

Next Level Talent Through Inclusive Recruitment

*by The Institute for
Diversity Certification*

This step-by-step guide will give you the basic systems and processes that your organization needs in order for it to find and hire the best talent, every time.



Table of Contents

Chapter 1: <u>The Strategic Advantage of Inclusive Recruitment</u>	Page 3
⇒ It's About More Than Talent	Page 3
⇒ "Cultural Fit" & Unconscious Bias.....	Page 4
⇒ Let Data Be Your Guide.....	Page 4
⇒ Unconscious Bias is an Operations Issue.....	Page 5
Chapter 2: <u>Better Strategies to Source Diverse Candidates</u>	Page 5
⇒ Plan Ahead.....	Page 6
⇒ Through Out the Boiler-plate.....	Page 7
⇒ Expand the Search.....	Page 8
⇒ Hold Your Team Accountable.....	Page 8
⇒ Make Diversity Visible.....	Page 9
Chapter 3: <u>Preparation Techniques to Conduct Unbiased Interviews</u>	Page 10
⇒ Unconscious Bias Training.....	Page 10
⇒ Structured Interview Questions.....	Page 10
⇒ Broad Candidate Pool.....	Page 11
⇒ Priming.....	Page 11
⇒ Multi-person Interviews.....	Page 12
Chapter 4: <u>Techniques to Improve the Interview Process</u>	Page 12
⇒ Alternate Interview Protocols.....	Page 12
⇒ Structured Interview Questions.....	Page 13
⇒ Multi-person Interviews.....	Page 13
⇒ Inquisitive Approach to Managing Bias.....	Page 13
⇒ Recording the Interview.....	Page 14
Conclusion: <u>Making the Best Decision for Your Organization</u>	Page 14
Organization & Author Information	Page 15

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Chapter 1: The Strategic Advantage of Inclusive Recruitment

Inclusive Recruitment is a business and organizational imperative. The Talent Wars have only gotten stronger over the years and finding the best and brightest is more important than ever. If you are not sourcing, recruiting, and retaining the best of the best your competitor will inevitably win.

If you haven't already, we want you to take a quick look around your organization. Inclusive recruitment is not about demographics, we can't stress that enough. However, it can be used as a superficial analysis of your organization's talent pool. Look around and see how many people look like you in your organization. Now, look again and consider the leadership roles. Do you see homogeneity or heterogeneity?

If your organization, especially leadership, looks homogeneous, you are already losing the talent war. It means that your organization is not finding and retaining the best, they are simply recruiting and developing people that look and think like they do. This breeds groupthink and hinders long-term sustainability.

A 2015 [McKinsey Report](#) analyzed 366 public companies and found that gender-diverse companies were 15% more likely to outperform competitors while racially-diverse enterprises were 35% more likely. Those are some serious competitive advantages.

It's About More Than Talent

Clearly, it is not just the ability to find the best talent, but also the capability to build diverse teams that drive innovation and creativity through a wide array of experiences and skill sets.

When we look at inclusive recruitment, it is not a feel-good objective, although that is certainly a worthy goal in and of itself. The goal is to bring diverse talent into the organization in a way that provides a synergistic mix of individuals. Team performance is always greater than even the best top performers output.

Not surprisingly, the highest performing organizations focus on building teams, not just hiring skilled performers in isolation.

One problem with overly homogenous teams is that they are probably not adept at harnessing the advantages of diversity of thought and behavior. In fact, in our experience, it's the exact opposite. Homogenous teams actually force conformity.

“Culture Fit” & Unconscious Bias

How many times have you heard the phrase, “he/she’s just not a good cultural fit”? This is often a strong indicator that that particular leader is not skilled at dealing with diversity of thought or behavior.

One way to look at this is results. It always comes back to the data. When amorphous phrases such as “cultural fit” come up, how is the employee performing against established KPIs? If they are achieving results, “lack of cultural fit” is more a description of the managers inability to allow for other perspectives, perspectives that may very likely lead to breakthrough results in your organization.

Above is one of the biggest reasons why organizations are not successful in building diverse & inclusive teams. They are ruled by bias, rather than data and results. Bias here is not used in a pejorative sense, but is merely defined as a predilection to make judgements without questioning. In fact, in the past few years, we’ve come to understand that the majority of bias is unconscious.

Our unconscious biases are determined by the cultural messaging and discourse we are exposed to every day. Let’s look at an example: Ask any woman if she would be comfortable walking home alone from a bar in the US, and her answer will invariably be no, largely do to a fear of assault. However, men do this all the time and think nothing of it.

