

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (DEI): A STARTING GUIDE

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Acknowledgements

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INTRODUCTION

Around the world, democracy is under threat, and the rise of extremist, authoritarian, far-right movements and parties is accelerating. Fuelled by the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the current economic and energy crises, as well as the ongoing state of insecurity, such movements often target the most vulnerable members of society, particularly hard hit by the economic downturn and social inequality, such as marginalised groups, with the aim to radicalise them.

There is no quick fix to the dangers democratic systems are facing, but one thing is certain: building an open and inclusive society will take consolidated efforts to restore civic participation and dialogue which goes way beyond election day. Breaking the echo-chambers brought about by the widespread use of social media asks for civil society actors to rethink their own outreach strategies, engage in new alliances and reconnect with all groups in society – especially those whose voices have not been heard.

45% of European citizens feel totally uncomfortable with having Roma people as neighbours.
Being Black in the European Union means facing systemic racism, and often discrimination in the labour market, wages, housing and even in hospitals.

With this short pocket-guide, you are invited to dive into the topic of diversity and inclusion, a mental framework which invites for self- and organisational- reflection. While not pursuing the ambition of an all-encompassing guide, it aims to pose the question: “Are you, your team and your organisation ready to engage in open, respectful, and inclusive dialogue with diverse groups in society?”

Whether you are a community organiser, activist, NGO leader or project manager, we hope this guide will bring you useful insights.

DEFINITIONS

Before diving deeper into ways to create diversity and inclusion at the organisational and project levels, it is important to have a clear understanding of some key terms.

Diversity: the deliberate inclusion in a group or activity of people who are, for example, of different races, genders, and religions.

Inclusion: the policy or practice of making sure that everyone in society has access to resources and opportunities.

Privilege: a special right or advantage that only one person or group has.

Discrimination: the practice of treating one person or group of people less fairly or less well than other people or groups.

Racialisation: this is a political process through which groups become designated as being part of a particular 'race' on the basis of which they are treated differently or unequally. It is a manufactured concept that others and marginalises certain groups through a myriad of systems, tools and social practices.

While white people are also racialised, their process is often rendered normative to those designated as white, enabling them to maintain the authority and racialise others. In many countries, whiteness is considered as the 'norm' against which other races are measured.

Institutionalised Racism: institutional racism refers to the ways in which 'institutional structures and processes promote racial inequity.' It encompasses all types of institutions, such as schools, courts, businesses and the government.

Perpetuated from generation to generation, institutional racism translates into organisations' collective failure to provide appropriate and professional services to people, because of their colours, culture, or ethnic origin. This is often reflected in '[unwitting prejudice](#), ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping,' disadvantaging minority ethnic people.

It [manifests](#) itself at three different levels:

1. **Extraorganisational:** in the reciprocal relationship between organisations and their external environment;
2. **Intraorganisational:** it perpetuates itself through an organisation's internal climate, policies and procedures;
3. **Individual:** through staff's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

One way to address institutional racism is through anti-racist community organising, which promotes institutional practices that respect inclusiveness, interdependence and acknowledge racial differences. [The strategy behind this](#) is to create change by reducing inequities in power relations and addressing the root causes of social problems.

White Fragility: white fragility is 'a state in which even a [minimum amount of racial stress](#) becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.' Often, discomfort around discussing race leads to anger, fear and silence or to behaviours such as a 'argumentation, silence and leaving stress-inducing situation,' which thus contribute to reinstate white racial equilibrium. The triggers for white fragility can be many and include elements such as [people of colour](#) talking directly about their racial perspectives or suggesting that a white person's viewpoint comes from a racialised frame of reference.

There is often an expectation for racialised people to provide emotional support and education. Part of the problem is the impatient need for a 'quick fix,' an immediate solution. The answer might lie in [accepting that the process is painful](#) and requires awkward and hurtful self-reflection. Learning and [growing from one's mistakes](#), rather than shutting down, could gradually lead to less racial harm.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (DEI) GUIDELINES

Diversity and inclusion start at the organisational level, by adopting adequate policies that helps attract and retain a diverse set of talent.

A DEI Strategy is a fundamental policy stating an organisation's commitment to ensuring an equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace. The organisation embraces and encourages employees' differences in age, colour, disability, language, national origin, gender identity or expression and other characteristics making the employees unique.

DEI IN ORGANISATIONS

Putting forth inclusive projects starts at the organisational level by building a diverse team of people that can bring to the table of wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, which can be reflected into the activities put forth by the organisation. This can be achieved by adopting diversity and inclusion policies that establish a sense of belonging among employees, allowing them to feel more connected at work, fostering their creativity and innovation and enabling them to thrive.

