

MAPPING THE ROAD TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN AGING SERVICES

“DEI is an emerging corporate strategy to enhance the workforce and morale of existing staff.”

— LeadingAge California’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Roadmap

There is a new roadmap for aging service providers who want to begin, refine or sustain a program for promoting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in their settings. LeadingAge California has developed a helpful toolkit, called “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Roadmap,” to provide long-term care facilities, senior housing programs and other aging services with step-by-step guidance for setting and achieving DEI goals.¹ As the toolkit notes, when organizations commit to being informed by America’s diversity, “the field can make bold strides toward an equitable workforce.”



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WHY INCORPORATE DEI NOW?

We have always been called to correct past injustices, and equal employment protection under the law has been with us since passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Yet, the LeadingAge California roadmap states that “major employers across the nation have been successful in maintaining a homogenous executive workforce.” Today, the rise of public consciousness of DEI in American society — resulting from a combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor — has led to a national (and often local) introspection on its importance.

Committing to DEI values can assist aging service providers in many aspects of their operations, according to the toolkit. It cites that “DEI in the workplace will dramatically impact workforce culture, quality of care, community outreach, corporate policy, hiring practices, promotion strategies, and strategic partnerships.” It can increase employee satisfaction and retention, and build new connections to pipelines of diverse talent.

The roadmap describes five phases in the DEI process: preparation, planning, implementation, progress evaluation and maintenance of initiatives.

Phase 1: DEI Preparation

The roadmap’s preparation begins with introspection, including an evaluation of social demographics at all levels of employment and an organization’s board of directors, as well as a review of current and past hiring practices.

An important part of preparation is visibility. The organization’s executives and board should be visible and outspoken leaders of the initiative by attending meetings, supporting the initiative with space and funding, and acknowledging that this is important — if challenging — and sometimes anxiety-generating work.

The roadmap suggests that preparation involved to build a DEI infrastructure includes establishing a budget, forming a DEI committee and providing its members with basic training. Some organizations should consider hiring or contracting with a diversity expert to lead discussions. Other preparatory steps entail establishing a DEI calendar for regular meetings, events and deliverables; developing short and long-term goals; and instituting cultural holidays — such as celebrating Juneteenth — to more comprehensively teach the organization and its community about DEI.

Phase 2: DEI Planning

After the preparation phase, the roadmap suggests taking three to six months to plan a robust DEI initiative. This includes establishing “safe

space guidelines” for the DEI committee. Members should be encouraged to share honestly and speak up if another participant shares an opinion that makes anyone uncomfortable. The committee should agree that each participant is trusted to act in the group’s best interest. As the roadmap notes, “A single person should not be expected to speak on behalf of an entire demographic that they represent. They will, however, be expected to provide insight on best practices by providing cultural insight.”

Planning also should include establishing a DEI corporate framework with the creation of a DEI statement. The statement should express the organization’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. It should also be short — no more than three sentences — and easy for the reader to understand and repeat.

Phase 3: DEI Implementation

After all the preparation and planning is complete, aging service organizations should release their DEI statement and promote the initiative throughout the institution. An important step is reviewing organizational policies, especially hiring. The DEI statement can be included in job postings, new staff onboarding and in employee interviews. The roadmap also suggests looking at promotion policies and being creative in using wages or benefits to recognize expertise and to show staff members they are valued.

DEI training is another critical step in implementing the initiative. Current and new staff should participate in initial training and have annual updates — all of which can be incorporated into existing training modules.

Implementation, the roadmap notes, should also include establishing clear measurable outcomes with specific dates, for example: “By three months from the start of the initiative: Establish diversity metrics and target outcomes for diversity of staff, board and committees.” Or, another example can state: “By the end of year three after the start of the initiative: The diversity of employees [and board] will match that of county or state demographics.”

Phase 4: DEI Progress Evaluation

Evaluation means looking at qualitative and quantitative data. One step could be an annual employ-

ee satisfaction and workplace culture survey that incorporates the organization’s DEI goals, and measures results against the goals. If goals are not met, find out why: Is it lack of executive or board leadership support? Are policies (such as hair discrimination) presenting barriers? Is funding for the initiative insufficient? Has communication not been successful?

Once barriers have been identified, the initiative can get back on track by reevaluating its plan and considering the hire of a DEI expert for guidance. The organization may need to refocus the initiative or reprioritize certain aspects. Also, review suggestions from your expert and the work of the DEI committee.

Phase 5: Maintenance of Effort

The roadmap offers six action steps for maintaining the DEI initiative: 1) conduct and report on metrics about staff and resident social demographics, employee satisfaction and initiative events and activities; 2) communicate progress to board, employees, residents and the local community; 3) subscribe to DEI newsletters and keep up with other resources; 4) consider hiring an executive team member to oversee the initiative; 5) establish a DEI critical response team to address DEI-related complaints and concerns; and 6) identify staff to attend conferences and education on DEI.

Catholic-sponsored aging service providers who want to be part of CHA’s We Are Called initiative should take a look at this new and valuable resource.² It includes the previously described step-by-step guidelines and can help aging organizations, whether they are beginning or fine-tuning their DEI efforts. It also offers examples from the field and resources for more information. It is truly a one-stop resource for aging service providers.

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NOTES

1. “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Roadmap,” LeadingAge California, 2022, <https://indd.adobe.com/view/77191b23-20fe-4e1b-b0ec-d3b2d7934506>.
2. “We Are Called,” Catholic Health Association, <https://www.chausa.org/cha-we-are-called>.

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