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How We Are Creating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion From the Inside Out

By Yolanda F. Johnson

As a string of tragic deaths of Black men and women inspires action nationwide, many nonprofits are putting renewed attention on their diversity and inclusion efforts. But it can be hard to avoid sudden, often inauthentic, reactions and know which steps will make a lasting difference and change unjust systems.

That's why it's important for those of us who have been working on these issues to share what we have learned. At Women In Development, New York, an organization of professionals working in fundraising and philanthropy that I lead, we have [just released the results](#) from two years of work to identify ways to shift perceptions of and expand opportunities for professional women of color.

As the first African American president of WID, this work was personal as well as professional. It also served as the catalyst for me to found Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy (WOC), which recognizes the unique experiences of women of color in fundraising and philanthropy and celebrates, supports, and champions these women.

At WID, here's what we did that has made a difference — and how other groups can do the same:

Incorporate a diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) statement into WID's core-values document, which was created in 2014 to outline its vision for the future. Making DEI a core value helps to ensure that change will come from

within the organization and will help protect these efforts from claims that it is not a priority. Here is our new statement:

"WID is committed to maintaining a culture of diversity and equity in fundraising and related professions. As a membership body, our strength is in our promise to be inclusive, with intentional strategies to welcome and uplift historically marginalized identities and people within our field."

Develop DEI programming. This is one of the most visible ways to enact change. For example, we gathered a panel of women of color who are both experts and leaders on diversifying staff and boards to speak to our members. Participants received a resource sheet to enrich and inform their DEI work at their own organizations.

At WID events, I now see gatherings that more accurately reflect all those who work in development, events where everyone from every background feels welcome.

Establish or expand DEI-related partnerships. For instance, we worked with an organization that promotes diversity among leaders of arts organizations and one that runs a fellowship program for fundraisers of color to reach beyond our members and raise awareness of those who hold leadership roles as well as the need for more diversification of the profession.

Begin to collect demographic data. In fall 2019, WID surveyed members and updated its membership application to begin collecting demographic data so we can better understand and serve members. By spring 2021, we hope to have data available to share publicly .

Include a woman of color in our advice columns, which appear on our website and e-newsletter to provide a platform for diverse experts. And include at least one book about overcoming inequality and expanding access to opportunities for discussion in the book club.

Revise WID's Resource Directory, which recommends vendors for a variety of services, and form relationships with new vendors to create a more diverse network of specialists to fulfill our organizational needs.

If you are interested in accomplishing similar change at your nonprofits, begin having honest conversations with your staff members, supporters, and key volunteers. Then form a working group, allowing people to self-select, so you can find people dedicated to the work. I recommend

enlisting outside experts to provide DEI guidance because an external participant can be completely objective.

Set a few attainable goals that can be realistically implemented now. With so much uncertainty in the world and so much progress needing to be made, you must act swiftly. Be careful not to set and share unrealistic goals.

Each step we take in this direction proves that the only wrong action is inaction, and real change begins from the inside out.