

Harnessing Employees for Meaningful Change in DEIB Efforts

Rhode Island Housing

Management Innovation: Human Resources

HFA Staff Contact

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Overview

RIHousing meets people where they are in our programs, in our communications, and in our employee relations. With recent shifts in cultural focus, RIHousing has stepped up to ensure that Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) is incorporated into our agency's every day activities and actions and not just one-off events and initiatives. We started off by hiring a consulting firm to conduct an extensive evaluation of our employees, processes, and culture, so that we understood where we were starting from and identified areas for improvement. Armed with these insights, we came up with a plan aimed at harnessing the potential of our greatest asset – our employees – to commit to meaningful change.

Where We Were

In order to make a significant and sustainable difference in our agency-wide DEIB practices, we recognized the importance of thoroughness. To assist us in conducting a DEIB pulse check, we hired an equity consulting firm, The Exeter Group, who came to us with an impressive resume that spanned healthcare companies, nonprofits, manufacturers, financial services, insurance providers and more across the country. Our comprehensive DEIB assessment, conducted from April 2022 to February 2023, drilled down into every part of our agency. We conducted a survey for all staff, analyzed our workforce data, and reviewed various agency documents.

We also engaged in additional means of collecting qualitative feedback from our employees about the state of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging in the organization: a second survey comprised of three open-ended questions; interviews with 25 key stakeholders; and four focus groups, each brought together according to a particular diversity dimension. Four Leadership Alignment sessions with representation of team leaders from across the agency were also held to update leaders on the DEIB assessment and to align RIHousing strategic goals. Involving all of our employees from every level of our agency was vital in the collection of individual experiences, thoughts, and suggestions. With everyone involved, we achieved a broader perspective and gained valuable insights into what truly matters to our colleagues.

This extensive assessment spotlighted our DEIB efforts. Our all-staff survey showed that RIHousing's overall DEIB Index score was 77%, a solid rating that showed we had some work to do. Armed with our new set of knowledge, we came up with important action items that could be achieved relatively quickly, along with setting meaningful long-term goals.

Leveraging from Within

RIHousing recognized that organization transparency and employee buy-in were important as we worked to weave DEIB practices into our day-to-day. That's why the assessment findings were presented at a mandatory agency-wide meeting – so that all employees could understand the results, ask questions, and be aware of next steps. Throughout the assessment process we ensured that employees were seen, heard, and respected. Because of how open and direct we were about our areas needing improvement, our employees have expressed appreciation and admiration for RIHousing taking on this commitment, and for involving every employee.

We created a new DEIB task force, comprised of seven members from our agency's previous task force, plus seven new additions, employees selected through an anonymous [application](#) that was reviewed by the leaders of the task force: our Deputy Director, Director of Human Resources, and our General Counsel. Growing the task force from seven members to 14 members has expanded the age range, ethnicities, and tenure with RIHousing of the group, allowing for diverse perspectives and more in-depth

discussion, reflection, and action. The task force held its kickoff meeting in October 2023 to begin the next phase of our agency's DEIB journey. During that first meeting, the group identified priority action items we could start addressing right away.

Results and Actions

In December 2023 RIHousing received the Providence Business News DEI Award in financial services, our first time winning, and a vote of confidence for how our initial efforts to incorporate DEIB practices into our every day were working. We're also a multi-year winner of Rhode Island's Best Places to Work; with our increase in DEIB efforts, we hope to continue to stand out as an exemplary employer that cares about and listens to our people.

One initiative the DEIB task force undertook immediately, led by our Director of Human Resources, was increasing the number of training sessions and guided discussions RIHousing holds for employees, all through a DEIB lens. These have included a Cultural Competence Series where we've not only brought in different subject matter experts to educate our staff, but are also creating opportunities for our own staff to share their stories and perspectives. We've received a lot of positive feedback for this series, especially the staff-led discussions, as employees have been able to learn more about their own colleagues, ask questions, and gain new understanding about the diverse people and cultures that make up our organization.

