating pivots and adjustments to meet shifting needs and creating open avenues for shared learning, experiences and growth throughout your process. Commit to growing together, both internally and externally to your organization; learn from other companies that are engaging in similar processes and develop open communication channels for shared learning and growth.

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EVALUATE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Engage your DE&I stakeholder group in considering, evaluating and adapting your company policies and practices. Consider your hiring practices: Where are job listings posted? How are interviews conducted? Do you tend to hire based on "culture fit" or "culture add?" Consider your onboarding and training processes and how they might be adapted to meet various cultural or ability needs. Conduct an audit of salaries and advancement and development opportunities.

CONSIDER ALL ASPECTS OF DIVERSITY

Be careful not to focus your Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts solely on one aspect of diversity. For example, many companies celebrate an increase of women in leadership while overlooking that the women who are promoted still lack cultural diversity. Some may hire and onboard a few culturally diverse team members and assume their work is done. In the rental housing industry, we emphasize the protected classes we must not discriminate against in renting but sometimes overlook the existence of diversity in race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age and disability within our own organizations. Remember that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is not about meeting quotas. A culture that embraces DE&I likewise values the suggestions and experiences of all types of diversity represented within the team.

CULTIVATE BELONGING

Inclusion in the workplace thrives when team members feel a sense of belonging. When employees feel isolated at work, companies see lower engagement, decreased satisfaction and increased attrition. On the flip side, employees who feel comfortable being themselves at work and valued as individuals tend to be better engaged, have a higher sense of satisfaction and loyalty and are more productive. To "belong" at work is to have a sense that you matter, you have your own identity and you are accepted by and connected with your coworkers and associates. Consider cultural differences, gender identities, religious practices and more when thinking about whether team members may feel excluded. Examine holiday calendars and consider creative solutions like self-selected holidays and days off. Have discussions on whether "gender-norm" or "mainstream American"-conforming dress code policies may make team members uncomfortable and redefine "professional attire and appearance" for a more inclusive audience. Engage with your teams to understand what makes them feel both included and excluded and adapt your policies and perceived "norms" accordingly.

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INWARD AND UPWARD

Continue examining the various levels of your organization to uncover areas where growth can be adopted. For example, consider how a sense of belonging and company loyalty might be affected by the perception that there is no room for growth or advancement. Specifically, when it comes to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, maintain objective awareness of trends in advancement practices that may suggest a lack of opportunity. What is the makeup of your leadership and corporate team? Who makes up your onsite management team? What opportunities exist for growth within your maintenance and housekeeping teams? How often are new opportunities created within your organization? Do you have a coaching or mentorship program? Always remember: DE&I is not about quotas or considering a single hire or promotion the end of the line. It is about ensuring all people within your organization are engaged, celebrated and enabled to thrive.

Resources for DE&I Engagement:

- ◆ [Inclusive Communities Improve Resident Living Experiences](#)
- ◆ [Women, Diversity, Growth and Leadership in Rental Housing](#)
- ◆ [Diversity Equity Inclusion: Considerations for Managing Diverse Teams](#)
- ◆ [Celebrating Black History Month in Rental Housing](#)
- ◆ [When Two or More Women Are Up for the Job](#)
- ◆ [Winning the Fight for Talent](#)

There Is No Finish Line

It has often been said that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is "not a sprint but a marathon." Frankly, even this analogy is deceptive because marathons have an end. If DE&I is a race, it is one with a constantly shifting finish line... one that you never reach, and you never want to. DE&I programs are ongoing efforts that require constant and consistent measurement, re-evaluation, adaptation and communication. As you achieve growth in one area, you may uncover challenges in others.

That's a good thing! Progress in DE&I means becoming ever more aware of ways to keep your growth going. As DE&I becomes part of your culture, you realize that culture is shaped by the shared knowledge and experiences of your group; the more you engage, the more you learn, the more you grow and the more your culture changes. Ensure your commitment to DE&I remains strong. Keep communication open. Constantly evaluate feedback. Engage in bold conversations.

The more you embrace Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the more it becomes the fabric of your organization.

The more it defines your culture, the better both internal and external perceptions of your organization will become.