Steps Towards a DEI Strategy:

There are nine steps needed to build a DEI strategy:

- ✓ **Secure management buy-in: have a signed and agreed upon mandate constructed in consultation with all of your colleagues;**
- ✓ **Gather relevant resources and contacts: in conceptualising the strategy, involve relevant partners as well as individuals from the impacted communities;**
- ✓ **Establish accountable people: be inclusive, allow for participation and common construction, to ensure that people feel responsible and invested;**
- ✓ **Make a diagnosis: assess where you are currently at. Be honest with your initial assessment;**
- ✓ **Formulate objectives and set of actions: be sure they are SMART and intersectional;**

- ✓ **Establish a budget: internal and external costs, possible fundings/grants, specific expenses (e.g. DEI trainer);**
- ✓ **Implement the plan: ensure that is done in a transparent and transversal manner;**
- ✓ **Assess: allow time and space for evaluation and impact, where all the key stakeholders are involved and can give their input;**
- ✓ **Keep Learning: it is important to proactively seek feedback by asking employees from marginalised backgrounds about their experience of the workplace culture. This ensures that they feel continuously involved and empowered, while making the DEI strategy better as well.**

It is also vital to focus on **their wellbeing**. Underrepresented groups are more likely to experience physical and mental challenges as well as have access to good healthcare and healthy lifestyle options. It is therefore important to adopt holistic strategies to care for employees' wellbeing. This can include: bringing experts to conduct facilitated group discussions about racial trauma and injustice, offering employees a space to better understand their emotional trauma as well equip them with tools to adequately navigate it in the workspace.

DEI IN PROJECTS

Embracing diversity and inclusion is an important part of project management. A great deal of value is created from diverse team members with different backgrounds and cultures. When it comes to the conceptualisation and implementation of a project or an event, it is good practice to have a coordination team that represents a range of backgrounds as they will bring forth different perspectives as well as connections to various target groups, particularly marginalised groups. An inclusive project and/or event does not start during the implementation phase, it is inclusive by its design.

Here are a few key steps in designing a more inclusive event:

1. Assemble a representative team

- Decide on the target group you wish you have present at your event (e.g. marginalised group) and contact individuals who are part of these groups to be part of your team. They can be part of the outreach team and consult on the programme and content development.

2. Create an inclusive outreach strategy

- Develop a needs assessment of the target groups by reflecting on their various characteristics. This will allow you to think outside of the box when thinking of how to communicate information to them for the event.

Here is an example that you can use per target groups (at least 3 separate ones):

<p>Name: have fun choosing a name for your persona. If a certain Gender will be more represented than others, choose a name corresponding to that.</p>	
<p>Age: What age group will your event be developed for and why?</p>	
<p>Geography: What is the project's geographic scope – local, regional, national or transnational? Do participants live in the same or several countries? Do they reside in urban or rural areas?</p>	
<p>Education: What educational levels should your event cater for? What would this mean in practice, in terms of conveying and presenting information?</p>	
<p>Professional background: What are their employment profiles? What might this mean for their participation in the event in terms of duration and availability?</p>	
<p>Interests: What topics are relevant to their interests? What information do they find engaging?</p>	
<p>Motivation: What are the main benefits of your event that would motivate them to participate? What are the 'hooks'; the elements that would attract them to it?</p>	

- Explore different formats of invitations such as creating videos in different languages with interpretation. Some marginalised groups will have varied access to written sources and therefore the diversification of outreach will increase the chances of connecting with them.

- Implement quotas for each envisaged target group that participants from envisaged groups are guaranteed a place, regardless, for instance, if lack of experience/ opportunities might otherwise prohibit them from participating.
- Contact and work directly with representatives of marginalised groups for outreach. This can pose some challenges if there aren't already established connections with hard-to-reach communities. Here are some tips and tricks on how to do it:

Misconception and/ or challenge	Tips and tricks to over it
Fear of offending a marginalised group when approaching them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ask for feedback and advice from your team, colleagues, and partners to ensure that your messaging is appropriate and inoffensive. ▶ Connect with someone from the community first to have them support with the outreach. A familiar face is always more comforting and welcoming.
Fear of being intrusive or condescending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Do not offer help but rather offer opportunity. ▶ Define your motives and find a balance between professional messaging and friendly-human approach. ▶ Pay careful attention to the messaging and words used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The title of projects can deter people from participating ● The use of pronouns in titles and messaging could also discourage or qualify a group(s) of people
Absence of formal channels of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ It is crucial to think about formal and informal ways of communication. Both ways are valid and can connect with a variety of individuals. ▶ Generate specialised messaging with a personal touch. ▶ Reach out personally.

