Job Seekers Guide

Organizations with strong diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices provide a better work environment and more equitable advancement opportunities for **ALL** employees. Accordingly, DEI practices are a valuable piece of information for all job applicants. This guide is to help job seekers evaluate the strength of those practices. We also recommend watching the following webinar hosted by Work Wider.

Most organizations are early in their DEI journey, so we encourage evaluating both current results and the ongoing efforts. Organizations working to drive change should be able to show action in the following three areas.

- **Commitment** – leadership shows strong commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion
- **Accountability** – The organization holds itself accountable to improvement
- **Action** – The organization takes specific action to drive diversity, equity and inclusion

Asking questions on DEI practices during the interview process can sometimes be tricky. Fortunately, job seekers do not need to rely on DEI specific questions. We recommend job seekers review publicly available data (including the company website, job description, third party review sites and publicly available press), evaluate the hiring process itself, and then ask neutral questions that can provide information on DEI practices.

Current DEI results
The best indicator of future success in DEI are the results achieved to date. What does the company look like today? Are the board and executive management team diverse? If so, are employees from historically marginalized groups primarily in support roles (HR, finance) or in P&L roles? Are the individual departments in the company diverse? Does the company retain women and employees from underrepresented groups?

Most companies readily admit that they have not achieved their goals when it comes to DEI, and express the desire to build a diverse and inclusive workforce. However, many underestimate the commitment and effort needed to achieve this. Here's tips for assessing the company's likelihood of meeting its goals.

Commitment
Leadership should be vocal and consistent that diversity is an important business goal. The commitment to diversity should come from the CEO and be supported and promoted by the leadership team. You should be able to observe commitment directly. Consider the following:
- Interviews and public statements from the leadership team. Does leadership discuss the importance of diversity publicly? What do the leaders discuss in public? What values do leaders express?
- Publicly available non-discrimination statements. Most companies will have these on job descriptions and their website. Many statements are legalese boilerplate. Others express thoughtful communication on why the organization desires a diverse employee base.
- Mission and values statements – these statements provide insight into the organization's aspirations. Do values statements respect individuals and the value of collaboration and teamwork? Or do they seek superstars and promote an internally competitive environment? The former tends to be better for marginalized groups.
- Discussions of DEI in the interview process – over the course of the interview process, evaluate how the organization presents their DEI efforts. Do they directly address DEI without prompting? Are DEI initiatives built into the organization's business goals or is it treated as an "add-on"? Is there evidence of ongoing, sustained effort in this area?

Accountability

The organization should hold its members accountable to meet its diversity and inclusion goals. Accountability is stronger when the company is transparent about results and the results matter to the career prospects of employees. Consider the following:

- Certifications – has the company sought certification related to DEI goals, such as Great Place to Work, MLT Black Equity at Work, The Global Business Certification Standard for Gender Equality or Bloomberg Gender Equity Index? These programs tend to be geared towards larger organizations, but participation does show that action is being taken.
- Diversity scorecards/metrics – does the organization publicly share its results on diversity? For example, Slack, Salesforce and PwC all publicly publish results. If progress has been slow, how has the organization responded? If the organization does not publish these numbers publicly, does it publish them internally? Do managers know how the company is performing on diversity?
- Does the company have goals on DEI? Are these known throughout the organization?
- How are promotions determined? How is compensation determined? These are topics that should be discussed during the interview process. Do DEI results matter in these?

Action

Creating a diverse and inclusive workforce requires intentional action in diversity (creating a diverse employee population), inclusion (creating an environment in which all can thrive) and equity (paying and promoting all equitably). Efforts on diversity are closely tied to the company's hiring process, which you will be experiencing directly. We have tips on what to look for below.

Inclusion and equity require a focus on promotion processes, performance review, training, employee development and culture. We recommend general questions on these processes and procedures to get an understanding of how the organization is doing. In general, organizations managed by gut instinct and informal mechanisms tend to favor dominant groups. Consider the following:

- What sort of management training does the organization provide? Ideally, all managers should go through basic management training. Poor skills on how to manage a meeting, provide feedback or handle delicate situations tends to hurt employees from underrepresented groups.
- How does the company manage training overall? Is there a well-thought out program regarding training or is it largely ad hoc?
- How does the company gather employee feedback? Are there formal employee surveys conducted? Are results shared and how does management respond to the feedback?
- How are promotions and compensation determined? Are there defined processes in place or do managers act independently?
- What is the performance review process? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the process? Look for well-defined processes that are updated and refined over time.
- How are stretch assignments distributed? How does the organization develop employees? Does the organization promote from within and across departments? Are there mentorship and/or sponsorship programs in place? Ideally, the organization has processes to ensure equity in the provision of development opportunities and provides opportunity for employees to develop beyond the departments they are hired into.
- What is the company culture? What does the company do to support and promote the culture? Does the company have Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)? What sort of team building activities are used? Some cultures are more supportive of inclusive behaviors than others. Does the culture cultivate teamwork or is it more individualistically oriented?

Evaluating the hiring process

The Hiring Process - Diversity is dependent on the hiring process, so it's worth evaluating the hiring process itself. In general, hiring processes that support diversity cast a wide net and are structured to compare candidates objectively. Informal processes are prone to bias. Things to consider:

- Where does the organization source candidates? Does the organization rely heavily on a small number of schools, companies and/or referrals for recruiting new employees? Companies that don't cast a wide net have a hard time meeting diversity goals.
- Job descriptions – the job description may appear to be boilerplate, but it can tell you much about the employer's approach to hiring and its culture. Is the job description heavy on dominating language, such as ninjas, killers or winners? Is the list of skills and qualities consistent with the position and realistic in scope? Many job descriptions offer a long wish list of skills and experience that no one person could possibly meet. Poorly constructed job descriptions tend to favor the dominant group. Stanford Professor of Organizational Behavior Margaret A. Neale shows the challenges caused by poor job descriptions.
- Interview process – Is the interview structured or is it a wandering conversation? Unstructured interviews tend to be biased. Does the interview address key job requirements and skills? Some relationship building is useful in an interview, but this should not be the focus of the interview.
- Interview team – Is the interview team itself diverse? If you know others interviewing, do all candidates have a diverse team or only candidates from underrepresented groups?
- Is there a strong emphasis on "culture fit"? Culture fit as a hiring criteria is often discriminatory in nature and hinders building a diverse firm. (This is different from hiring on specified company values.)
- Does the company proactively address DEI issues in the interview process?

Most organizations admit that they are still learning how to build diverse and inclusive organizations. Very few, if any organization, will be great across all these measures. However, there are striking differences between attitudes and actions being taken.

About the Racial Equity Playbook: The Racial Equity Playbook is a 100% volunteer effort from the Stanford GSB Class of 1994 Organization team, formed after the death of George Floyd. The Playbook is intended to help executives and managers wanting guidance on how to improve diversity within their organizations. For more information, visit racialequityplaybook.org.