Appendix A: DE&I Glossary

This glossary of terms was adapted and crafted by the author using various resources, educational materials, and accepted language of trusted experts engaged in the practice of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Ally (or, Accomplice; Advocate)

An **ally** is a person from one social identity group (e.g., Black, cis gender, heterosexual, Christian, etc.) who stands in support of members of another group (e.g., Latinex/Hispanic, transgender, LGBTQ+, Muslim, etc.). Allyship is earned, not self-proclaimed; self-proclaimed allyship is often viewed as "performative," while earned allyship is active, engaged and willing to accept personal risk. An ally is typically a member of a dominant/elevated group who stands with members of marginalized/disenfranchised groups.

Similar to allyship, an **accomplice** is one who actively stands beside or "before" (i.e., as a "shield") a member(s) of a marginalized/disenfranchised group(s) to directly challenge institutionalized "isms" (racism, colonialism/colonization, sexism, homophobia/heterosexism, etc.) by actively blocking or impeding people, policies and structures that attempt to exert prejudicial power over others.

An **advocate** is another form of active allyship, wherein someone speaks up for themselves or on behalf of a particular identity group (their own, or another).

Bias

Prejudice, whereby one uses an inclination or preference to prejudge others. Bias can be positive and/or negative.

Diversity

Generally, the wide variety of shared and different personal and group characteristics among human beings. Diversity is both visible (color, gender, age, ethnicity, visible disability and sometimes religion) and invisible (socioeconomic status, invisible disability, mental/behavioral health, religion, familial status, etc.). It is important to note that people have diversity; people are not, themselves, diverse, but elements and aspects of their identity are. The risk in conflating diversity and the notion of "diverse people" tends to lead to tokenism and diversity based in representation rather than inclusion.

Equity

The act of ensuring that individuals are provided with the resources they need to have access to the same opportunities as the general population. Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, but there are key differences. "Equality" suggests uniformity, with even distribution among all people; what is equal, however, is not always equitable. "Equity" or "Equitability" suggests impartiality, with distribution made in such a way to "even" opportunities for all people; what is equitable is not always equal.

Appendix A: DE&I Glossary

Explicit Bias

Also known as “conscious bias,” explicit bias refers to the attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level, often expressed in response to the perception of a direct threat. Explicit bias is known and openly recognized.

Fragility

An uncomfortable term for many, fragility refers to discomfort and defensiveness on the part of an individual or group when confronted by/with information about inequality and/or injustice. Typically used in the context of "White Fragility," the term in this context suggests that white people (specifically those in North America) live in a social environment that both protects and insulates them from race-based stress, resulting in increased stress and discomfort when directly confronted with these things. In a broader sense, fragility is the tendency of a person or group to become defensive when confronted with bias, prejudice or “isms.” (e.g., "I'm the farthest thing from racist!" "Why should I have to pay for the homophobia of others?" "If we just stopped talking about it, the problem would go away.")

Guilt

A feeling one experiences when confronted with and/or acknowledging the commission of an offense or wrongdoing, whether intentional or accidental. Guilt is often associated with one's "moral code"; one feels guilty when they do something contrary to their expressed morality or values. Guilt is not necessarily bad and is often linked with the felt need to "atone" or "make right."

Implicit Bias

Also known as “unconscious bias,” implicit bias refers to attitudes, assumptions and beliefs we have about a person or group that are unknowingly held. Implicit bias is often "hidden" and thus not openly recognized; we often do not recognize the ways implicit bias unconsciously impacts our behavior toward certain groups considered "other" to our own.

Inclusion

Authentically bringing traditionally excluded ("marginalized") individuals and/or groups into processes, activities and decision-making and/or policymaking in a way that shares power. Inclusion actively creates involvement and empowerment, whereby any person or group can be, and feel, welcomed, respected, supported and valued to fully participate.

Appendix A: DE&I Glossary

Intersectionality

The idea that classifications (gender, race, class, etc.) cannot be examined in isolation from one another, but rather interact and intersect in individuals' lives, society and social systems. Intersectionality enables a person to recognize how they might simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. Coined by scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, the term originally denoted the ways in which the feminist movement in the United States excluded Black women in the 19th and 20th centuries, and highlighted the fact that, despite feminism's suggestion otherwise, women were not a "homogenous" group sharing the same life experiences. In a broader sense, intersectionality clarifies that no one classification represents the whole of a person, and not all are met with equal degrees of privilege or discrimination.