We held a presentation on pronouns and implemented an option for staff to express their own chosen pronouns through email signatures. Other workshops and trainings we've conducted include Inclusive Listening, Foundation for Unity: Exploring Personal & Collective Drivers for DEIB, and From Bystander to Upstander: Allyship at Work. With this variety of opportunities for staff to learn about the many facets of DEIB, we're training each employee to understand DEIB and incorporate it in their own work – and hopefully personal -- lives every day.

What's Next

It's been less than a year since the end of our agency's extensive analysis and presentation to all staff, but RIHousing and our employees have already been recognized for our DEIB efforts and have clear goals, action items and a well-established task force to spearhead the next phase. This level of achievement could not have been accomplished if the agency hadn't prioritized Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging practices and understood that success only comes with the full agency's dedication and investment into the initiative.

Training sessions, guided discussions, and the Cultural Competence series are ongoing. The task force continues to develop the RIHousing DEIB Strategic Action Plan, including working with our Communications team to create a DEIB Communication Plan for all employees.

At the start of this we analyzed our agency's data by race/ethnicity and gender for hires, promotions, disciplinary actions, and separations and created a system that tracks data on the agency's hiring and promoting practices. We're working hard to keep our agency as a whole accountable as we make new hires and consider promotions. Overall, we have an increase in both new hires and promotions within of staff with various backgrounds. Hispanic or Latino promotion has increased by over 4% since 2022. Our new hire of those identifying as Black has increased by 3.7%, and our hiring of those identifying as two or more races has increased by 6.4%.



Leveraging internal resources and fostering staff buy-in was essential in bringing real changes in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging practices within our agency. We understand that this process is a journey, not a final destination we're trying to reach – we're aiming for ongoing, constant improvement. With employees actively engaged and invested in DEIB initiatives, RIHousing can truly embody these principles at every level. We're more confident than ever in the future of our DEIB work and the satisfaction of our employees.

Attachments


Cultural Competency Series

RIHousing Cultural Competency Series

THE EVOLUTION OF SOUL FOOD

Join us in the board room to learn about soul food, integrating African dishes with American foods, how stereotyping food has impacted African Americans, and how we can embrace soul food and culture.

FEBRUARY 7TH AT 11:30 AM IN THE BOARD ROOM, FOLLOWED BY SAMPLE-SIZED TRADITIONAL DISHES.



Presenter: Shahidah Ali, Finance Department

FOUNDATIONS FOR UNITY
 EXPLORING PERSONAL & COLLECTIVE DRIVERS FOR DEIB VIRTUAL WORKSHOP

with Sabine Smith, Executive Coach and Leadership Facilitator



Through thought-provoking discussions and sharing real-life experiences, you'll delve into your values and motivation while discovering the diverse perspectives of your colleagues. This collaborative exploration will foster empathy, connection, and a shared understanding of the importance of DEIB.

Thursday, March 28th, 12:00 - 1:30 pm (Virtual)
 This interactive workshop is intended for all RIHousing employees and will be limited to 50 participants.

Let's Talk About Pronouns

Thursday, January 19th
11:00 - 12:00 / Virtual Session

Join us on a grammatical journey to learn how pronouns function as a part of speech and how they relate to the concept of gender.

We will identify commonly used pronouns, and see examples of pronouns in use.

This presentation will be centered around the intention of seeking to understand the experiences and identities of others.

Learn more about how we can all support and engage individuals with compassion and empathy.




SPEAKER :
Kelly Boutin
Director, Hochberg Women's Center & Pride Center at Bryant University

RIHousing Cultural Competency Series

RIHousing Cultural Competency Series

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY PRESENTATION

Join us for a virtual presentation on the origins of Columbus Day, the controversy surrounding the holiday, and the movement for change.



Presenter:
 Silvermoon Mars LaRose, a member of the Narragansett Tribe and Assistant Director of the Tomaquag Museum

THURSDAY
OCT 12TH
11AM-12PM



THE
EXETER
GROUP



RIHousing
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
Strategic Action Plan

Final Submitted: April 2, 2024

Table of Contents

- 1. Table of Contents 2
- 2. Overview of DEIB Strategic Plan 5
- 3. DEIB Strategic Action Plan High-Level Timeline 6
- 4. Appendix A: DEIB Task Force Members 8



Action Planning Process

The RIHousing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Task Force was charged with reviewing assessment findings and developing a strategic plan from Exeter’s recommendations and those posed by the group. The following are the high-level steps that were taken to develop the plan.

