

American Society of Civil Engineers, Philadelphia Chapter, Young Member Forum
How to Implement DEI Initiatives in Our Industry

Sharing & Connecting Block:

How We Are Implementing DEI Initiatives in Our Industry

Event Summary:

On Tuesday October 24, 2023 we hosted our “Sharing and Connecting Block: How We Are Implementing DEI Initiatives in Our Industry” event. The event was held at McCormick Taylor, Philadelphia, and hosted by the Philadelphia Chapter of ASCE and Young Member Forum (YMF). Engineers, Planners, Architects and others in the industry got together to share their experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and connected across disciplines, associations, and companies. Ten organizations participated in our fast and dynamic presentation, sharing what they’re doing at their organization. Lively connection and discussion were had at the round tables which focused on getting DEI groups and programs off the ground, implementation of DEI at organizations and within teams, and intersectionality and group participation. As a follow-up to this event, we are providing the following resources:

1. How we organized, hosted, and structured the event, so you can recreate it.
2. Actionable Items from the round tables.



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What we Did: (Anything listed below can/should be modified for your group or myriad topics.)

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is an industry-wide issue. This event focused on *SHARING* our thoughts and experiences and *CONNECTING* across our industry. Only by learning from others, welcoming diversity of background and experience, and growing-together can we make a difference.

Goal 1: Connect Industry Wide - We have begun to focus on creating networking events that allow those in the industry, not just civil engineers, to learn and understand from one another.

Actions 1:

1. Focus on events that encourage conversation and avoid business card handout sessions.
2. Look for partnering organizations; find associations and companies that compliment your organization.
 - a. Have leadership coordinate and agree upon the event, event style, and topic, prior to specific event planning.
 - b. Establish that the partnering organizations have the same level of respect and understanding for each other. (This can be more challenging when you are a YMF group or a physically smaller group.)
3. Start advertising months in advance. Find ways to network the event and drum up excitement. (This style of event may be a-typical, and require a face-to-face explanation to get others onboard.)
4. Coordinate advertising schedules with partnering and participating organizations. (Some organizations need a few days to advertise, others up to a month.)
5. Consider having the event be free, or at a low cost, to allow for inclusivity.
 - a. Consider budgeting for the event in advance.
 - b. Ask local companies to donate space, food, etc.



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Goal 2: Share Information Quickly - To disseminate information quickly, we modified the Pecha Kucha style presentation format to suit our needs. (Pecha Kucha is a storytelling format in which a presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds of commentary each.)

Actions 2:

1. Advertise that you are looking for presenters from any/all participating organizations.
2. We recommend having those working in the industry present, rather than HR.
3. We recommend that presentations not be recorded, as this alleviates most participants' hesitation to present.
4. Supplement volunteers, as/if needed. Reach out to those with a diversity of backgrounds, including ages, job titles, and experiences.
5. Give each organization 3-5 minutes to present on as many slides as they would like to share key events, initiatives, success, failures, etc.
6. Assemble all the presentations into one PowerPoint or PDF file.
 - a. Put the name of the person presenting, title, association/company before their section of slides.
 - b. Inform participants on how the slides will be combined. (Some may include links or videos that cannot be presented off of a PDF.)
7. Have a designated person to identify 1 minute left, time, and who's next.



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Goal 3: Connect Meaningfully - We utilized round tables to allow participants to connect and share their experiences, initiatives, and future goals when working on DEI initiatives.

Actions 3:

1. Allow for at least 3 rounds of round table discussions. Plan for 10 minutes per round and 5 minutes in between.
2. Each round should have a new series of 3-4 questions, with 5-8 people expected per table. (We ended up having 3 rounds with 10 questions.)
3. Focus on one theme per round, having all questions focus around that theme. This allows everyone to participate in each theme.
4. At each table have a large sheet of paper that people can write their thoughts down on. Explain that what they write down will later be used to provide actionable steps that they can take. (You could alternatively use sticky notes that people can write their thoughts on as well.)

Goal 4: Follow-Up - After the event, it is important to have follow-up.

Actions 4:

1. Ask presenters, beforehand, if you can share their slides and verify format.
2. Summarize the event so that others can replicate it; include lessons learned.
3. Provide a round table summary listing your round table questions, and 3-5 actionable items per theme. (Try to avoid generalizations, such as “have a metric to measure company’s improvement,” instead say, “utilize tools such as the Human Rights Campaign’s, Corporate Equity Index, to measure company’s improvements.”)
4. Create a brief summary of the event with links to presentations, full event summary, and round table summary, and send to all participating organizations.



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Round Table Takeaways:

Round 1: These questions focused on getting DEI groups and programs off the ground at an organization.

Questions:

1. What are the most effective ways to make the case for DEI?
2. How do we overcome resistance to DEI initiatives?
3. How do we get everyone to the table, and avoid an echo chamber?
4. How can an organization's leadership support ERGs and DEI initiatives?