Let Data Be Your Guide

But what does the data say? According to a [Department of Justice report on Violence Against Women](#), a woman actually only has a 4% chance of being raped by a stranger. 96% of rapes occur by someone they know, almost always in the home. The opposite is true of violence against men. Men are much more likely to be assaulted outside the home. Yet, our beliefs and behaviors would assume the exact opposite to be the case.

The cultural messages we hear are often erroneous. Think about the perceptions of men and women in the example above. What kind of negative reactions may be held against a stranger due to our bias? The same thing is happening in the candidate sourcing and interview process. Many false assumptions are being made simply based on our unconscious biases.

The difficulty is that many of our biases are unlikely to change, even with conscious effort. Even if a person is aware of their bias, most of it acts on an unconscious level and continues to be reinforced by prevailing cultural messaging.

Percentages of rape regarding women’s relationship to attacker.

- *Someone with whom the respondent was in love: 46%*
- *Someone that the respondent knew well: 22%*
- *Acquaintance: 19%*
- *Spouse: 9%*
- *Stranger: 4%*

Source: [Dept. of Justice report on Violence Against Women](#)

So what does this mean for organizations? It means that, while training on bias can help people become more aware of their own predispositions, it often does little to remove that bias from talent decisions.

Unconscious Bias is an Operations Issue



Instead, processes and systems that help remove bias from the equation is a must. An easy example of this is Blind Resume Review software or processes.

A well-known study by [Bertrand and Mullainathan](#) showed that individuals with traditionally Black names received up to 50% fewer call backs for a job application than the exact same resume sent in with a traditionally White name.

Rather than focusing on trying to change unconscious mindsets, it's much easier, and far more effective, to simply eliminate names on resumes.

Many European countries, such as Sweden, Germany, and France, have recently implemented this strategy with preliminary results [showing more equitable outcomes for applicants](#).

Now that we've established what the advantages are and that this is as much an operations and systems issue as it is a people management one, let's dive into what strategies work for your organization to source and hire the best talent so that you can have the competitive edge against your competition.

Chapter 2: Better Strategies to Source Diverse Candidates

Any recruitment process needs to start with the targeting and sourcing of candidates. Many companies have made renewed commitments to building more diverse and innovative teams. Yet, many are failing to actually do so. By now, we all know the advantages of hiring strong candidates with a diverse array of backgrounds and experiences, but so few organizations seem to be able to do anything to change their entrenched hiring practices.

It's well known that change is hard and many recruiters, both internal and outsourced, are used to doing things as they've always done. This means that they're going through their usual channels, which, more often than not, are affinity channels—channels with candidates similar to them.

Both hiring managers and recruiters naturally gravitate towards candidates that they find strong similarities with, whether that's in appearance, background, or interests. Even online, they tend to join communities with others like them and that naturally narrows their candidate pool down. This is the first process that needs to change.

So what are some concrete steps individuals and organizations can take to find those high-performing candidates that they're currently missing? How do they successfully broaden their candidate pool to ensure a top selection of candidates that *aren't* that just more of the same? Here are the strategies that, if you implement, will get your organization on track to hiring better talent, not just from a diversity perspective, but overall.

Plan Ahead

This is the single most important step. Most organizations tend to hire at point of need. This is a basic flaw in their recruitment as well as their talent management strategies.

When you are under pressure to find a new candidate fast, you quickly default to what you know best. This pressures recruiters and hiring managers into looking in the same old places without the time to seek out additional candidates or take the right amount of time to evaluate them once they find them. This also pressures them into making quick decisions rather than thoroughly screening and vetting.

Creating a pipeline of candidates and strategic succession planning is crucial to any organization's success. You want to hire the absolute best, and you can't do that if you're missing a huge percentage of possible candidates.

Additionally, so many organizations we work with make the claim that, "they just don't have the internal talent ready to step up." This is a huge red flag that your organization is doing a very poor job of developing your team. Individuals that already know the organization, have relationships within it, and understand your customers are often very well situated to move the organization forward.

The fact that there are not team members ready to move up is a failure of the organization to properly prepare and provide them with the opportunities to grow into those roles. What would you rather do? Spend tens of thousands of dollars on the hiring and training of outside personnel with a higher chance they may not be a good fit, or invest in your current employees with the confidence that they are already interested in staying and are a good fit for the organization?