-Ism

The use of power (whether intentional or unintentional) to isolate, separate and exploit others, where such use of power is based on a belief in superiority (or, superior origin), and whereby certain privileges are conferred upon and defenses applied to the dominant group and the discriminatory assertion of prejudicial power reinforced, sustained and perpetuated against others. Examples include racism, sexism, ableism, etc.

Marginalization

The exclusion, ignoring or relegation of a group to the "outer edge" of a group, society or community. Marginalization devalues those who vary from the "norm" or "mainstream," at times to the point of dehumanizing them or otherwise categorizing them as deviant, regressive and inferior.

Microaggression

Everyday verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile or derogatory slights. Microaggressions are typically outside the conscious awareness of perpetrators; those who conduct microaggressions are rarely aware of the hidden message being sent and the insult that might be leveled against members of a marginalized group.

Power

The ability to do something or act in a particular way, and particularly the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Power is inextricably linked to access and control; those with greater power within society typically have greater access to and control over resources. Power is also very much linked with privilege; power is often granted on the basis of social mechanisms (e.g., citizenship, education, heterosexuality, patriarchy, wealth and whiteness).

Appendix A: DE&I Glossary

Privilege

Unearned social power (set of advantages, entitlements and benefits) accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to the members of a dominant group. Privilege is typically invisible to those who possess it, thus creating a difficult to manage discourse when those without privilege note it to those who unknowingly have it. Privilege often grants a degree of power that those with it seldom realize they have. As something that is unearned, it is not something to be ashamed of; rather, it is how one exercises this privilege, once they are made aware of it, that is typically judged.

Representation

As opposed to inclusion, representation is the idea that a group is diverse simply by merit of the presence or presentation of a typically marginalized group. Representation is often linked with the ideology of "diverse people" and tokenism. Representation suggests that the presence of "diverse people" means an organization or group is diverse; it rarely, however, takes into account the actual inclusion of different perspectives or peoples, and typically results in the further alienation of those who become "representative" of a particular group. Just because one is represented does not mean they are included.

Safe Space

An environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule or denial of experience.

"Safer Space"

Taking the idea of a "safe space" one step further, a "safer space" is a supportive, non-threatening environment that actively encourages open-mindedness, respect, a willingness to learn from others and both physical and mental safety.

Shame

A painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior; contrary to guilt, where one realizes they have made a mistake, shame often makes one feel that they *are* a mistake. Guilt makes one feel humble; shame makes one feel humiliated. Where guilt may prompt action, shame may prompt inaction, defensiveness or hostile withdrawal from engagement with wrongdoing.

Tokenism

The hiring or seeking of representation (i.e., having a few women, racial minorities, etc.) to appear inclusive while remaining mono-cultural. Tokenism is akin to performative allyship or performative inclusion; it is often viewed as a symbolic gesture to give the appearance of equality, equity or inclusion within an organization. Tokenism often revolves around quotas and the idea of "checking the boxes" of diversity; it is typically harmful to those who become "tokens" within an organization, as they can often perceive that they are not valued for their input, intelligence or skill, but rather minimally accepted for the purpose of "checking a box" (and quieting the discourse of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion).

Appendix B: NAA Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

NAA Affiliate Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Pledge



As leaders in the rental housing industry, we are committed to modeling inclusion; embracing diverse backgrounds and perspectives among our peers, partners and those whom we exist to serve; and promoting a workforce based in the principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

We recognize that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are broad and complex areas that must be approached holistically, transparently and with deep institutional integrity and humility. We also know that diversity, simply put, benefits our business, leading to:

- **Increased** and **enhanced** employee engagement, retention, and satisfaction
- **Broader**, more **creative** problem-solving and ideas
- **Stronger** and **more sound** decision-making
- **Improved** company and industry reputations and public perceptions and
- **Increased** productivity and profitability

As part of our commitment to boldly embrace Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in our organization, we are committed to the following actions:

1. We will proactively build trust and work to ensure our workplaces provide safe spaces to have bold, inclusive conversations and foster corporate cultures of inclusivity.
2. We will educate ourselves and our teams about the nature and impact of unconscious bias, working to recognize and minimize our blind spots, build cultural awareness both of ourselves and others and continuously evaluate and adapt our shared resources to further enhance this essential education.
3. We will establish and share best practices, understanding that each of our partners are at different places in their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion journeys and recognizing the importance of sharing strategies, challenges and successes to help each other along the way.
4. We will develop proactive, purposeful teams to lead our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, working with our leaders to establish strategic action plans that prioritize accountability, evaluation and meaningful engagement in such initiatives.

