

FOCUS

Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP

→ A CORPORATE COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE: HOW BUSINESSES CAN TURN MESSAGING INTO ACTION

Carolyn Davis, Janica Pierce Tucker and Devin Spencer

In the wake of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, a call for change and end to racism and inequality swept local and global communities. In response, many companies and business leaders issued public statements of solidarity and commitment to the fight against racism. While reaffirming a company's pledge to social justice is important, moving beyond messaging to action is essential for change.

The following are best practices and recommendations to assist businesses in their commitment to diversity, inclusion and operating in a non-discriminatory manner.

1. Set organizational goals—and meet them.

Setting tangible goals related to your hiring practices, leadership, trainings and even your community spend can move the needle forward in diversity and inclusion efforts. Conduct diversity

audits across your leadership suite, departments and vendors to identify areas of improvement in hiring practices and promotions. Review which community organizations your company partners with and determine if funds should be redistributed to organizations that align with your diversity and inclusion goals. Remember to consult with counsel when making decisions related to impact investing and large-scale charitable contributions.



Taft Diversity Chairs Adrian Thompson and Janica Pierce Tucker

2. Create a culture of open dialogue and continuous learning.

Educate your workforce on diversity and allow for discussion by implementing and supporting internal and external affinity groups. Celebrating holidays such as Juneteenth, National Hispanic Heritage Month and LGBTQ Pride Month will demonstrate to employees and clients your commitment to inclusion. Make development resources and applicable funding readily available to your affinity groups and employees so that your organizational diversity and inclusion goals are continuously at the forefront of your workplace culture.

3. Invest in training.

Training employees on diversity, inclusion, discrimination and harassment is not only required by many states, it can also protect employers from various harassment allegations. The primary goals of all trainings should be to reduce the number of workplace incidents, empower employees with knowledge on how to recognize and report discrimination and harassment, and demonstrate the employer's commitment to diversity and inclusion and the elimination of discrimination and harassment at work. Be sure that

employees understand that prohibited behavior also extends to their respective social media.

4. Assess and update human resources protocols.

Your employee handbook is an important tool to define acceptable workplace behavior. Update your handbook to include a section specifically dedicated to the employer's commitment to diversity and inclusion. Make sure your company's Equal Employment Opportunity section and discrimination, harassment and retaliation policies are current and include a process for filing internal complaints.

Train hiring managers and human resources professionals on recognizing implicit bias and what hiring, interviewing, evaluation and promotion practices can lead to discrimination, such as asking questions related to race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability or religion. Establish a protocol for asking the same interview questions for each candidate to help prevent implicit bias. Additionally, confirm that your human resources employees have access to an attorney who is well-versed in employment discrimination law for complex questions and legal needs that arise.

Implementing protocols such as the above can help reduce the risk of discrimination, harassment and implicit bias while also fostering purposeful change in the workplace. While messaging is an important component in demonstrating your company's commitment to social justice, assessing and implementing diversity and inclusion best practices will channel these statements into meaningful action.

Taft/

think / forward

Lawyers with one mission: to advance yours.

Our Employment attorneys help businesses achieve inclusive workplaces.

Taftlaw.com