Prioritizing Recommendations

During the Task Force kick-off meeting, Exeter asked the Task Force to reflect on two questions: “What does Impact mean to RIHousing”, and “What would make a recommendation difficult to implement at RIHousing?”

Task Force members said an initiative would be impactful to RIHousing if the following are in place:

Participation from across the company.	Everyone feels they belong at RIHousing and can be themselves authentically.
If a change led to improved employee engagement & retention.	A culture of humility, where everyone is willing to learn.
Separate role devoted to DEIB work not as an offshoot of their overall job.	An open and inclusive work environment.

Regarding difficulty to implement, Task Force members cited several items as potential barriers to implementing recommendations at RIHousing including:

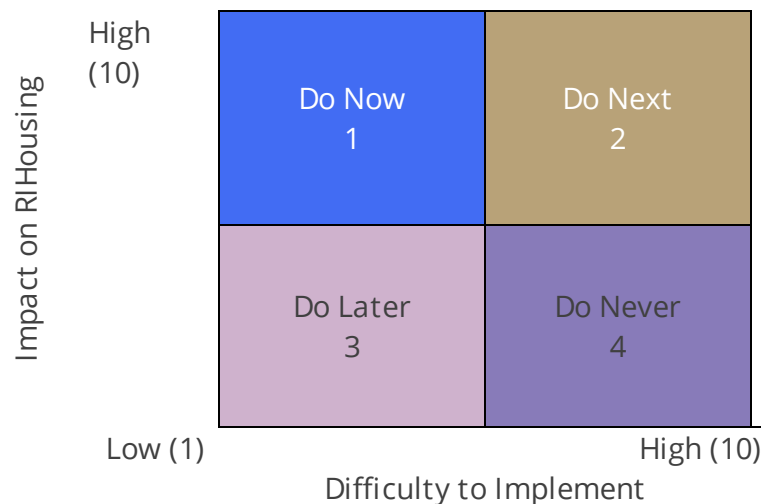
Cost and time.	People don’t see DEIB as a priority or care for it.
Red-tape, RIH is a public agency that has to jump through a lot of hoops to get things done.	People naturally fear change.
People and teams are working in their own silos, finding ways to get buy-in and engagement across the organization can be difficult.	When it comes to DEIB people often think only of interpersonal interactions and not as a structural issue.

Following the kick-off meeting, Exeter provided the Task Force with a survey that included all the recommendations from the assessment report. Taskforce members were asked to rate each recommendation on a 10-point scale to determine its potential impact on RIHousing and potential difficulty to implement. Taskforce members were also invited to submit additional recommendations for consideration by the group.



The results were tallied to capture the average across all members.

- Quadrant 1: Do Now (in the next year) - Recommendation has big impact and is easy to implement
- Quadrant 2: Do Next (between 1-2 years) - Recommendation has big impact and is difficult to implement
- Quadrant 3: Do Later – Recommendation has little impact and is easy to implement
- Quadrant 4: Do Never – Recommendation has little impact and is difficult to implement



During the Collaboration session, the highest rated recommendations were presented to Task Force members to further prioritize as a group. There was also opportunity to reconsider lower rated recommendations to be included in the strategic plan.

The task force arrived at the final list of recommendations to include in the strategic plan. Exeter recommended narrowing the total list of items to five for greater manageability by the organization. The final list was categorized into four broad segments based on their alignment:

1. Enhancing Training and Resources
2. Establishing a Common Understanding
3. Promoting and Advancing Staff
4. Ensuring Accountability and Good Communication

Next, the Task Force developed operational details for each recommendation by answering the following questions:

1. What baseline data is available? If none, what data could/should be collected to establish a baseline?



2. How will success/progress be measured? What metrics should be used?
3. What are specific required resources aside from time, budget, and staff (e.g., technology)?
4. What positions or roles are responsible to implement the recommendation?
5. When should the recommendation be undertaken? Identify milestones along the way.
6. Are there additional notes, other considerations, or potential issues or challenges that should be noted?

