50+ Ideas for Cultivating Diversity and Inclusion at Your Company

Jennifer Kim | September 15, 2020

Following widespread protests against police brutality and systemic racism, companies around the world are taking a hard look at their diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs and policies. This work can be challenging, but it's crucial to creating a more equitable and supportive workplace for everyone.

As someone who grew a team that became known for its diverse workforce (a rare distinction in Silicon Valley), I encourage you first and foremost not to be paralyzed at this moment. Yes, there is a lot of work to be done, but the key is starting. The longer you wait to build a diverse workforce and inclusive culture, the harder it will be in the future.

There are countless ways you can invest in diversity and inclusion, and below are over 50 ideas to help inspiration flow. These are designed to be impactful steps you can take right away, regardless of your headcount, budget, and bandwidth.

Impactful D&I will always require a balance of bold initiatives and sweating the details. But we tend to only hear about the big ones and not so much about the day-to-day work. So, instead of seeing D&I as "all or nothing," you can build momentum by tackling smaller initiatives from the list below.

Let's get started:

1. Convert all job descriptions to gender-neutral language. Audit all your job descriptions to check for uses of "he/his/him" as the default, and convert them to gender-neutral pronouns like "they." Text.io is a fantastic platform for this. You can also use this free app to check for gender-coded words like "aggressive" or "dominant" that may dissuade women from applying.

2. Conduct blind screenings to minimize unconscious biases in the resume review process. Studies have shown that people with stereotypically "ethnic" names need to send out more resumes before they get a callback, and that resumes with female names are rated lower than ones with male names, even if they're equally qualified.

3. Ban "culture fit" as a reason for rejecting a candidate. When interviewers want to reject candidates for "culture fit" or a "gut feeling," unconscious bias is often at play. Challenge your interviewers to articulate a more specific explanation as a way to uncover hidden biases and have open conversations about them. Never punish or shame people, as this can lead to counterproductive responses.

4. Explicitly request a diverse range of referrals. Challenge your employees to think beyond the obvious — past their three best friends that may or may not all be from the same demographic. Emphasize that diversity requires deliberate effort, and it's something all employees can help with — by making introductions to great people they know, even if they don't fit the "traditional" profile. It only makes the team stronger in the long run. Pinterest has seen success with this adjustment in its referrals process and has blogged about it here.

5. Write results-based job descriptions. Studies have found that while men will apply for a job if they meet 60% of the qualifications, women will only apply if they meet 100% of them. Instead of being based on a checklist of skills that may weed underrepresented candidates out, job descriptions should

ideally focus on what your new hire will be expected to achieve, say, a month, six months, and a year into the job.

6. Start a "Guys jar." Take a page from the Bay Area startup [npm's](#) book and implement a ["Guys jar"](#) as a friendly reminder against unnecessarily gendered language in the office. Whenever someone at npm accidentally genders something gender-neutral, they put a dollar in the jar. When they reach $50, they donate the money to charity.

7. Invest in a structured interviewing process and training. This isn't to say that you must stick to a strict script in your interviews — candidates often share important insights when conversations flow naturally — but structured interviews lead to higher-quality hires because they help reduce bias and "gut-feeling" hiring. By asking each candidate the same or similar questions, you have a consistent "data set" to help boost objective decision-making. A structured process also allows interviewers to learn and improve your recruiting process faster.

8. Ensure that underrepresented employees are included in your interviews. But don't overload them, either! As much as candidates want to meet with diverse faces, if your one female engineer is in every single interview panel, it's not fair to her performance (or sanity).

9. Introduce diversity and inclusion early on in the employee life cycle. During employee onboarding, clearly communicate why your company cares about D&I, how you define it, and steps you're taking to [foster belonging](#) in the workplace. Be prepared to answer any questions your new hires have about what your company is doing to move the diversity needle.

10. Check your bathroom stock. Just saying, if you have the budget for office beer, then you can definitely stock tampons in the bathrooms.

11. Use [Alex](#) to catch gendered language in team communications. Alex is an open source tool that you can install wherever you do text editing (like Chrome or Slack). It will catch potentially hurtful language and nicely remind individuals how they might rephrase.

12. Create a channel for D&I in your company's communication tool. Consider creating a Slack channel dedicated to D&I where employees can share articles and news. This can help normalize talking actively about D&I in the workplace.

