

How to establish diversity leads and diversity task forces

8 points to consider when setting up
diversity leads and diversity task forces
for success

A guide for leaders of organisations,
HR and Diversity and Inclusion leads

This guide is part of the 'How to
improve gender equality' toolkit



THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS
TEAM

The recommendations we provide are based on the best available evidence and the latest thinking from practitioners and experts in organisational behaviour and behavioural economics.

This guide is one of five in the 'How to improve gender equality' series:

- [How to set effective targets](#)
- [How to establish diversity leads and diversity task forces](#)
- [How to run structured interviews](#)
- [How to use skill-based assessment tasks](#)
- [How to increase transparency of progression, pay and reward processes](#)

To understand other approaches which are effective at improving equality, see our [summary of evidence-based actions for employers](#).

For more information see the sources listed in the bibliography or contact gabiprogramme@bi.team.

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Key points

How to establish a successful diversity lead role

- 1 Appoint an influential senior individual who cares about equality, diversity and inclusion, and has ringfenced time
- 2 Ensure the diversity lead has access to data
- 3 Enable diversity leads to hold managers and staff to account

Tips for diversity leads

- 4 Focus on decision-making processes rather than outcomes
- 5 Challenge colleagues to improve

How to establish a successful diversity task force

- 6 Establish a diversity task force with a diverse mix of representatives
- 7 Support the diversity task force to develop solutions to diversity challenges
- 8 Spread solutions throughout the organisation

Diversity leads and diversity task forces matter

Working towards equality, diversity and inclusion is a team effort. Senior leaders, managers and individual employees each play an important part. There are two other roles/groups that enable organisations to improve the representation of women and minority groups in organisations: diversity leads and diversity task forces.¹

Diversity leads establish diversity initiatives and create fair processes throughout the organisation. These processes create a framework that all employees can use to improve equality. Diversity leads also provide senior leaders and managers with motivation, guidance and tools which support progress towards the organisation's equality targets. For more information, see [How to set effective targets](#).

Diversity task forces undertake the work of developing, championing and implementing diversity initiatives and should represent a range of individuals who make up an organisation's workforce. By representing an array of people, diversity task forces provide diverse perspectives on how processes and structures within an organisation can be more inclusive. They highlight and promote the value of diversity in the workplace.

An essential element for successful diversity leads and task forces is senior support within the organisation. Senior leadership putting their backing behind these diversity roles and providing them with support and resources are marks of an organisation that is truly committed to improving its gender pay gap.

Definitions

Diversity lead

A **diversity lead** is a role within an organisation. Depending on the size of the organisation, this may be a full time **diversity manager** position, or a set of responsibilities which can be combined with another role (for example, the Managing Director or Director of HR).

Large organisations may share activities out across a **diversity and inclusion (D&I) team**. Smaller organisations, or those that are earlier on in implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives, may begin by appointing a **diversity sponsor, champion or advocate** – someone who takes an interest in diversity and inclusion and challenges colleagues to do more, alongside their wider role.

Diversity leads usually work to improve representation and inclusion of members of minority groups, or staff who are underrepresented in the organisation.

Typical responsibilities include some or all of the following:

- Creating, developing and implementing a diversity and inclusion strategy, and linking this to the overall organisation's strategy.
- Guiding a review of policies and procedures, to ensure that these are inclusive.
- Identifying and implementing external best practice which will increase diversity and inclusion within the organisation.
- Building relationships with colleagues, particularly underrepresented individuals and staff networks or employee resource groups.
- Identifying barriers for minority groups and promoting organisation-wide solutions to overcome these.
- Establishing and managing specific diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as returnships for individuals returning to their career after a break to care for others.
- Regularly reviewing data on diversity representation and inclusion within the organisation to understand challenges and progress.
- Constructively challenging colleagues to do more to achieve progress on equality, diversity and inclusion.



Diversity task force

A **diversity task force** is a diverse collection of people who come from different backgrounds, have different characteristics and represent the full diversity of employees in an organisation. In particular, the task force should be a way for underrepresented groups to have their voices heard and their perspectives incorporated into decision-making within the organisation.