There is, as we've been illustrating, value in diversity, and group think can become a problem within organizations, so outside talent needs to be brought in to shake things up. You always want to have a good mix of internal and external talent. However, the problem arises when most of your senior level hires always seem to need to come from the outside. That's a sign that you aren't managing your internal processes well.

Planning ahead gives you the space you need to develop internal talent, build a strong pipeline, and allow for thoughtful hiring decisions that empower both hiring managers and candidates to make the best choice.

Throw Out the Boilerplate

Boiler-plated job descriptions and resume requirements are one of the biggest issues holding organizations back from finding diverse talent. If someone has written and designed entire programs they sold to Microsoft, do you really care if they have a university degree in Computer Science? If someone has built two companies from scratch to driving revenue of several million per year, does it matter that they don't have an MBA from Harvard?



Talent is talent and, let's be honest, the current university system is failing in teaching most students skills actually applicable in the work place. As we noted above, many organizations are doing the same by failing to develop their teams, so the fact that someone worked at a similar organization may not even speak to their ability to succeed in the role or in the field.

Building a recruitment strategy and training your recruitment team to look for the skills and values that will make your company successful is far more important than a checklist of qualifications or even previous work experience.

Think about what you want this person to do to succeed in the role. Maybe it's "Grow our business from four offices in one state to 20 offices in 6 states over the next 3 years." Now you can do two things: 1) Put that goal on your application and ask candidates to speak to their previous success and how they expect to accomplish it in this new role and 2) give your recruiters and hiring managers strategic direction on what to be looking for in candidates.

Expand the Search

Let's say you're looking for a new Sales Team Lead. Your team might start off on LinkedIn looking for people with a background in sales. However, you need to start thinking outside the box. As an example, what about consultants? Consultants actually spend at least 50% of their time looking for and closing sales on clients. As they are small and usually target niche markets, they have to get very creative in how they do that. They don't have sales anywhere on their resumes or in their titles, but they could be great candidates for a Sales Team Leader.

Go back to the skills and goals you've created after step two above and think about who else might be a good fit for the role and your organization. Then find out where those people spend their time online and in real life.

You can do this demographically as well. Do you advertise in Latino Groups or maybe the local Urban League? *To be clear, you should never source a candidate based on external demographics.* You're always looking for the best talent, bottom-line. However, by expanding your search into new and different groups, you expand your talent pool and potentially connect with candidates other organizations don't even know exist. This puts you at a distinct advantage in the competition for talent.

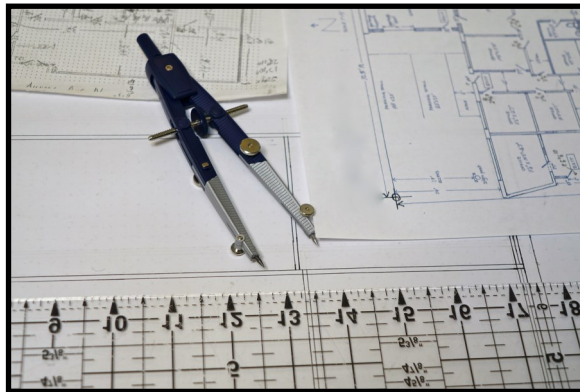
Hold Your Team Accountable

Metrics and accountability are always the pieces that keep new goals on track. Don't just tell your recruitment team to broaden their search, follow their results and continuously check in to make sure they are following through or to see if they may need additional direction and support.

Metrics you may want to consider are:

Number and variety of sources.
Demographic data on candidates sourced, hired, and length of retention.
Quantity and quality of referrals.
Length of time to source and hire.
Number of candidates presented to hiring manager for interviews.
Track these metrics geographically and across business units or roles as well.

If you don't see improvement across metrics, you know something isn't working. You'll then have to step in to figure out what. This is especially important when you outsource your hiring. Staffing and recruitment firms have their own internal processes that may not align with your hiring goals, so you need to be very clear what the expectation is and ensure that you are tracking results to monitor delivery.



Make Diversity Visible

In the words of Janice Celeste, Editor-in-Chief of [Successful Black Parenting Magazine](#), "If I don't see D&I in the C-suites, it's (diversity initiatives) not successful. Then D&I doesn't exist or there's a glass ceiling."

When candidates look at potential employers, they want to see that the organization is open to a diversity of ideas and people. If they see all white men, or all black women, then they may think they'll just be a token in role or that the company isn't actually embracing diversity and inclusion, merely giving it lip service.