Overcoming mistrust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Make this phase part of the project and allocate time, resources, and methods. ▶ Create a long-term strategy of cooperation to allow for multiple collaborations in the future.
Not enough people from marginalised/ minority groups within decision-making bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Have a percentage of people that must be from select groups. ▶ Follow and apply policies focused on inclusion. ▶ Empower individuals to take on positions of power/ decision-making.

3. Plan logistics with inclusivity in mind

- Budget for transport costs that could cover participants arriving from remote areas and/or who may require visas to enter the country where the event is taking place. Having someone on the team whose role is to care for the administration of these processes is very important and ensures that they have the adequate time and resources to process the documents.
- Decide on a format that is most inclusive for the event. If you're looking to have participants from many countries and have little budget for transportation, a hybrid option is always a great idea for increased accessibility.
- Choose a location that is safe for minorities and is accessible for those with disabilities.
- Circulate guidelines for the creation of a safe space and have a designated person that all participants can identify in the safe space policy
- Set up interpretation throughout the event, it is very important when there is a diverse group of participants from various background and countries.
- Set up a mechanism that allows participants to give feedback daily. This will ensure that you can adapt and make any necessary changes as needed.

4. Create a programme that meets the diversity in the room

Once you've connected with individuals from marginalised groups it is important to meet them at their different levels and needs. Moreover, it is essential to create a programme that meets the diversity in the room.

Steps:

1. Inquiry

The first step in putting a programme together is to first ask of series of questions to better understand and cater to those in the room:

- Who is in the room and where are they coming from?
- What is their level of knowledge and experience with this topic?
- What might they need to fully grasp the content and messaging? (e.g. visual aid)

You can find out this information through questionnaires or other forms of communication. Once you've compiled the needs and results, you must take them into consideration when planning activities and approaches.

2. Planning

The conceptualisation of every good programme starts and builds on the needs of the target group. Even if there is an existing programme, adaptations are still required to match the needs of the target group. Diverse groups require diverse methodologies:

- Allow for participative methodologies for participants to share their personal thoughts and experiences
- Work in groups and allow for participants to express themselves through discussions and exchange of ideas
- Audio-visual materials (short videos, photos, etc.) and interactive activities are more attractive and promote participation
- Use descriptive approaches alongside visuals when presenting content

- Use digital platforms
- Connect ideas and emotions with images
- Replace content driven presentations with art and theatre

3. Accommodate

You may not gather all the information needed during the inquiry stage. Therefore, some sessions might not be suitable for the target group. Be ready to adapt the sessions and use the expertise in the room to propose a more appropriate session.

Adaptation is crucial

Participants can act as multiplier for your event. Work with them to disseminate your outputs and ideas even further

Empower participants to become changemaker in their own communities. Share resources, tips and tools during and after the event comes to an end

Keep the connection alive. Invite participants to other events that could be of relevance to them and to their networks

TIPS

4. Keeping participants involved well after the project or event comes to an end

When a project comes to end, most energies are focused on the reporting, evaluation, and compiling best practices. However, creating strategies to maintain connections with the participants is just as important and should be an added element to the closing out phase.

TIPS to retain your participants

5. Keep learning and improving for future projects

Conduct a thorough evaluation throughout the event or project to ensure that opinions and experiences are gathered from the marginalised groups. They can provide their first-hand experiences, therefore providing concrete ideas and next steps for future events and projects. This can be done through various formats:

Surveys & questionnaires	Dedicated session in the programme
Mentimetres during the event	Focus groups with organisers and participants

DEI for You

To ensure the workplace is an inclusive and diverse place, having a DEI Strategy is not sufficient. Steps needed to be taken at the individual level as well to help you both understand and support colleagues from different background, especially marginalised ones.

These include:

1. **Unlearn racism and embrace antiracism:** challenge your existing notions of race and culture, unpack your own biases and practice empathy to others by finding adequate material, ranging from books to podcasts, films and news sources.
2. **Self-assessing your privilege:** this exercise will help you reflect on the ways in which your sociocultural identities shape your reality, while allowing you to understand if/where you have privilege or find yourself at an intersection of oppression. Be kind to yourself!
3. **Speaking up:** take a stand when you notice intolerances and injustices taking place, advocate for spaces free of violence and invite more people to learn about their privileges and to learn into discomfort.
4. **Mentoring people from marginalised communities:** this could help access opportunities that they would otherwise be excluded from, while supporting their personal and career development. Keep in mind: potential imbalances of power and privilege!
5. **Showing empathy:** by doing this, you will increase your understanding of the experiences and struggles faced by marginalised groups, build trust, avoid power struggles and create more equitable environments for everyone.
6. **Practice efficient allyship:** this requires you to value someone's struggle as your own, even if you have not experienced it yourself. Transfer the benefits of our own privilege to those without, allow [room for the voices](#) that are silent and recognise that allyship is a process.

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