13. Celebrate holidays and events for underrepresented groups like [Black History Month](#), [Juneteenth](#), and [Pride](#).

14. Start a dish duty rotation. Have you ever noticed that it's women who pick up a lot of the slack for "office chores?" Combat this by establishing a rotating dish duty (two people every day) to ensure everybody pulls their weight — and that the office stays clean!

15. Give visible recognition when employees do go above and beyond by picking up extra duties. Contributing to your workplace isn't just about hitting sales goals or shipping products — it's also about doing your part to make your company a great place to work, and it deserves props too.

16. Allow [flexible work](#) hours. Show your employees you trust them to get their work done with the freedom to create their own work hours. People have all sorts of personal situations that may [affect their ability to work a strict 9 to 5](#) (like picking up or dropping off children at school). Lack of flexibility

makes the lives of some employees unnecessarily difficult, and they may respond by leaving for a company that can provide it.

17. Order a set of knowledge cards. It can be hard to know how to talk about D&I and bring awareness to your coworkers. The Society of Women's Engineers partnered to create a set of knowledge cards designed to facilitate a discussion and prompt reflection around D&I.

18. Have coworkers take an Implicit Association Test to help them realize their own biases. Acknowledging that we all have biases is often a very important first step toward deeper D&I conversations.

19. Check the temperature of your office. The temperature in most buildings defaults to what's most comfortable for men. It's entirely possible a subset of your employees can't even be comfortable at work without constantly layering themselves in sweaters and jackets — how could we ignore that?

20. Check what reading materials you have in your lobby. If you're going to provide magazines, try to make sure they're relevant to your industry as opposed to clearly gendered options. Unless you're in fashion, GQ probably doesn't belong in your lobby.

21. Print inclusive bathroom signs. Hang signs that say "For those who identify as" above the gender signifier on each door to help transgender and genderfluid employees feel comfortable using the bathroom that best fits their gender identity.

22. Hang a poster explaining your company's commitment to D&I or how employees can contribute to an inclusive workplace. For example, take a look at these posters The Guardian created and spread around its offices to start a discussion around the 10 pillars of its D&I strategy:

23. Establish a mother's room where nursing women have a private space for pumping breast milk. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it may also be legally required depending on where your company is located. Here's a guide to low-budget lactation rooms from Winnie.

24. Schedule team bonding activities during the day. When everything fun happens at 5:00, working parents and caregivers — and folks with different lifestyles in general — may not be able to participate.

25. Order swag in women's sizes or from a non-gender binary shirt company. Assuming unisex works for all is a subtle way to exclude.

26. Hold an international foods potluck as a way of highlighting different cultures present in your employee population and opening up organic discussion.

27. Take a fresh look at the visuals of your careers page. What demographics are represented in your photos? In your leadership bios? Candidates can interpret a non-diverse careers page as a sign of a non-inclusive workplace.

28. Bring in technology. There's lots of emerging "D&I tech" that can provide potential help and solutions to challenges. As a place to start, check out: Interviewing.io (objective technical hiring), Compaas (fair compensation), and Allie (inclusion Slackbot).

29. Start blogging. Diversity attracts diversity, as so much of the talent pool is seeking a safe, inclusive place where they can do their best work. Ask your current employees from underrepresented groups to write about their experiences at your company so prospective candidates can discover an authentic perspective.

30. Invite a guest speaker from the D&I community to speak at your company, especially if you already have regular talks on technical topics or on leadership. Just set aside a couple of slots for D&I!

31. Share discussion points and an agenda prior to meetings so more voices are heard. Some people like to talk through new information immediately, whereas others (such as introverts) prefer to have time to process it before sharing their perspective. By presenting a problem on the spot, you're less likely to receive the latter group's contributions.

32. Try the Round Robin technique in meetings, where you ask every person in the room for a contribution to the discussion at hand. People can either share an idea or pass, ensuring that one or two voices aren't dominating the conversation and that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak up.

33. Point out interruptions. Studies show that women are far more likely than men to be interrupted in meetings — and the more it happens, the more they may feel that their contribution isn't valued. By heightening awareness of interruptions, you can help people break the habit.

34. Establish a parental leave policy. Optimizely's post on how they increased their parental leave policy from 6 to 17 weeks — along with the financial model they used to advocate the policy — is a helpful blueprint. Policies to support parents and caregivers can play a huge part in making a workplace more inclusive, not to mention more attractive to candidates. (For further reading, check out this Inclusion At Work article.)