Other terms which are sometimes used are '**diversity working group**', or '**employee resource group (ERG)**'. Sometimes, members of '**diversity networks**' can play a similar role – though the scope of a diversity network may be different if it is not focused on improving organisational processes. This is not an exhaustive list. We use the term 'diversity task force' in this document to refer to a group of colleagues who do not focus solely on diversity and inclusion within the organisation in their day-to-day roles but who work collaboratively to improve the experience and outcomes of the full diversity of staff in the organisation.

Diversity task forces can take different forms depending on the approach or size of a given organisation. Some organisations may have a single diversity group, while larger organisations may have multiple ones focused on different areas of diversity, for instance groups dedicated to race and ethnicity, or parents and carers. Producing a Terms of Reference document for the task force ensures that objectives are clearly established. The task force needs to be given the backing of an organisation's leadership to enable it to achieve its mandate of improving diversity.

A task force's activities can overlap greatly with those listed above for diversity leads. In organisations with both a diversity lead and diversity task force, the diversity lead can be expected to advise, attend and/or lead the task force. The additional people-power of task forces can enable these groups to undertake a range of activities. Below are some different responsibilities that task forces may take on, in addition to those already noted for diversity leads:

Advocating for different groups

- Identifying and prioritising problems that need attention.
- Developing solutions which draw on the perspectives of staff at all levels of the organisation.
- Building partnerships with local communities.

Holding leadership to account

- Encouraging colleagues to progress with solutions.²
- Ensuring diversity concerns remain on the organisation's corporate agenda.

Helping to implement solutions

- Acting as ambassadors for diversity good practice in members' respective departments.
- Establishing buy-in for D&I initiatives via meaningful consultation.
- Encouraging change to spread.

To increase the impact and effectiveness of these roles/groups within your organisation, use the approaches outlined in this guide.

Diversity leads

Step 1: Appoint a senior individual who cares about equality and diversity

A diversity lead will be most effective when they genuinely care about improving equality, diversity and inclusion.

Subject matter expertise and experience working directly on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives will be important for demanding roles.

The role needs to be supported by the executive team. This senior support ensures that a more diverse and inclusive culture spreads throughout the organisation.

Diversity leads need to be senior enough to be influential and to enforce accountability.

Diversity leads require sufficient time, resources and support from other corporate functions to undertake their roles.³ Larger organisations should expect to build a dedicated D&I team to enable this.

Step 2: Ensure the diversity lead has access to data

A diversity lead needs to have access to information about how the opportunities and experiences of women or staff from minority groups compare to others.

Diversity leads should have access to detailed data about recruitment, pay and reward, performance evaluation, career progression and retention. They should seek to identify and understand any inequalities which emerge. This may require resource from team members who can collect and analyse complex data. For more guidance on how to do this in order to improve gender equality, see our guide [Eight ways to understand your gender pay gap](#).

Using this data, diversity leads can target and track the progress of diversity and inclusion initiatives, and identify particular challenges where processes may need to be adapted or initiatives implemented.

Diversity leads may also collect, commission and scrutinise new sources of data in order to understand staff experiences in more detail, for example staff diversity surveys or focus groups with members of staff who may not be experiencing equal opportunities. This typically requires close collaboration with HR colleagues.

“Diversity leads should have access to detailed data about recruitment, pay and reward, performance evaluation, career progression and retention”



Step 3: Enable diversity leads to hold managers and staff to account against fair policies

Organisational policies should require managers to follow transparent and structured processes which give all employees or job applicants equal opportunity. [See our guide on how to increase transparency of progression, pay and reward processes.](#)

For accountability to function, managers need to have a clear understanding of the policies which should be followed when making decisions about staff.

Managers need to know that their decisions about hiring, reward, progression, and broader management decisions, will be reviewed by the diversity lead to ensure they are fair and in line with policy.

