# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: The 4 First-Focus Fundamentals for Culture Transformation

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# INTRODUCTION

As health care organizations strive to improve organizational effectiveness and workforce engagement, many are expanding their efforts to foster diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environments. Understanding how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are critical to exceptional patient experiences enables organizations to better shape their culture and improve engagement among caregivers themselves.

Perceptions of diversity and inclusion in the health care workforce correlate closely with staff engagement. Analyses of Press Ganey workforce engagement data show that clinician and employee engagement is higher when individuals believe their organization values diversity and is committed to ensuring an inclusive environment. The data also reveals that the association between DEI and engagement is preserved across employee race, gender, and job type groupings. The results of these analyses are presented in the Press Ganey white paper "Diversity and Inclusion: Building Workforce Engagement and Improving Outcomes in Health Care." This white paper also indicates that, since excellence across safety, quality, experience, and financial outcomes in health care depends on engaged and aligned team members, health care leaders should make diversity and inclusion an organizational priority.

Press Ganey has identified several key principles, or "first-focus fundamentals," that positively impact the representation and inclusivity of health care organizations. While not an exhaustive list, it is meant to aid organizations at the beginning of their journey as well as organizations looking for confirmation about their current state of DEI. When an organization commits to integrating DEI into their practices, the following first-focus fundamentals should be considered the starting point.

1. Forge a common language and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
2. Capture robust DEI data and make it visible.
3. Strengthen organizational structures and operations to reinforce diversity, equity, and inclusion.
4. Focus on high reliability principles that cultivate a fair and just culture.

This workbook includes brief descriptions of these fundamentals as well as questions to help leaders evaluate current practices relative to each.

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## Forge a Common Language and Understanding of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The language around diversity, equity, and inclusion is continually evolving. What we communicate to others, verbally and in writing, can empower people and demonstrate an alliance with our workforce and community. Conversely, language also has the potential to divide and highlight instances of perceived privilege. Because of the power language wields, the entire workforce must understand the meaning of the words "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion" individually and how using appropriate language can foster a culture in which diversity is welcomed, equity is championed, and inclusion is promoted in support of organizational strategy.

In order to build a culture that demonstrates a commitment to DEI, the first step entails ensuring the entire organization—from the board of directors to front-line employees—understands what is meant by each of these terms. These terms are often misapplied, used as a catch-all phrase, or (worse) avoided. Simply stated, diversity, equity, and inclusion are a lens that can be applied to operations to ensure all stakeholders, including patients, experience a culture of respect and trust across all levels of the organization. Understanding and developing a common language around DEI allows leadership to better align it to the mission, vision, and values of the organization and make direct connections to the strategic plan.

**As you are understanding and aligning definitions, take note of the following.**

- Diversity extends beyond race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. It encompasses all aspects of difference, which may include socioeconomic status, life experiences, and other social factors.

- Diversity alone does not guarantee inclusion. In the words of DEI expert and thought leader Vernā Myers: "Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance."

- "Equity" is not synonymous with "equality." People are diverse and have different needs, so treating everyone the same is not an effective strategy.

- Order the terms in a way that makes sense for your organization. For example, instead of diversity first, perhaps your organization prioritizes equity.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Has your organization clearly defined what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean and ensured alignment with its mission, vision, and values?

- Do employees know the common barriers to DEI, such as implicit bias, microaggressions, and systemic racism, and have they been provided training on how to recognize and overcome these obstacles?

- Does your organization have a set of universal relationship skills, equity goals, and other appropriate norms/values built into the system?

- Does your communication strategy directly address the organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

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# Capture Robust DEI Data and Make It Visible

Once concise and compelling definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion are developed, the next focal area is building accountability into the system through a transparent and robust data strategy. The data strategy should be designed to support the measurement and improvement of the organization's strategic business objectives and goals. It is important to move beyond just compliance tracking and toward using this information to support broader organizational priorities. Making the data visible at all levels of the organization helps reinforce accountability.

Common types of measures that reflect DEI include data on workforce engagement, talent management (e.g., recruitment, retention, development, promotion, performance, and turnover), patient experience, safety, and compliance. By collecting and segmenting important metrics—such as perceptions of diversity and inclusion related to workforce and patient populations by race, ethnicity, and other key characteristics—leaders can deploy targeted high-value tactics to identify where improvement is most needed to better organizational outcomes overall.

However, measurement cannot be allowed to occur in isolation. To hold the system accountable, performance across these measures should be made widely available to all levels of the organization. Performance of key measures can be included on a balanced scorecard or another mechanism for tracking progress on strategic business outcomes.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

**Capture robust data:**

- Does your organization have a data strategy that goes beyond compliance when it comes to evaluating and supporting DEI efforts, and is this data incorporated into safety, quality, patient experience, and workforce engagement measures?

- Does your organization ensure data collected is specific enough to allow for necessary segmentation and benchmarking?

- Have your leaders identified a plan for tracking the effectiveness of improvement programs by measuring value and return on investment (ROI)?