35. Aim for as close to a no-negotiation compensation policy as you can get. Studies show that men negotiate more often than women, and when women do negotiate, they can actually be punished for it.

If no negotiation isn't realistic, consider narrow bands for each role. Companies like Glitch have also [publicly shared salary ranges](#) with employees and candidates so that everyone can feel confident they're being paid fairly.

36. Hold office hours. If your HR/People team has the bandwidth, hold recurring office hours and welcome input around D&I.

37. Sponsor an event. Get other companies together to talk about D&I, and share what's working and what isn't working. Even if you can't meet in person, you can easily meet with other teams using video conferencing tools.

38. Sponsor organizations. If there are organizations doing the work that you would like to be doing or the work that you admire, offer to sponsor them. Even if you don't have the resources to help in any other way, sponsorship shows employees that your company puts its money where its mouth is and is committed to supporting positive change.

39. Partner with nonprofits and community organizations. Bonus points for supporting orgs that are aligned with your mission! Are you a food company? Reach out to soup kitchens or food banks and offer to support their fundraisers. Ed-tech? A variety of nonprofits offer tutoring and volunteer opportunities where your employees can share their skills.

40. Include D&I in performance conversations. Even if you're not tying D&I directly to individual goals, you can still touch upon hiring managers' efforts, progress, and the expectations you have for them in performance conversations to keep it top of mind.

41. Provide Learning & Development workshops for employees to develop and refine adjacent skills like [communication and empathy](#). An inclusive workforce is an [emotionally intelligent](#) one.

42. Have every employee take a working styles test — such as the [Insights Discovery](#) test — to help coworkers understand each other's work and communication styles. Understanding ourselves leads to better understanding of others and the appreciation of differences.

43. Offer flexible PTO. Empower your employees to decide when it's the right time for them to take a break. By giving them the option to take time when they need it, you're inherently telling them that you trust their judgment.

44. Update your sick leave policy to cover mental health days. Allowing employees to use their sick days when they need to take a mental breather shows your company [prioritizes their mental health](#). This small change to your policy can also help you prevent burnout and loss of productivity.

45. Re-visit your office decorations. Make an effort to put up decorations, signage, or even company memories that promote the values you want your employees to feel or think. For example, at Slack's San Francisco HQ, a sign on the wall [reminds employees to "Work hard and go home"](#) — helping to discourage the kind of culture where employees feel pressured to work long hours, which can be especially challenging for those with kids.
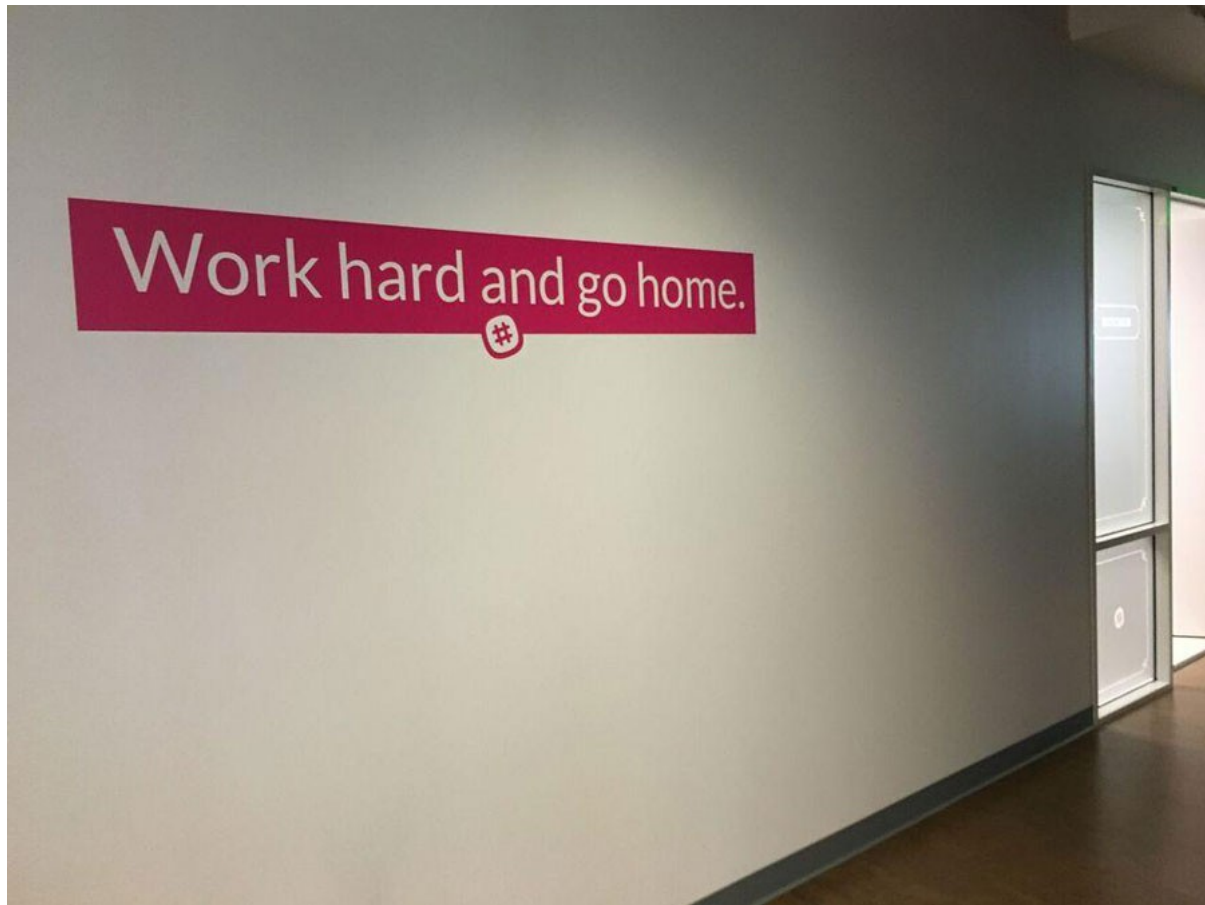
46. Approve budget for ergonomic workspaces. Everyone is different, so promote a healthy working environment by catering to individual needs in their workspaces.

