



Why Improve Diversity from Underrepresented Populations?

Underrepresented populations refer to groups who historically have not been granted equal access to economic opportunities because of discrimination or other societal barriers. This may vary by context and by geography.

Hiring processes can reflect hidden biases that should be corrected to avoid discrimination and develop an inclusive culture. Employing people from a broad range of populations helps incorporate diverse perspectives into corporate decision-making, which can improve profits, innovation, productivity, customer satisfaction, and community relationships. Prioritizing the hiring and development of a management team that is diverse in backgrounds and perspectives also ensures that a company's overall diversity is not undermined by a hierarchy that reflects historical inequalities.

A more diverse and inclusive workplace and workforce can help your company:

- Gain market insight and grow into new markets
- Develop creative and innovative products and services
- Create a more vibrant company culture and positive work environment
- Access and retain top talent
- Build relationships with community leaders and external audiences
- Boost brand loyalty and customer satisfaction

Are there Legal Parameters to Consider?

Yes. The Rhode Island Fair Employment Practices Act prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age (40 years of age and older), or country of ancestral origin. It also prohibits most employers from making any decision regarding hiring, advancement, or any other action based on one of the protected characteristics. This means that certain well-intentioned policies intended to foster workplace diversity and adjust for historic inequities are not permissible under Rhode Island State Law. Companies should consult with legal counsel before implementing policies that are designed to affect people differently based upon race, color religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin.

Leadership Can Support Diversity By:

- Ensuring that leadership understands and can articulate the business case for inclusion.
- Demonstrating a collaborative leadership style. Ensure that the leadership team is sending a strong, clear message that diversity and inclusion are essential to the business.
- Ensuring opportunities to share leadership do not exclude people from underrepresented groups.
- Seeking out and listening to employee experiences. Develop a shared language that is meaningful and resonates with all employees. Celebrate differences, show respect for all employees, and publicly welcome ideas that are different from your own.

- Creating a sense of collective identity and shared goals. Show up in person to participate in diversity and inclusion-related activities, such as committee meetings, recruiting events, and mentoring programs. Encourage participation from every level of the company from staff to management and leadership.
- Continuously improving their own cultural competency and experience. Consider an annual diversity and inclusion training for senior leadership and management. Acknowledge cultural holidays and tragedies which are relevant to the entire workforce.
- Actively and effectively managing conflict.

Steps to Improve Diversity

1. Start with affirming and articulating the company's key commitments. An inclusive work culture is necessary to support, attract, and retain a more diverse workforce.
2. Perform an inclusion audit of your current recruiting processes, website, and job descriptions to determine where the process excludes or ignores underrepresented people. Create a plan to improve recruiting processes based on your findings.
3. Put policies in place that promote an inclusive work environment. For example: proactively offer employee benefits such as translation services and alternative holidays to be celebrated by employees upon request; purposefully schedule and plan events and meetings to have a lot of variety in time, location, and types of activities; adopt child care and sick family member caregiver policies; and highlight Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and inclusion policies internally and externally.
4. Regularly survey your team to measure and track the inclusivity of your work environment.

Resources

- [Diversity Linked to Increased Sales Revenue and Profits](#) from the American Sociological Association.
- The [New England Diversity Council](#) is committed to fostering a learning environment for organizations to grow and leverage their knowledge of diversity.
- The [RI Office of Diversity, Equity & Opportunity](#) advances equitable and fair opportunities for all RI citizens to be employed. They operate four offices: the Equal Opportunity Office, the Minority Business Enterprise Compliance Office, the Supplier Diversity Office, and Human Resources Outreach & Diversity.
- Rhode Island allows a [40% tax credit](#) for businesses that employ and retain RI residents who were previously unemployed or receiving public assistance.
- Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island is an example of a local firm with an established [Diversity & Inclusion initiative](#). See their most current [Diversity & Inclusion Report](#).
- See [Partridge, Snow, & Hahn](#) web site for one example of an EEO statement.

Associated Resource Guides

- Mentor & Internal Promotion
- Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
- Board, Ownership, and Supplier Diversity
- Health Insurance Benefits



[Best for Rhode Island](#) is an initiative of [Social Enterprise Greenhouse](#) in partnership with business and community organizations across the state.