**Make diversity, equity, and inclusion visible:**

- Does the board of directors and other senior leadership review DEI performance regularly?

- Are diversity, equity, and inclusion key performance indicators (KPIs) included on your organization's balanced scorecard?

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## Strengthen Organizational Structures and Operations to Reinforce Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Organizations focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion for several reasons—legal, risk management, or even branding and marketing. To provide more meaningful DEI measures and reinforce the cultural commitment to an organization's values, it is important to embed these principles throughout the organization itself. Specifically, leaders should consider how the organization's structure and operations communicate and demonstrate the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It should permeate the system, integrating with vital areas like safety, quality, and patient experience to avoid separating and siloing DEI.

By building DEI explicitly into your organization's values, your systems and operations—as well as your accountability mechanisms—are more readily managed. Creating leadership roles, like chief diversity officer, and providing support in the form of diversity councils/committees, networking/affinity groups, expanded patient and family advisory councils, and more help an organization care for its diverse workforce and patients/clients. This intentional structure also allows transparency and alignment throughout the system.

From an operations standpoint, the traditional focus has been on how DEI impacts the talent lifecycle—understanding how recruitment, performance management, leadership assessment, and training strategies nurture more diverse and inclusive cultures. It is equally important to consider how operations that integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion impact care delivery. Having a workforce—not to mention all levels of leadership—that accurately reflects the diversity of the community it serves provides an opportunity to ensure inclusive organizational policies and procedures, which leads to better safety and quality outcomes.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

**Structure:**

- Does the organizational structure include a department, team, or council dedicated to and responsible for developing strategies, implementing initiatives, and providing a framework/platform for sharing diversity, equity, and inclusion best practices?

- Has the organization integrated DEI with support structures, such as mentorships, networking groups, supplier diversity, and community groups?

- Is the organization, from the board of directors to front-line employees, representative of the community it serves?

**Operations:**

- Have policies, processes, and program initiatives been considered to reinforce diversity, equity, and inclusion?

- Do employees know the process for reporting incidents of microaggression and incivility?

- Have the CEO, board of directors, and top management openly communicated their commitment to DEI and ensured accountability through performance measurement?

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# Focus on High Reliability Principles That Cultivate a Fair and Just Culture

While high reliability principles are often discussed in the context of employee and patient safety, these same principles also underpin a fair and just culture, which is foundational to an organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. A fair and just culture allows for everyone to feel comfortable with and responsible for speaking up when issues related to DEI arise. This requires workforce trust. By focusing on high reliability principles, leaders can foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture with the necessary psychological safety in place to have difficult conversations around these topics.

Focusing on universal relationship and reliability skills encourages all employees to "speak up" when diversity, equity, and inclusion values are not being met—for example, microaggressions and unconscious biases that go unaddressed. Use of the universal reliability tools, such as ARCC (which stands for **Ask** a question, **Request** a change, voice a **Concern**, and **Chain** of command), throughout the organization will make it easier for all employees to escalate concerns related to DEI. Once disparities are identified, they should be addressed and evaluated with clear metrics, allowing the whole organization to execute improvement strategies and avoid unintended consequences with specific populations or marginalized groups.

How leaders respond when an employee's behavior does not meet expectations related to DEI is a management moment of truth. Transparency and honesty are key. Employees need to trust they won't be punished for raising an issue of diversity, equity, or inclusion, and they will question a leader's integrity and effectiveness if they are. Conversely, leaders who let employees off the hook for DEI transgressions erode a fair and just culture too.

If employees perceive individuals as being unfairly treated, they are less likely to bring up issues. If employees see management tolerate behaviors that go against their organization's values, others' performance—and performance of the team—will decline over time.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do leaders actively consider how to instill a sense of belonging for the entire workforce and ensure every voice feels welcomed, heard, and respected?

- Does your organization celebrate differences and create space for employees to bring their "full selves" to work?

- Do all employees, leaders, and physicians recognize their role and responsibility in creating psychological safety and an inclusive culture?

- Do employees feel comfortable reporting issue that undermine a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization?

- Do employees know leaders will respond and treat people fairly when performance falls short of expectations?

- Do employees see the organization making efforts to improve the identification and correction of system and process problems related to DEI?

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## Final Thoughts

As you evaluate your current goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion, reflect on the four first-focus fundamentals outlined below and take an inventory of what's going well and what could be going better.

1. Forge a common language and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
2. Capture robust DEI data and make it visible.
3. Strengthen organizational structures and operations to reinforce diversity, equity, and inclusion.
4. Focus on high reliability principles that cultivate a fair and just culture.

While these are foundational steps for building a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture, implementing effective change requires commitment from leadership to champion and model their personal expectations for execution.

Often, organizations benefit from not only having insight into the basic concepts, but also from working directly with experienced teams that can guide them along the right paths. For additional support and deeper interventions, Press Ganey can partner with you to identify solutions that fit your needs.