In this pledge, we acknowledge that this is not the complete answer, but that these are important first steps toward building more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces. We also recognize that we are accountable both to ourselves and to others, and pledge to create systems of accountability to track progress, share and evaluate outcomes and develop strong systems of accessible, shared practices. By adopting and sharing in this pledge, we recognize that by sharing and learning together, we grow together, strengthen our industry, and better serve our employees, partners and communities.

Appendix C: Don't Go It Alone

Organizational Outreach

We have mentioned several times the need to engage your full team in implementing your DE&I strategies. Working across all key levels of your organization, from leadership to stakeholders (employees, supplier partners, etc.), helps to ensure none of the work you do in developing and implementing your plan is done in a vacuum and that all voices are valued and given opportunity to be heard. We have already discussed leadership's role in guiding these processes... Now let's take a closer look at ways to engage the rest of your team!



DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION COUNCIL

We previously discussed the importance of organizing your organization's DE&I stakeholders to help guide policy development and ensure inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in your DE&I processes. According to the recent NAA DE&I Survey, while 88% of respondents reported their organizations valued improving people's feelings of connection and inclusion, most have not created the conditions for diverse employees to thrive. Only 34% of those surveyed had a diversity council that has had a positive effect on their DE&I efforts.

A DE&I Council is a partnership of employees across the various levels of an organization, including organizational executives and senior leadership, that work with the organization's senior leadership team to plan, develop, implement and manage DE&I processes while ensuring these programs, processes and initiatives align with the organization's mission, vision, goals and business strategy. While all levels of the organization are important to the success of a DE&I Council, it cannot be stressed enough how vital a role senior leadership support plays in the success of the council.

To ensure success for both your DE&I Council and DE&I strategies, your council must have:

- ◆ The buy-in, support and participation of senior leadership
- ◆ Diverse membership across all levels of your organization
- ◆ Goals, outcomes and metrics that are clearly communicated and easily tracked
- ◆ Clear, direct connection to your organization's business strategy, mission, vision and goals
- ◆ A strategic plan to guide the various initiatives recommended and implemented within the organization

Appendix C: Don't Go It Alone

BUILDING YOUR DE&I COUNCIL

Consider the following when developing and inviting stakeholders to your DE&I Council:

- ◆ **Leadership:** While senior leadership must be part of your Council, who takes the lead can vary. Your organization may choose to have your CEO/President chair the Council, especially if they are either the primary champion of your DE&I initiative or have extensive background and experience in leading DE&I initiatives. You may choose to create a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) position that will also lead your DE&I Council. Many organizations choose to partner the CEO and CDO as joint chairs of the Council.
- ◆ **Representation:** Ensure that membership reflects balanced representation of your organization's team. Seek membership from all levels of your organization. Remember that while championing your DE&I initiative comes from the top down, it often is those who perceive themselves as the farthest down in your organization who also feel they are the least heard. Ensure that you are bringing all voices to the table, across the various departments, generations, genders, cultures and demographics representative of the full spectrum of diversity within your organization.
- ◆ **Champions:** Consider who the leaders are within your organization. Who is already championing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion? Council members should be those who are respected and influential within your organization. They will be well-versed in your organization, from its goals and mission to the challenges and concerns driving business practices and changes within the organization. Members of your Council will be those you can rely on to bring unique and varied insights, perspectives and ideas.

DEFINING YOUR DE&I COUNCIL

The leadership team will determine what type of group (council, committee, working group, etc.) best meets your organization's current needs; the structure and makeup may change over time as your organization's needs and culture change. Regardless of the title given to this group, the work and responsibilities must be considered from a company culture and business practice lens, with buy-in and engagement from company/senior leadership.