Diversity & inclusion starts at the top and should be reflected in every level of the organization. Then, when candidates search for additional information, or when they join the team, they are confident that they will be accepted and be able to easily find a place on the team.

You need to connect with your marketing, HR, and web development team to ensure the diversity within your organization is accurately reflected in visible and promotional materials that speak to your commitment to and valuing of diversity and inclusion.

As you can see from the above, these are not quick fixes. There is no such thing as a quick fix when it comes to revamping outdated processes and introducing new ones. These things take commitment and time. The effort is more than worth it as the time needed to build a strong and diversified workforce of exceptional talent is reduced once you do get the processes and systems in place and once people become accustomed to them.

As can be found in any number of studies these days (try these articles from [McKinsey & Company](#), [The American Bar Association](#), and [Catalyst](#)) inclusive organizations far outperform similar organizations that are more homogeneous in overall staff composition. The rewards are tremendous.

Chapter 3: Preparation Techniques to Conduct Unbiased Interviews

Continuing on from broadening the candidate pool, now it's time to prepare for the actual interview. What steps can you take to ensure not only that the best candidate gets hired, but that all candidates are evaluated fairly and accurately? This is important, because research indicates that diverse hires with the exact same qualifications as their white, male peers, are far less likely to be hired (check [here](#) and [here](#)). Following are the tactics needed to ensure things are done right.

Unconscious Bias Training

Having become a major focus for organizations in recent years, unconscious biases are the attitudes we hold based on messages received from our cultural surroundings. These can be implicit assumptions about gender, race, or any number of less contentious issues. Even for those who are consciously committed to equality, unconscious biases have an effect on behaviors and attitudes.

[Based on recent research](#), it should be assumed that all hiring managers have unconscious biases and need to be given the tools to recognize and minimize those biases. Awareness is not enough.

Structured Interview Questions

Prepare a standard interview question sheet that all hiring managers *must* review before the interview. Hiring managers are always affected by unconscious biases, even when they are aware of them. We may naturally make an interview easier for a candidate with whom we have an affinity for and harder for ones that we do not.

A standard set of structured questions ensures all desired skills and attitudes for the job role are examined and that the interview doesn't veer off track due to biases. It also helps the hiring manager stay focused on questions they need to be asking.

Broad Candidate Pool

Regardless of the interviews, according to a study in the [Harvard Business Review](#), if only one candidate of a particular background is included with many others of a different background, our minds automatically identify them as an outlier and cast doubt on their suitability or “fit”. The outlier is almost never chosen.

This is why it’s essential to ensure hiring managers have a broad spectrum of candidates to both choose from and interview before any final decisions are made. The goal is to ensure at least 40% diverse representation of candidates in a pool. So, ideally, when you break down the candidate pool being reviewed, you need to have 40% of the candidates represented from various demographics and backgrounds.

Priming

Related to unconscious bias, we often hold certain perceptions defined by our socio-cultural surroundings. For example, we may believe that women aren’t as good at leadership as men or that an outwardly gay applicant would not be a good fit for the company culture.

[Priming is itself an unconscious process](#) and helps us examine similarities and positive associations with individuals in order to suppress negative bias before going into the interview. The best way to do this is to sit down with the hiring managers and discuss the applicants in relation to both similarities with themselves as well as in respect to either strong examples of individuals with a similar background already in that role, or ones outside of it.

For example, if we have a male hiring manager, we could look at a female applicant’s resume and identify similar background and professional characteristics such as education, work experience, or skill sets. We could then have them consider other women in the same position with the company that are already known to be successful or think of strong examples from outside the organization if the company does not have many women currently in such a role.



This technique naturally increases the likelihood of starting from points of similarity and actually increases the chances of being hired.

Multi-person Interviews

By having a hiring panel, ideally comprised of diverse individuals as well, research has shown that bias is limited when multiple perspectives are evaluating the same candidates. Multi-person interviews also help minimize social, and therefore non-job-related, affinities that may skew one-person interview assessments.

Combining these strategies with the ones above will ensure your organization is setting up all candidates for equal opportunities of success. Furthermore, you've now helped your organization become confident that it is truly able to source the best candidate for the job.

Chapter 4: Techniques to Improve the Interview Process

So far, we covered sourcing and pre-interview preparation. Now it's time to look at the most important stage. Inclusive recruitment isn't successful unless it's managed throughout the entire process and the interview is the final step in that process.

