



[www.diversityadk.org](http://www.diversityadk.org)

## **DEI Frequently Asked Questions**

***This resource is designed to dispel myths, clarify misconceptions, and address misrepresentations surrounding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies and programs. It aims to provide a unified and consistent response to common questions and arguments that are often used to discredit DEI work.***

### **What is DEI?**

“Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a term used to describe policies and programs that promote the representation and participation of different groups of individuals. DEI encompasses people of different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, disabilities, genders, religions, cultures and sexual orientations. It also covers people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, skills and expertise.” Techtarget.com

### **What is Diversity?**

Diversity involves all the ways people are different, including the characteristics that distinguish one demographic or individual from another.

Elements of diversity include the following:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Socioeconomic status
- Gender identity
- Religion
- Language
- Age
- Marital status
- Veteran status
- Mental ability
- Physical abilities and disabilities

### **What is Equity?**

Equity ensures equal treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals. It identifies and removes barriers that prevent some groups from fully participating in society or specific jobs and industries. Equity aims to promote justice, fairness, and impartiality in how

things are done and in the distribution of resources within social structures, systems, and institutions.

### **What is inclusion?**

Inclusion builds a culture where everyone feels welcome. It actively invites every person and group to contribute and participate. An inclusive, welcoming environment supports and embraces differences, fostering a sense of belonging for all.

### **What “groups” fall under the DEI umbrella that we often overlook?**

Many people, when they hear DEI, think of race, gender, or sexual orientation. However, DEI protects many more groups from being marginalized in the hiring process, workplace, and larger society. This is why we say that DEI benefits everyone. Other groups we often don't think about but are included in the DEI umbrella are:

- People with physical or mental challenges
- Veterans
- Parents
- Pregnant Women
- Single Parents
- Caregivers
- Refugees
- Neurodiverse Individuals
- Ex-Offenders
- Those facing Mental Health Challenges

### **Who benefits most from DEI programs?**

White women have benefitted the most from DEI programs. While women remain underrepresented "at every stage of the corporate pipeline," a McKinsey study estimated that it would take 48 years for women of color to achieve gender parity, while only 22 years for White women to reach this milestone. White women hold nearly 19% of all C-suite positions (CEO, CIO, and CFO), while racial and ethnic minority women hold only 4%. Overall, White women have benefitted disproportionately from corporate DEI efforts.

*\*Black women are less likely to have access to the same support and advocacy as White women. Black women who are often numerically under-represented in professional occupations regularly grapple with how to counteract negative racial stereotypes that undermine their professional images in the office. In response, they often have to strategically engage in code-switching, by adjusting their speech, appearance, and behaviors to try and fit in.*

### **Why is DEI controversial?**

DEI critics often use the DEI label to play upon racial or gender resentments. It is increasingly used to question and undermine the positions, qualifications and abilities of marginalized people for political reasons. DEI is often misunderstood and often misrepresented and/or confused with quotas or putting unqualified people into positions, none of which is true. DEI seeks to promote the fair treatment and full participation of all people, particularly groups who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination based on identity or disability.

DEI enhances merit by asking, How do we find the best people for the job or ensure we promote the best people? And that means thinking about barriers and biases that might be getting in the way of considering the complete talent pool. **DEI policies don't dictate who gets hired.** They are policies, programs and strategies to open doors to people who might not have access or equal access. The equity piece of DEI seeks to level the playing field for groups of workers who have historically been underrepresented in a given field or are underpaid for doing the same work as their white or male peers. **DEI creates opportunities and strives to overcome current and historical barriers to full participation by all people through policies, programs, and strategies that benefit all.**

### **Is DEI the same as Affirmative Action or Equal Employment Opportunity?**

No, DEI is not the same as Affirmative Action or Equal Employment Opportunity. Affirmative Action is a legally mandated initiative for government contractors to take proactive steps to ensure the recruitment and advancement of **qualified** minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and covered veterans. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) refers to employment practices that ensure nondiscrimination, fairness, and equity in the workplace. DEI, on the other hand, is a broader concept that aims to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals, regardless of their background or identity.

### **Doesn't DEI put unqualified people into positions?**

**DEI is about hiring individuals—because they are highly qualified—regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexual preference, etc.** It's about doing so with the knowledge that many people have historically been marginalized and disregarded as suitable job candidates precisely because of these factors. Before DEI, meritless systems abounded. A person's career success (hiring, placement, portfolio projects, raises and promotions) often had little to do with merit. You could solely—and immediately—be included or excluded in the candidate pool based on nothing more than your gender, race, ethnicity, age, looks, friendships, family money, etc. DEI has been designed and put in place to prevent this when possible. DEI is really about welcoming people in and removing the unconscious and sometimes conscious biases that impact historically marginalized candidates. For many from underrepresented racial groups, proving they are “worthy” of a job comes with additional requirements than their counterparts, often preventing them from applying to jobs they are more than qualified for. When you leave the door open for everyone to have an opportunity, you get a deeper, more qualified pool of candidates to choose from. **DEI is a key solution to strengthen merit-based employment systems. It's not the problem.**