Diversity leads should then regularly review HR data and trends, for instance looking at recruitment and progression stats. Where policies have not been followed, or change is needed, diversity leads should ask the relevant manager to explain why, and ensure that the appropriate changes can be made. Here is a recruitment example:

- If a particular department hires disproportionately low numbers of women, the diversity lead should bring this to the department manager's attention. They should prompt the team to consider where the process can be improved. HR Business Partners in larger organisations may provide this link between departments and the D&I team.
- The hiring managers in the department should be reminded of the organisation's hiring policies and supported to implement them.
- If the trend continues, the manager should be asked to explain the department's decision-making processes in detail. These may relate to setting job specifications, preparing for interviews, deciding the criteria against which applicants will be assessed and so on.
- The diversity lead should work with the department to develop solutions. The department should be encouraged to remove any opportunities for bias to affect outcomes in the process and to align with the organisation's policies and best practice. For ideas see [Structured interviews](#) and [Skill-based assessment tasks guides](#).

Tips for diversity leads

Step 4: Focus on decision-making processes rather than outcomes⁴

Diversity leads will be interested in how attraction, progression and retention ultimately affect the representation of women or members of other minority groups. However, the emphasis when reviewing manager decision-making needs to be on the processes that produce these results. This is because fairer processes result in fairer decisions about the best person for the job. Furthermore, processes are more firmly within managers' control. For example, managers might stick closely to decision-making criteria for hiring and yet still not hire enough women, simply because not many women applied.

Note that in the example above, hiring managers are being asked to account for their hiring decision in terms of the *process* they used to make the decision. They are not being asked to justify why they are hiring more men than women overall.

In contrast, asking people to account for outcomes may actually result in a negative effect as a focus on outcomes does not effectively curb biased behaviour.⁵

Relatedly, the decision-making criteria themselves need to be carefully considered and designed to be as unbiased as possible too.

Step 5: Challenge colleagues to improve

Diversity leads should provide feedback to managers about how they are performing on improving equality, diversity and inclusion. This may be via HR Business Partners in larger organisations.

Celebrate successes and acknowledge the work that went into achieving them.

If progress has not been made, diversity leads should challenge teams to investigate why. Useful questions to ask at this stage include:

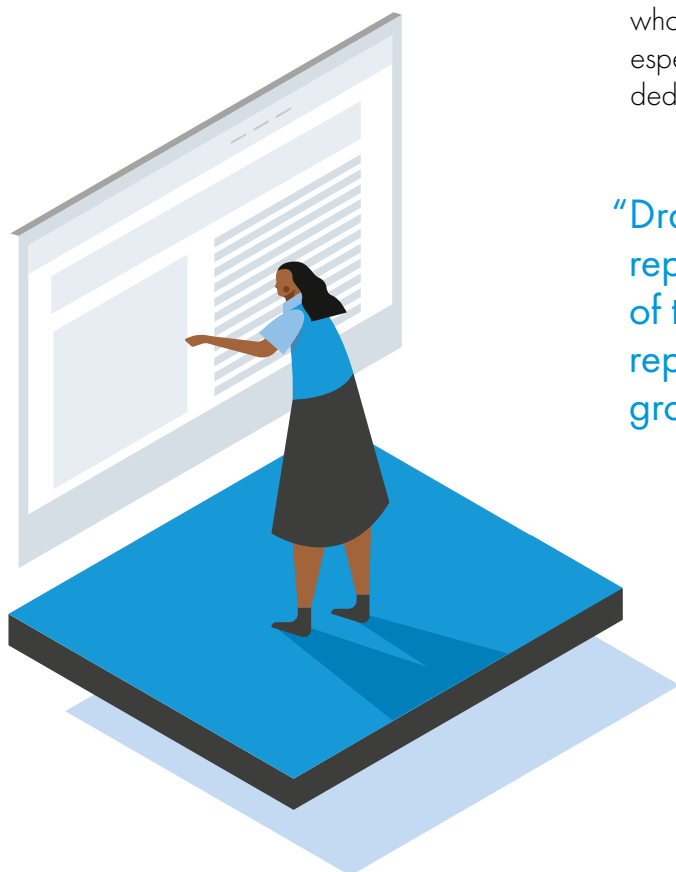
- “What changes have been made to our talent management processes in this area, and what was the intended impact?”
- “Have you been using data to track the impact of these changes, and if not, what do you need to start doing so?”
- “Have you considered other solutions to this challenge?” In order to support with this, diversity leads may then link the manager with other colleagues in the organisation who have successfully tackled the same challenge, or signpost them to quality guidance (for example [Transparency, structured interviews](#) and [Skill-based assessments guides](#)).
- “What will you do next and what is a realistic target to set for change?”