Interviewing is a very difficult process that no one has really perfected, despite all of the advice out there. This chapter will examine the techniques that again help to minimize unconscious biases and also ensure the candidate exhibits a clear fit for the role rather than any emotional affinities on the part of the interviewer(s) that may skew perspective.



We must keep in mind here that the ultimate deciding factor must be hiring the best candidate. We've ensured a strong selection of varied candidates and have done our best to minimize unconscious biases. It's now up to the candidate to showcase what they bring to the team. Our goal is not to hire an individual within a certain demographic, but to hire the best person for the role. Here are some techniques to ensure that happens:

Alternative Interview Protocols

Much of our unconscious bias comes into play through visual cues. One way to drastically reduce this is to simply eliminate face-to-face interviews. Phone interviews and Internet chat-based interviews are another method that few organizations utilize well.

The reality is that we often do face-to-face interviews because we feel we get a stronger sense of the

person, and this can sometimes be the case. But the reality is that much of what we take into account in a face-to-face interview is unrelated to actual job performance ability.

Online interviews, in particular, take out many of the grounds for unconscious bias. In addition, it gives candidates ample time to deliver well-considered responses, rather than answers off-the-cuff. Thoughtful and strategic thinking is a key skill-set expected in today's staff, yet interviews are basically designed only to test rapid-fire thinking and responses, largely only beneficial in high-stress or crisis situations.

A common hiring pitfall is that many candidates are also just good at doing interviews, but not necessarily good on the job. By removing the face-to-face component, this particular trap is also avoided, in addition to reducing bias.

Structured Interview Questions

We discussed this in the preparation stage and so must ensure it's being followed here. Interviewers need to stay on track and ask all candidates a standard set of questions. It's very easy for an interviewer to veer off track, especially with a candidate they like on first impression. Interviewers may also not ask necessary and relevant questions to a candidate they don't feel immediate affinity for. Structured questions allow for them to get the whole story and to avoid snap judgements as they know they need to go through the entire set of questions regardless.

Additionally, not having to think of questions to ask on the fly allows the interviewer to actively listen and focus in on the answers, rather than think about what they're going to say next.

Multi-person Interviews

As mentioned in the previous chapter, having multiple people in the interview aids in keeping the interview on track. It's also very important to have one person taking notes while another asks the questions. As many a hiring manager has found out, doing both at the same time usually means we're not doing either well.

Inquisitive Approach to Managing Bias

Our pre-interview preparation should already have trained our hiring managers to be on the lookout for possible biases. Hiring managers should not be jumping to conclusions within the interview, but always asking questions to validate or invalidate said assumptions.

For example, a hiring manager may assume that a single mom will be calling out from work often to watch her children. However, a single mom may have back-up plans in terms of family, friends, or neighbors.

Additionally, more and more jobs can be done from home. We have to ask if it's critical to the role for the employee to be on-site at all times. [Research indicates](#) that telecommuting employees are more productive and more satisfied. Rather than seen as an accommodation, establishing telecommuting as an option may be to the organization's advantage.

Hiring managers need to think outside the box and establish a process of inquiry to any assumptions they may have in order to make the best decision for the organization.

Recording the Interview

A recording can be shown to a panel post-interview. It enables multiple opinions even when more than one interviewer could not be present for the actual interview.

Furthermore, the opportunity to review questions and answers with time to think, and even pause the recording, can be extremely beneficial in making a good decision. The interviewer may notice items they had completely missed while actually conducting the interview.

Conclusion: [Making the Best Decision for Your Organization](#)

Combining the 3 stages – Broadening the Candidate Pool, Prepping for the Interview, and Conducting the Interview – paves the way for your organization to not only find the best and brightest, but to ensure they are brought onto your team.

By using all of the strategies and techniques outlined, you will have an edge on the competition. From working with many organizations, we can tell you that few of them are well-equipped to source and hire the best and brightest. Most look only in the same places and hire through affinity more than ability and performance. They fail to be intentional about diversity and end up with stale organizations run by group think.

To truly be competitive in today's globalized business world calls for constant agility, innovation, and sustainability, characteristics that cannot be capitalized upon by doing the same old thing and continuously hiring only one type of person. Use these techniques well and see your organization's talent set itself apart from the competition.

The Institute for Diversity Certification was formed for the sole purpose of providing diversity and inclusion management preparation courses and materials, administering diversity certification exams, and designating diversity and inclusion credentials to Certified Diversity Professionals (CDP) and Certified Diversity Executives (CDE).

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