



Audacious Hospitality

How to Assemble a DEI Working Group

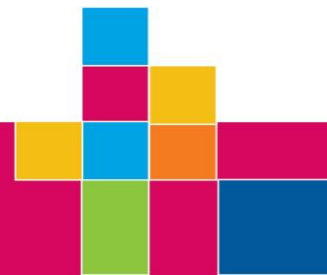
We are thrilled you are creating a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Working Group. We want to acknowledge that it's ok if you don't know exactly where or how to begin - we are here to help you. You might be thinking that your community has years of experience assembling committees and taskforces, and you already have a great blueprint for building your DEI Working Group. **However, we are asking you to assemble your DEI focused group in a potentially different way than you might have done previously.** Please keep in mind, the suggestions below were designed to maximize the chance that people from a wide variety of backgrounds and lived experiences participate in every step of your group process, from beginning to end.



Ensure Your Working Group Is Comprised Of People From Diverse Backgrounds

As we engage in this important work, we abide by the phrase, “Nothing about us without us.” We ensure that individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds are included every step of the way. Anything less leads to the working group being too prescriptive about issues that they haven't experienced themselves. By ensuring your DEI Working Group reflects diversity with regards to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, etc., you're investing in the entirety of your community, and therefore equipped to accurately take different needs and experiences into consideration.

In addition to various identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, etc.), you also want to include people with various levels of community involvement. While you will of course want to include some proven or obvious up-and-coming leaders, you will also want to make room for folks who have no leadership role at all (and may never) in your community. Examples include singles who only come to your community a couple times of year, a family member or “Jewish adjacent” individual (people who are not Jewish but are in families or relationships with Jewish people) whom you see sometimes, but have yet to hear about their experiences within your community, or maybe even a busy parent in your school, provided that the timing can be worked out. These are all just examples to caution you against overlooking a “lesser connected” individual with valuable insight from being a part of your group. These individuals are likely to bring new perspectives that can help shape your DEI goals.





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How To Ask

Often, people wonder how they can create a “diverse” working group if they are not in close relationships with people from various backgrounds. It’s a good question! In some ways, it’s like the difference between inviting people to a dinner party versus inviting people to a potluck. When you invite people to a dinner party, you often have a specific number and list of people you want to invite, the menu is set by you, and you usually have an existing relationship with everyone who comes. Maybe someone brings a dessert, or a new partner, but largely there isn’t too much wiggle room on the menu or invitation list. With a potluck, there is much more flexibility and many more unknowns. Maybe you tell people to bring a main dish or a dessert, but largely the menu is unknown until the day of the dinner. In addition, you’ll likely try dishes that you may have never tried before, because people are bringing *their* favorite dish to the table, rather than only trying yours.

Due to the informal nature of a potluck, the invitation itself may be less formal; a spontaneous invite in passing or allowing someone who is already invited to invite someone they think would be a great addition. With a potluck, the success of the gathering and meal itself doesn’t rely on the planning of a single host, but rather the collective participation of an entire group.

Keep this in mind when putting together your group. While you might have a set number of people you’d like to include, and you don’t want to invite “anyone and everyone” prior to forming your DEI Working group, we urge you to be flexible to allow for last-minute invitations and to invite people from your community that you may not have had the opportunity to work with yet.

While we are not to tokenize anyone, we must acknowledge when a working group isn’t comprised of people from a variety of backgrounds and is missing input from people with important lived experiences. If there are people in your community who you are interested in working with and who have been open about their experience, most of the time it will be ok to approach them, acknowledge their openness about their background/identity and ask them if they have any interest in being involved. You can also ask them if they have any other suggestions for people who might be interested. Another great way to involve people from various backgrounds is to create a short letter, specifically stating something along the lines of, “We are specifically interested in garnering input from a wide variety of people, including those of us that identify as LGBTQ+, Jews of Color, people with disabilities, working-class people, singles, people who have gone through divorce, those who are ‘Jewish-adjacent,’ interfaith families and couples, etc. and asking, “Are you interested?”.

We understand you may be fearful to approach individuals about these topics. However, in our experience, if you ask respectfully and in a way that doesn’t expect individuals to



Audacious Hospitality

represent an entire group (i.e., acknowledging those of us who are LGBTQ+ do not speak for or reflect the views of all LGBTQ+ individuals), people are usually honored to be asked to participate, as long as they know they can say “no” without any hard feelings. Please keep in mind that if your working group is not comprised of people from a variety of backgrounds, you can still begin this work; however you should not only be aware of these missing voices, but focus on **why** these voices are missing from your DEI Working Group and take steps to create a more inclusive community.

Be Flexible In How You Define Membership To Your Working Group

In addition to casting a wide net for DEI Working Group participants, we also want you to think about the ways members of this group should engage with one another. While we do request that at least a couple of staff and/or clergy commit to sustaining your DEI Working Group efforts over time, we also want to give you permission to allow members (particularly those from marginalized backgrounds) to participate for a finite amount of time. Perhaps there are people who would agree to attend the first 6 meetings, helping to share their lived experiences and insight, providing invaluable feedback and perspective that will help to shape your future DEI goals. As long as all group members read and agree to the Shared Agreements of the group, there can be flexibility to your group configuration. Again, it is through every step of our DEI process that we try to keep in mind, and work through, the lens of inclusion. The flexibility mentioned above will allow for more voices, and in turn, a greater sense of understanding.

Keep In Mind

In the introduction to the [Assessment](#), we will have laid out “next steps” for your DEI Working Group to follow. Each step was decided intentionally and skipping steps often results in those community members with the most to lose, getting hurt and possibly disengaging. Yolanda Savage-Narva, the Executive Director of Operation Understanding, cautions new DEI Working Groups against “expecting someone to come in and point out everything that’s wrong... [that] there is a process that must evolve, and this can only be done through relationship building.” We can’t stress enough the words ‘process’ and ‘relationship.’ In many ways, the unexpected can only happen if we refuse to operate as we are always expected to. By taking time to acknowledge the dominant culture we function in, day in and day out, with people from non-dominant groups, a roadmap forward will surely be revealed to us. And remember, if in 6 months of building your DEI Working Group, you are still fine-tuning or considering what your **new** “next steps” will be, but you have pulled together an actively engaged group of people from a wide variety of backgrounds that might never have had the chance to intersect otherwise, you are indeed taking “next steps.”