There should be consequences if decisions cannot be justified to the diversity manager. It is up to organisations to decide what the appropriate response might be.

Diversity task forces

Diversity task forces can build on the work of a diversity lead to push an organisation even further towards its diversity goals.

The following actions can be used to set a diversity task force up for success. Task forces will take different forms in different organisations. It is important to note that task forces cannot replace a dedicated D&I team. Members of a task force work on diversity initiatives in addition to their other role responsibilities, while dedicated D&I leads or teams work solely on improving diversity within the organisation. This can occupy a number of full time roles, especially in larger organisations.



Step 6: Establish a diversity task force with a diverse mix of representatives

Draw together employees representing different parts of the organisation and representatives of different groups and levels of leadership. Ensure that as wide a range of voices as possible is represented in the task force.

These individuals should be motivated to improve diversity and inclusion and to share learning across teams.

The remit, roles, leadership and individual responsibilities of the taskforce should be established and agreed from its outset.

Diversity task forces will be much more effective if they include at least one person who has seniority, influence and authority, especially in an organisation without a dedicated diversity lead.

“Draw together employees representing different parts of the organisation and representatives of different groups and levels of leadership”

Step 7: Support the diversity task forces to develop local solutions to diversity challenges

Members of a diversity task force should be given time away from their roles to spend understanding diversity trends or inequalities in their areas of work. Care should be taken in ensuring that these activities are not overwhelmingly undertaken by women or other underrepresented groups.

The efforts and achievements of the group members should also be recognised and rewarded on a par with their other work objectives. One way of doing so, can be to include work done for the Diversity Taskforce as a formal performance objective which contributes to company goals.

HR and D&I teams should share analysis of diversity data and trends with members of the diversity task force. This enables a diverse range of views to contribute to discussions on how to interpret or communicate the findings of the analysis.

Task force meetings should allow members to collectively consider solutions to the diversity problems they have identified.

They should also have the opportunity to consider the degree to which diversity and inclusion solutions need to be tailored to different parts of the organisation in order to get people engaged and increase impact.

Task forces should have regular appointments with senior leaders of the organisation to allow ongoing discussion of their concerns and recommendations.

Task forces can also collect and share the views of wider staff members up to senior leaders.

“Members of a diversity task force should be given time away from their roles to spend understanding diversity trends or inequalities in their areas of work”

Step 8: Spread solutions throughout the wider organisation

Diversity task forces are well placed to propose realistic but challenging targets for diversity and inclusion which senior teams can then communicate and enforce. See [How to set effective targets guide](#).

Diversity task force members can act as champions for change. They can amplify messages about diversity and inclusion coming from senior leaders. Examples of this include:

- Cascading messages via individual team meetings.
- Circulating regular diversity and inclusion bulletins or newsletters.
- Running events which celebrate diversity.
- Convening wider staff networks.

What evidence have we used?

This guidance is based on the best available evidence currently. Where possible, we have used evidence based on randomised controlled trials that were conducted in the field and that measure objective outcomes.

It is important to acknowledge that high quality evidence on the issue of gender equality in the workplace is not as common as it is for many other issues. Researchers are endeavouring to generate high quality evidence of what works to improve equality.

The following list of sources informed this guide, though it is not exhaustive. The advice was also informed by practitioner and expert insight.