Take-Aways:

1. **Include company leadership and management:**
 - Include company leadership and management in your conversations and planning efforts.
 - Leadership should find ways to devote time, money, and networking for Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Employee Resource Group (ERG) Initiatives.
 - Leadership should act as role models and ambassadors, exemplifying what DEI should look like within the company.
2. **Bring everyone to the table:**
 - When creating ERG and DEI initiatives consider providing a marketing campaign asking those in the company to contribute their thoughts, comments, and concerns such that all potential stakeholders are heard.
 - Include employees from all leadership levels, business lines, disciplines, and locations in discussions.
 - Make it clear that allyship is a key component to a successful ERG/DEI program and can lead to a wider network of support within the organization.
3. **Show support and provide clear communication:**
 - Ensure to regularly, clearly, and frequently communicate with your organization about new and existing DEI initiatives to help gain support and counteract any resistance.
4. **Educate:**
 - Educating your leadership and peers is a great way to ease concerns and ebb any resistance that may be at hand. Be sure to include facts & data, personal stories, and historical context. Balancing facts and emotions can help to convey a compelling "story" to advance DEI initiatives.
 - Education efforts can focus on many different facets, including why DEI is important to implement, how a DEI program can help a company's bottom line, highlight issues that certain employees may feel are not being addressed within the organization, and so on.



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Round 2: These questions focused on the implementation of DEI at organizations and within teams.

Questions:

1. How can we use DEI initiatives to connect and build relationships with clients and our communities?
2. How do we argue the importance of innovative diverse teams to gain work, top candidates, and retain clients?
3. How do we promote a diverse educational background and continuing education?

Take-Aways:

1. **DEI starts with leadership:**
 - Encouraging diversity at all levels of an organization from new hires to board members. After selecting candidates to interview, look at the diversity of interviewees. If there is low diversity consider interviewing additional candidates that create a diverse pool.
 - Create inclusive spaces, encouraging communication within your teams and between employees and company leadership, this could include ERGs or Town Halls where there is open communication between leadership and the company.
 - When kicking-off a project or initiative, set the tone of transparency so team members at all levels can present ideas or express concerns without fear of repercussions.
2. **Community engagement:**
 - For internal and external projects/initiatives invite stakeholders with a diversity of ideas, backgrounds, and experience to better identify blind spots.
 - Build relationships with clients and know their key contacts who can help champion DEI efforts.
 - Having a key partnership with a client who champions shared DEI goals can make projects go more smoothly and create an end-product that best reflects the community in which it exists.
3. **Recruitment:**
 - Highlight DEI perspective and initiatives in press releases, on company websites, and social media posts, showing clients and future employees your commitment to DEI.
 - Go after DEI awards such as, ASCE MOSAIC JEDI, WTS, NSBE awards, etc. which can showcase existing DEI, individual, and organization successes to other companies and job seekers.
 - Create a series that showcases individuals in your company with photos and interviews who exemplify DEI. By hiring and highlighting persons of various backgrounds, organizations improve the diversity of their teams and allow them to attract top-talent.
4. **Show best practices from other projects/initiatives/organizations:**
 - When starting or expanding DEI initiatives or ERGs, reach out to other companies and organizations to help with flow of information and ideas.
 - Present research to clients and leadership to encourage buy-in to a particular initiative.



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Round 3: These questions focused on intersectionality and group participation.

Questions:

1. How can we create cross generational learning and initiatives that support everyone from 21 to 91?
2. How can we celebrate diversity authentically at your organization?
3. How do we create intersectional initiatives?

Take-Aways:

1. **Create a mentorship/reverse-mentorship program:** Allowing different levels of experience, backgrounds, and points of view to mentor each other from equal ground can:
 - Set employees up for promotions and improve transitions from lower to upper positions.
 - Improve top-down managements
 - Help with succession planning
 - Improve employee Retention/Hiring
 - Promote sharing of skills.
 - Driving cultural changesWhen pairing mentors and mentees, ensure diversity of background, region, department, and personalities. It is not uncommon to have more mentees than mentors or to have issues with consistent meetings, so it may be worth incentivizing participation and regular meeting times.
2. **Create a position for intersectionality:** This role can focus on finding ways to bring different ERGs and DEI initiatives together, as well as relay to management/the C-Suite what people need, rather than anyone assuming what others need. The position can ask; is one group hosting an event that would partner well with another; are you updating your handbook, how can all the ERGs have a voice at the table; how can DEI initiatives support as many people as possible?
3. **When hosting an event:**
 - Consider holidays, Google has a very extensive list of holidays which people may be celebrating.
 - Ensure that your menu is diverse enough that everyone has a few things to eat.
 - Those celebrating the event should have the most input on the event and how it is marketed and explained to others.
4. **Find ways to incorporate DEI concepts and initiatives in other learning topics:**
 - A round table discussing way's people have experienced adversity in the workplace, and how that has affected the way they manage people and projects.
 - Highlight past failings when discussing new projects, e.g. because of the history of redlining and "urban blight" in the US, we are now working on these highway capping projects.
 - Whenever possible make events a PDH/CEU.



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