

# Diverse Workgroups Spur Positive Change

Make the best use of your most valuable asset – people’s diversity and ingenuity.

*By Michelle M. Wicmandy*

**U**nique thoughts and behaviors may frighten some. But when we open our minds to beliefs unlike our own, we expose ourselves to new ideas that heighten creativity and spark innovation.

The same holds true when nonprofit leaders embrace diverse workgroups. By blending all ages, colors, genders, nationalities, lifestyles, and education levels, a valuable asset emerges: Teammates are forced to think beyond the status quo.

The result? Diversity helps the organization reach better decisions and sharpen its competitive edge.

## Diversity Stirs Discomfort ...

Diversity has mushroomed as more women, ethnic groups, and people with disabilities enter the workforce. And for the first time in history, four distinct generations of workers – traditionalists, baby boomers, gen Xers, and millennials – are working side by side. These minorities

and people from different generations tend to hold unique frames of reference. Each group treasures its own set of values, upbringing, attitudes, language, work styles, and expectations. The result can be clashing viewpoints, says Cecilia Orellana-Rojas, the Texas Diversity Council’s vice president of strategy.

## But Differences Propel Growth

“To evolve, today’s leaders need to shake off the shackles of traditional models,” explains Susanne Moore ([susanne.moore@gendereconomics.org](mailto:susanne.moore@gendereconomics.org)), executive chair for the Center for Gender Economics and Innovation. Organizations that want to thrive in this dynamic environment must acknowledge people’s differences and build a culture that encourages diversity. Heterogeneous groups work harder to reach consensus. They take more risks and are less vulnerable to groupthink. Their widely ranging perspectives and expertise generate more creative ideas and better solutions than homogeneous groups.

## “Diversity helps the organization reach better decisions.”

What techniques can you use to reduce frustration and encourage collaboration? Here are some keys.

### TRAINING

For change to flourish and be sustainable, diversity must become cemented in the organization's culture. Success rests on creating clear messages that feature the benefits of diversity and inclusion. The organization needs to evaluate its strategy, structures, and practices as well as its training. A one-size-fits-all training program won't work with diverse teams. So, tailor the training program to fit the group's unique learning styles.

### MENTORING

Another option is to develop a mentoring program. Such a program achieves multiple goals:

- **The mentor reduces tension within teams** by helping the protégé integrate with the group.
- **The mentor grooms mentees** to help them reach their goals and advance.
- **Helping the protégé hone professional skills** keeps the leadership pipeline filled with qualified candidates.

### STORIES, MEETINGS, REWARDS

How else can you weave diversity into the fabric of your organization's culture? You can share success stories, provide opportunities for diverse people to work together, and reward successful diversity programs.

Also, when hiring suppliers, consultants, and outsourcers for your organization, look for those that are certified-minority and women-owned. Doing so will not only enrich your organization; it will stimulate goodwill in the community, too.

### Track Progress


Diversity efforts should be measurable and built around key metrics, says Moore. Therefore, determine what you need to measure and define the organization's key metrics. These metrics might include, for example:

- **average time for dispute resolution** by group
- **growth** for specific group populations
- **workgroup effectiveness** or performance.

Then, link these metrics to results. Finally, use a diversity scorecard to track your progress.

You can also use tools such as the Diversity Program Review Framework (DPRF™, [diversityprogramreview.com](http://diversityprogramreview.com)) to measure your diversity program's effectiveness. This tool lets you baseline your current organizational culture and then measure the transformation. The results highlight changes in your culture and your organization's ability to leverage diversity.

### Improve Performance

The benefits of achieving a diverse workforce extend beyond wishful thinking. Whether you're trying to reach better decisions or build more innovative teams, creating diversity is a must. It's a win-win-win relationship for your organization, its stakeholders, and society. 

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### Create a Culture of Inclusion

Embrace the benefits of diversity with resources such as these ([NonprofitWorld.org](http://NonprofitWorld.org)):

**Managers Must Become Multicultural** (Vol. 20, No. 6)

**Motivate Workers with Training Opportunities** (Vol. 33, No. 3)

**Organizational Culture: It's in the Walk, Not Just the Talk** (Vol. 29, No. 6)

**What Followers Want from Leaders: Capitalizing on Diversity** (Vol. 25, No. 5)

**Creating an Inclusive Workforce** (Vol. 24, No. 4)

**Manage for Today, Mentor for Tomorrow** (Vol. 23, No. 5)

**Let's Take the Mystery Out of Training Millennials** (Vol. 36, No. 1)

**Board Diversity: Your Biggest Challenge** (Vol. 27, No. 3)

**Fighting Harassment & Improving Inclusion** (Vol. 36, No. 2)