Endnotes

- 1 Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2016). Why diversity programs fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 94(7/8), 52–60; Castilla, E.J. (2015). Accounting for the gap: A firm study manipulating organizational accountability and transparency in pay decisions. *Organization Science*, 26(2), 311–333; Dobbin, F., Schrage, D. & Kalev, A. (2015). Rage against the iron cage: The varied effects of bureaucratic personnel reforms on diversity. *American Sociological Review*, 80(5), 1014–1044.
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- 3 Epton, T., Currie, S. & Armitage, C.J. (2017). Unique effects of setting goals on behavior change: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 85(12), 1182–1198
- 4 Brtek, M.D. & Motowidlo, S.J. (2002). Effects of procedure and outcome accountability on interview validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(1), 185–191.
Patil, S.V., Vieider, F. & Tetlock, P.E. (2014). Process versus outcome accountability. In M. Bovens, R.E. Goodin & T. Schillemans (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- 5 Pitesa, M., & Thau, S. (2013). Masters of the universe: How power and accountability influence self-serving decisions under moral hazard. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98(3), 550.

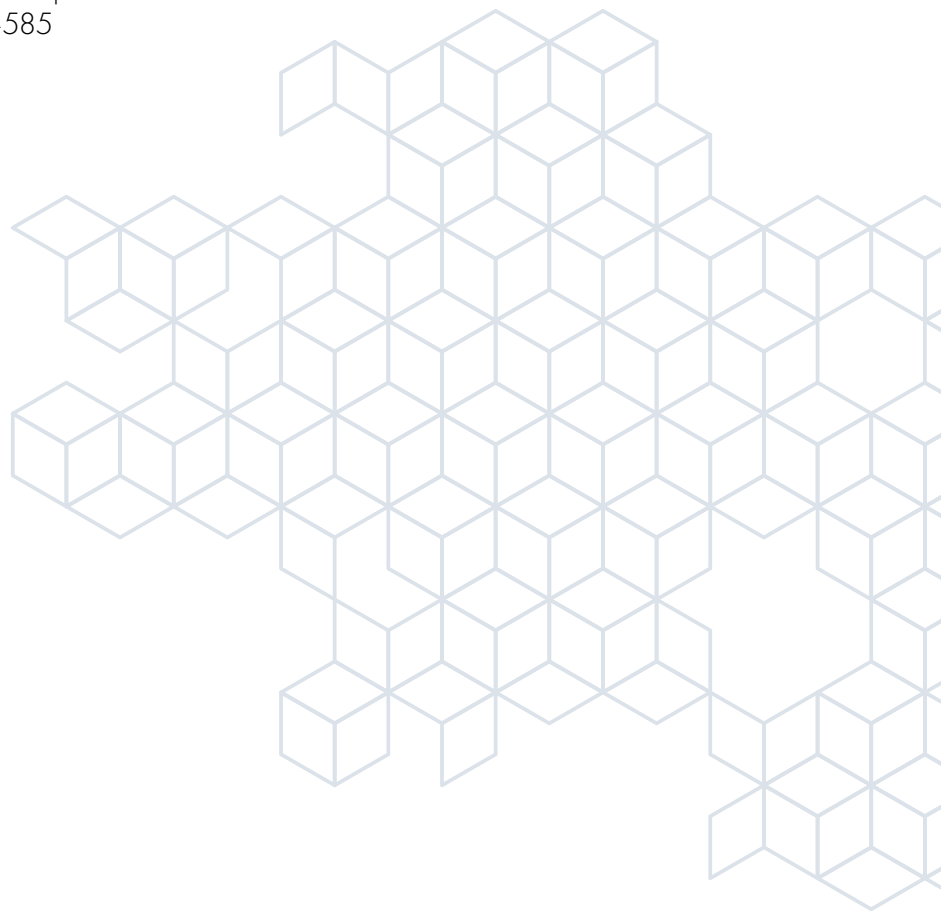
Further reading

Gender & Behavioural Insights Programme
by The Behavioural Insights Team.

How to improve gender equality in the
workplace

Harkin, B., Webb, T.L., Chang, B.P., Prestwich, A., Conner, M., Kellar, I., Benn, Y. and Sheeran, P. (2016). Does monitoring goal progress promote goal attainment? A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *Psychological bulletin*, 142(2), 198

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