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## Ten Things Meeting Pros Can Do to Improve Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

Stephanie Jones, CAE

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## Ten Things Meeting Pros Can Do to Improve Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

By: Stephanie Jones, CAE, Ksenija Polla, and Beth Surmont, FASAE, CAE

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From small associations to large corporations, the business and nonprofit worlds are embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) standards. It has evolved from an ethics conversation to one that is part of sound business best practices. However, putting these ideas in action can be more difficult than we realize. However, DEIA principles are some of the most important that planners should be aware of as we move into the new era of events, and their benefits are plentiful. Here are 10 ways that you can get started today:

1. **Track key metrics across your events.** By doing this, you can monitor improvement over the short and long term. Examples include diversity of audience, speakers, and sponsors; diversity of session topics to relate to all types of audience; and diversity of suppliers.
2. **Include DEIA questions in your RFPs with suppliers.** These questions provide additional information as you make your selections. (A [sample RFP can be found here](#) for ASAE members.) In addition, when sourcing destinations, it is also important to consider the safety and perception of safety for certain groups such as BIPOC, AAPI, LGBTQIA+, religious groups, and solo women travelers.
3. **Create a DEIA pledge and code of conduct for attendees to agree to during registration.** This simple step establishes and reinforces the culture of your association's values. These pledges include things like agreeing to treat everyone with respect and using inclusive and intentional language. Here are examples:
  - <https://deipace.com/>
  - <https://ama-pdx.org/about-us/our-dei-pledge/>
  - <https://www.yournpp.org/what-we-do/diversity-equity-and-inclusion.html>
4. **Take a fresh look at how your content is developed.** This includes reviewing speaker selection criteria. For example, if tenure or a certain experience level is required, it can be limiting due to legacy systematic barriers. Encourage your planning committee(s) to [apply a DEI lens](#) [PDF] to the selection process. Also review your planning committee(s) to ensure there is a balance of all voices. If there are gaps, hold a discussion on how to

incorporate more diversity. Consider having two chairs with different backgrounds. Similarly, if you have tracks run by chairs, moderators, emcees, and so forth, ensure that there is diversity in who is hosting the sessions.

In addition, develop sessions that consider the multiple ways in which people learn and connect:

- Use experiential, interactive activities to help participants immediately apply concepts.
  - Share information in different ways: auditory, written, visual, stories/examples, kinesthetic/experiential.
  - Have a mix of small, medium, and large group activities.
  - Incorporate formats like table topics, problem-solving sessions, and speed networking sessions to help groups mix and mingle.
  - Offer sign-language moderation, closed captioning, and other options to allow for full participation.
5. **Work with your sponsors and other partners to provide scholarships for increased access to your events.** You can also host onsite career fairs and “101” sessions to provide a pathway for access to careers in your industry.
  6. **Ask vendors if their platforms meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.** If not, ask what workarounds they can provide to ensure your events are accessible to everyone.
  7. **Train your speakers on best practices in accessibility for presentations.** Simple things like describing charts and using easily readable fonts ensure that you aren’t excluding anyone from being able to participate and elevate the experience for everyone.
  8. **Complete an [accessibility audit](#) of your in-person and digital events.** Be mindful that it is more than just the entrance to the event. Are the food stations and bars accessible? Are your registration counters too tall? If you don’t have this knowledge on staff, consider hiring an accessibility expert or consultant. Consider these resources from the [International Association of Accessibility Professionals](#), the [International Disability Alliance](#) [Word doc], and [the Internet Society](#).
  9. **Ensure that the imagery in your collateral and on your website represents people with multiple backgrounds and abilities.** People want to participate in organizations where they see themselves reflected. Visibility equals value, and an inclusive image with many different types of people lets your potential members and attendees feel like this is a place for them.
  10. **Acknowledge that this is a learning process and you have more to discover.** Continually seek out experts, articles, and other resources to learn more. Here are [two articles](#) to get you started.

As event planners, we cannot overlook the importance of our role in creating inclusive and welcoming space. While it might feel overwhelming at first, these simple steps are excellent ways to get started on your DEIA journey.

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