47. Explore inclusive benefits options. If you're able to, offering inclusive benefits like paid adoption leave and transition-related care for transgender employees can make a meaningful difference in the lives of underrepresented employees.

48. Host a book club. There's so much great literature out there that can stimulate valuable conversation. Hosting a book club can be a way to get employees to open up and connect with each other, while also encouraging them to discover more diverse voices and perspectives.

49. Host a movie night. A movie night is another way to stimulate meaningful conversation without the commitment of reading a full book. There are so many options to choose from, such as films helmed by black and female directors.

50. Encourage your leaders to get involved in the dialogue. Executive buy-in is mission-critical for D&I efforts to succeed. Ask your execs to get involved through actions like sharing articles, tweeting about steps your company is taking, and including D&I on the agenda in company-wide meetings so everyone feels encouraged. Silence from the top can inadvertently discourage underrepresented candidates from applying.

51. Support black-owned banks. Netflix recently made the decision to shift $100 million into banks that serve the black community. These banks are historically underfunded, so taking this simple step can make a big difference.

52. Abandon terms with racial connotations. Words like "whitelist" and "blacklist" — and "master" and "slave" in the technology industry — have potentially racist overtones, so swap them out for more neutral alternatives.

53. Create a diversity scholarship program. To help remove barriers and provide networking opportunities for underrepresented professionals in your industry, consider funding tickets to relevant conferences. For example, F5 Networks' D&I sponsorship program gives 15 individuals from underrepresented groups in tech the opportunity to attend DevSecCon. This is also a good way to build a diverse talent pipeline, since it raises awareness of and interest in your company.

Diversity & Inclusion Sponsorship Program

This year **F5 Networks** is supporting DevSecCon Seattle's Diversity & Inclusion program by funding 15 conference tickets for individuals of underrepresented groups in tech. We would like to say a huge thank you for their support! To apply for one of the tickets, please complete the application form below.

If you are interested in our Diversity Scholarship opportunities, please contact us to request a sponsor pack and find out how we can work together.

54. Lean on this Dismantling Racism Works workbook. Originally created as a two-day workshop, the Dismantling Racism Works workbook is now available to everyone online and includes a wealth of useful materials and resources.

55. Above all else, listen to your employees. Invest in the things they care about.

Start small. Don't let the immense scope of things that need to be done keep you from doing anything at all. Because you can talk about diversity and inclusion forever — but taking action is the only way to change anything.

https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/diversity/2020/50-plus-ideas-for-cultivating-diversity-and-inclusion