The accompanying Excel file includes the action items that were prioritized by the group and the operational details for the prioritized recommendations.

Overview of DEIB Strategic Plan

The RIHousing DEIB Task Force presents a multi-year action plan to the organization. The plan is designed to address DEIB from several perspectives across individual staff, departments, and the organization. The plan collectively provides RIHousing with numerous opportunities to bolster DEIB in measurable ways.



An accompanying Excel file includes details about the strategic plan. A high-level summary timeline and specific action plans are featured. Exeter recommends a condensed version of the DEIB Strategic Plan be shared with the organization. For example, it may include a recap of key assessment findings, the final recommendations to be actioned, progress/success measures, and implementation timelines.



DEIB Strategic Action Plan High-Level Timeline

Summary Timeline

The summary timeline lists each recommendation selected by the task force and the targeted start and implementation dates for the initial work supporting that recommendation. As the scope is refined by leadership, the timing is expected to adjust. In some instances, “First” represents the starting point to collect requirements vs. the start of implementation. Details for each item are included in the accompanying Excel file.

1. Enhancing Training and Resources	First	Second	Third
<p>1.1 Continue and expand DEIB training and education on unconscious bias, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership to help employees and leaders develop the skills and knowledge needed to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace.</p> <p>1.2 HR directors, Executives, and Directors or anyone leading a department should have a training requirement in their Performance Standards that is focused on their understanding of DEIB.</p> <p>Status: Completed training- Unconscious Bias, Inclusive Listening. eLearning platform in-progress, vendors are being reviewed. Targeting Q3/Q4 '24 to launch.</p>	<p>1.1 In-Progress</p> <p>1.2 Implement before 2025</p>		
<p>1.3 Offer ongoing career development opportunities such as training programs, workshops, conferences, and cohorts. These opportunities will help employees stay up to date with new skills and industry developments. Capture knowledge gain, team member engagement, and team member approval or disapproval of course content to assess effectiveness.</p> <p>Status: In-house development training is underway and open to all team members. Tuition reimbursement available. 5-workshop series to be conducted. Directors should include team professional development in budgets.</p>	In-Progress		
2. Establishing a Common Understanding	First	Second	Third
<p>2.1 Define what DEIB means to RI Housing for both internal and external audiences. This definition/ statement should be clear and concise.</p>	Start now		



<p>2.2 Develop a Communication Plan (internal and external), including why DEIB is important for RIHousing on an organizational, departmental, and team level. Explain the benefits of a diverse and inclusive environment, including improved creativity, better decision-making, and increased employee engagement.</p> <p>Status: Whitley to connect with Marketing team. Exeter provided links to DEI Statement guidance.</p>		After 2.1	
<p>3. Promoting and Advancing Staff</p>	First	Second	Third
<p>Establish objective, transparent, and consistent evaluation criteria such as performance and productivity metrics or skills and qualifications (including certifications, degrees or experience equivalents, and training).</p> <p>Status: Isa’s SMART Goal training is mandatory training for managers and will tailor for aspiring leaders as a starting point. Whitley is starting to work on career path visuals across departments.</p>	In-progress		
<p>4. Ensuring Accountability and Good Communication</p>	First	Second	Third
<p>Establish a reporting system or process that allows employees to submit concerns and receive updates on actions taken to address them. If such a process currently exists, provide more communication to staff about it.</p> <p>Status: Worked with IT to fix HR intranet functionality that includes a reporting function for HR service requests, enabled anonymous submissions for concerns and ideas. Will provide a communication plan when functional.</p>	In-progress		



Appendix A: DEIB Task Force Members

Task Force Members

- Corinne Myers
- Boris Sical
- Shahidah Ali
- Hector Cabrera
- Hope Lanphear
- Roberto Britto
- Gloria Johnson
- Rav Davila
- Giselle Olagues
- Abeer Khatana
- Karla Machado
- Isa Santamaria
- Dawn Mureddu

Core Team

- Whitley Werts
- Corinne Myers
- James Comer