### **DEI is reverse discrimination or racist!**

The truth is that DEI helps level the playing field. DEI is often characterized as “reverse discrimination or being racist,” usually in situations where white people believe they are negatively stereotyped or discriminated against because of their whiteness – or treated less favorably than people of color. This claim ignores a core ingredient of racism and discrimination: power. DEI seeks to rebalance that power and ensure that those historically disempowered or deprived of equal opportunities simply because of their identities should be given a fair and

equitable chance to succeed. This does not equate to discriminating against historically dominant groups (aka white men). ([www.ywboston.org](http://www.ywboston.org))

### **DEI excludes straight, white males!**

DEI benefits everyone! One of the most popular claims made by anti-DEI advocates is that DEI only benefits certain groups—usually people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. But the truth is DEI initiatives seek to ensure everyone has what they need to succeed, regardless of their identity. Stronger parental leave policies ensure that parents of all genders can take the time they need to bond with their new babies. Accessible entrances benefit people pushing children in strollers, elderly folks with mobility issues, or people with injuries. Stronger employee support programs help military veterans transition back into civilian life and receive adequate mental health support. DEI recognizes that many communities experience barriers to success and seeks to remove them so everyone can thrive, resulting in happier employees, higher quality work, and less turnover. ([www.ywboston.org](http://www.ywboston.org))

### **DEI is unnecessary because we live in a post-racial society.**

Racial disparities persist unchecked despite legal rulings. Many DEI critics argue that these initiatives are unnecessary, claiming we have achieved equality and that racism is no longer a significant issue. They often cite the Supreme Court's 2023 decision to eliminate Affirmative Action as evidence that DEI is redundant or illegal. But, as Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson aptly noted in her dissent, "deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life." Today, significant disparities remain: in 2023, white workers in Greater Boston significantly outearned their non-white peers, earning 27¢ more per dollar, and only 6.2% of people of color held top-paying roles. It doesn't take much to see that we still have a long way to go regarding reaching equality. DEI initiatives are crucial for addressing these gaps and advancing equal opportunity and pay. ([www.ywboston.org](http://www.ywboston.org))

### **Articles to read in light of the current assault on DEI:**

- [Why the term 'DEI' is being weaponized as a racist dog whistle](#)
- [Eliminating DEI isn't just racist — it's segregationist](#)
- [Why We Must Center Belonging and Justice in Our Leadership](#)

***Addressing and debunking the myths surrounding DEI is crucial to ensure its continued success and to counter the divisive rhetoric that seeks to undermine it. As Marguerite Fletcher wisely states, "Diversity, equity and inclusion efforts benefit everyone in an organization and in our society; studies have shown this to be true. Good, fair-minded people need to push back against these scare tactics and false narratives to ensure that we don't lose the progress that we have made over the last few decades." By doing so, we can build stronger, more resilient communities and organizations that truly value and support every individual.***

## Economic Statistics

1. A Harvard Business Review study found that companies with higher diversity in management earned 38% more of their revenues, on average, from innovative products and services compared to companies with lower diversity.
2. According to the Center for Talent Innovation, companies with a diverse workforce are 45% more likely to capture a larger market share.
3. Employee Retention and Satisfaction
4. A McKinsey report also highlighted that companies with strong DEI initiatives see higher employee retention rates. Inclusive workplaces tend to have lower turnover, saving recruitment and training costs.
5. Employees in diverse and inclusive workplaces report higher job satisfaction. A Deloitte survey found that 83% of millennials are actively engaged when they believe their organization fosters an inclusive culture.
6. Customer Loyalty and Brand Strength
7. Companies that prioritize DEI are more likely to build stronger customer loyalty. A PwC study found that 75% of consumers are more likely to support brands that are committed to diversity and inclusion.

(Key reports for this reference information)

"Diversity matters" (McKinsey, 2015). Companies with the highest gender diversity on executive teams are 25% more likely to have above-average profitability.

- "Is Gender Diversity Profitable?" (Noland, Moran, Kotschwar, 2016): Firms with 30%+ women in the c-suite are more profitable.

- "Women on Boards and Firm Financial Performance" (Post & Byron, 2015): Female directors positively impact accounting returns and strategic oversight.

- "The Impact of Diversity and Inclusion on Firm Performance" (MDPI, 2024): Firms with higher D&I scores (2017–2021) show better performance (Tobin's Q).

- "Unveiling the Dual Impact of D&I" (Monaco et al., 2024): Highlights how D&I enhances profitability through environmental performance.

### **Other reports:**

- [Being Black in Corporate America](#)

### References:

- What Is Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)?  
<http://honorsofdistinctionmag.com/what-is-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei-2/>
- Who Benefits From Diversity And Inclusion Efforts?  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/michelleking/2023/05/16/who-benefits-from-diversity-and-inclusion-efforts/>
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Archives - HR for Bioscience.  
<https://bamsupporthub.ca/category/hr-topics/diversity-equity-inclusion/>
- Frequently Asked Questions | Beverly, MA.  
<https://beverlyma.gov/1025/Frequently-Asked-Questions>
- Ten Common Myths About Diversity and Inclusion - Institute for Sustainable Diversity & Inclusion. <https://i4sdi.org/ten-common-myths-about-diversity-and-inclusion/>