

# How to Apply DEIA

Many executive orders have outlined requirements for diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA). But true DEIA is not satisfied by simply meeting a requirement. It calls for effective training and leadership and a cultural shift, both internally and externally. In a recent **Govloop online training**, three DEIA experts described effective methods of implementing DEIA in programs, policies and tech.



**Dr. Serelda Herbin**

Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, Naval Air Systems Command



**Aileen (Cohen) Bovan**

Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity Officer, Michigan Economic Development Corporation



**Matthew Cornelius**

Managing Director, Federal Industry, Workday

## Grow Perspectives and Value the Process

Herbin began DEIA work in the Navy without staff, a budget or a strategic plan.

“When you’re building from the ground up, you have to be resourceful in very creative ways,” she recalled. In addition to focus groups and training, she implemented DEIA infrastructure by initiating rotational assignments for professional development. As she watched staff develop their skills in new areas, she saw them embrace new perspectives and grow very quickly.

“It’s about going from being one person by herself to creating this team of people, whether it’s their primary job, or it’s just part of the rotation that they do,” Cornelius said, in support of Herbin’s initiative. The effort relates to what Cornelius referred to as Workday’s “VIBE” mindset — in other words, embedding “value, inclusion, belonging and equity” in products and solutions for hiring, onboarding and evaluation.

“All employees have value, and they should feel included,” he explained. “We should have an equitable workplace. But I look at [value] also as a verb — we must value inclusion, belonging and equity.” DEIA is not something your organization obtains by a specific deadline; it’s what it does over extended periods of time.

In Michigan, Bovan sees the demand for DEIA expanding, not just for single initiatives but for organizational culture. She described DEIA as an ongoing process and “a journey, not a destination.” She said those who engage in the work should “take the quick wins and build on those deeper dives” and understand that DEIA is not about rapid change, nor should it be. “Any kind of genuine, long-lasting change is going to be a slow process,” she said.



## Know Your Audience and Talk to It

What's the good of a policy or procedure if employees can't see themselves as part of it? Just because a strategy is meant to create inclusivity doesn't mean it's inclusive by design. And that's what DEIA supporters should work for, agreed the panelists. The policies should be intuitive, or easy to apply.

"I should be able to pick up this policy, this strategy ... and be able to say, 'Oh, yeah. We can do that,'" said Herbin. When you know the audience, and write for the audience, the work doesn't become just a doorstep or a paperweight, she said. Material and strategy should be written with the culture of the agency in mind.

"Meet people where they are," echoed Bovan. The material should be for everyone, she said, and capitalize on the aspect that's going to drive the needle forward.

"You have to keep finding new ways to engage with people, find new ways to show them benefits," agreed Cornelius. "New ways to show them how it has a meaningful and positive impact on their daily life or on their long-term goals."

## Research and Find the Gaps

Data can further DEIA efforts, agreed all three panelists — whether that's information from outside the workforce, perhaps supplied by communities and agency partners, or internal data that leaders measure.

Herbin recommended that agencies "start where the people stuff is happening, do as much research as possible and find the gap." That, she said, will allow leaders to fulfill their responsibility in terms of human capital diversity strategy.

Cornelius believes that when we see DEIA strategies in action through data snapshots, dashboards and metrics, the initiatives turn from abstractions into actions that improve our work, our agencies and our communities. He said public data and metrics are the keys to reinforcing transparent and effective DEIA, "so that people — from a secretary, cabinet official or CEO all the way down to the newest employee in an organization — see what's working, they see progress being made."

## Build DEIA Teams Across Organizations

Herbin is not only excited about change in her own agency, but about partnering with others, such as the Army, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and Space Force. "And we're doing it not only with the other governmental agencies, but the community. There's a lot of social activity," she said.

An enduring approach is multi-faceted, agreed Bovan. Her agency generates DEIA initiatives both internally, developing a "culturally competent employee group," and externally, building economic mobility for a wide spectrum of people, she said. That includes encouraging small businesses to partner with established ones to "facilitate the ecosystem in Michigan."

While Bovan felt she began the work as an army of one, her focus on team building has expanded the effort, so that it includes "a DEIA council that is made up of members of every business unit within the organization ... The more participation we have, the better we all do," she said.

