

Building on Dr. King's Legacy: Launch of HIRE, a Hiring Initiative to Reimagine Equity

Virtual Roundtable Key Takeaways



HIRE Hiring Initiative to Reimagine Equity



On January 19, 2022, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs at the U.S. Department of Labor (OFCCP) launched HIRE, a Hiring Initiative to Reimagine Equity, by co-hosting a virtual roundtable to explore how employers can lawfully promote recruitment and hiring practices that advance racial equity and create pathways to good jobs for workers from underserved communities. The group engaged in a robust discussion of the challenges and benefits of promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in the workplace. Participants discussed the importance of advancing equal opportunity for all and improving recruitment and hiring practices to benefit employers, workers, families, and the economy. Key points made by the panelists are summarized below.

Barriers to promoting DEIA in the workplace include structural and systemic forms of discrimination:

- **Both new and longstanding hiring processes may introduce bias when they are not designed to screen for job-related skills and abilities.** The growing reliance on automated and online hiring processes negatively impacts persons of color who may have limited or no access to the internet. In addition, inconsistent or undefined hiring practices, such as using unstructured interviews, make it difficult for interviewers to objectively compare candidates and assess whether they have the necessary skills to meet job requirements. As a result, these practices may lead to bias in hiring processes.
- **Employers do not fully promote DEIA.** Some employers focus narrowly on compliance with federal antidiscrimination laws rather than also promoting an inclusive workplace culture that can help them retain qualified employees of all backgrounds. Other employers champion DEIA at the highest levels of management but fail to do so at other levels of the company. Some employers are reluctant to implement DEIA policies and programs because they are unsure of how to do so consistent with nondiscrimination laws.
- **Lack of access to good jobs.** Certain well-paid industries have had a persistent underrepresentation of workers from communities of color. These workers, particularly immigrant workers, are instead often forced to accept low-wage jobs with unsafe working conditions. Many low-wage workers are treated as expendable, yet during the pandemic they were often called "essential workers." Unions could help improve working conditions, but employers sometimes view unions as adversaries rather than partners.

Promising practices to help employers expand the pool of qualified applicants during recruitment, include:

- Engaging and advertising jobs with trade groups, minority serving academic institutions, churches, and other community institutions.
- Inviting employees to help develop recruiting and referral strategies.
- Creatively using social media to engage with diverse audiences.
- Leveraging technology to reach a more geographically diverse applicant pool.
- Focusing on skills and abilities when hiring rather than relying only on education and positions previously held.

Effective DEIA strategies proactively advance equal employment opportunity and may reduce the likelihood of workplace discrimination. Promising practices to help employers advance DEIA and address barriers to racial equity in recruitment and hiring include:

- Take proactive action to advance equal employment opportunity through effective DEIA strategies. Make DEIA part of a company's strategic plan and structure. Develop proactive DEIA strategies that raise visibility, engage with stakeholder groups, set engagement and participation metrics, and measure progress.
- Include the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) or equivalent in the C-Suite. Have the CDO report directly to the Chief Executive Officer. Provide the CDO with sufficient resources and authority to hire staff and execute DEIA programs.
- Train hiring officials to ask relevant job-related questions during interviews and hold them accountable to ensure that they advertise vacancies widely and recruit from a broad range of sources that is likely to yield a diverse pool of candidates.
- Address disparities historically experienced by women and communities of color, in part, by implementing a policy not to ask applicants about their prior salary history.
- Develop collective bargaining agreements and partner with unions in good faith rather than treating them as adversaries. Workplace conflicts will be less frequent when workers feel valued and have their input considered.

Roundtable participants included government officials, representatives of workers and employers, and other experts:

- Jenny Yang, former Director, OFCCP
 - Charlotte A. Burrows, Chair, EEOC
 - Jocelyn Samuels, Vice Chair, EEOC
 - Sindy Benavides, Chief Executive Officer, League of United Latin American Citizens
 - Fred Redmond, Secretary Treasurer, AFL-CIO
 - Lola Smallwood Cuevas, Project Director and Founder of Los Angeles Black Worker Center, UCLA Labor Center
 - Veta Richardson, President and CEO, Association of Corporate Counsel
 - Cid Wilson, President and CEO, Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility
 - Kathleen Lundquist, President and CEO, APTMetrics.
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