



Developing a Talent Pipeline

►► For D&I Staff, Executive Leadership Council, HR Leaders and Business Partners, Resource-Group Leaders, Mentors/Mentees, Sponsors/Protégés

How do you get talent from underrepresented groups into the top levels of your company? If you are working to develop a pipeline, do you nurture young people for many years or recruit from the outside—or both? This Meeting in a Box gives you valuable information on getting that talent pipeline in place, including succession planning/mandatory diverse slates; exposure to senior management; and the increasingly important mentoring/sponsorship.

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I Succession Planning/Mandatory Diverse Slates

Getting a [diverse pipeline to the top](#) of your organization starts with the initial hiring of those with management potential. Companies on [The DiversityInc Top 50 Companies for Diversity](#) list show consistent progress in their hiring of people from underrepresented groups. For example, their hiring of Blacks, Latinos and Asians was up 16 percent, 36 percent and 25 percent, respectively, compared with last year.

A major concern in succession planning is whether the talented people from underrepresented groups stay and are willing to put in what it takes to move up to the top echelons. Recently, DiversityInc Top 50 companies have been assessing what they need to do to [retain mid-career women](#). And more and more companies are paying attention to their voluntary turnover rates broken down by race, ethnicity and gender.

Some organizations don't have the luxury of waiting to develop talent and feel an urgent need to get more diversity in senior management by hiring from outside. Others are able to do both, focusing on long- and short-term benefits. If your company does hire executives externally and hopes to improve its diversity this way, it's important to require diverse slates and not allow recruiters to tell you that they "couldn't find any qualified candidates" in their rush to "time to fill" positions.

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Guided Questions for Staff

»» **Are internal and external recruiters required to have diverse slates? How far down the line does accountability (and compensation) for increasing diversity fall?**

Consider that if you require diverse slates from either internal or external recruiters, you must specify what those slates are. Some companies require one woman and one nonwhite person for every slate at a certain level and above. Others require a certain percentage of women or nonwhite people based on how many applicants there are. Also, be clear about what the rewards (compensation, promotion) are for meeting these requirements and what the penalties are (demotion, lack of compensation, even dismissal).

»» **Are diversity goals set by your [executive diversity council](#) and formally factored into your succession planning?**

Goals are not quotas, but the adage "What gets measured gets done" is absolutely true. Without goals that address the need for more diversity at the top, organizations remain stagnant and don't push or innovate to make room for more diversity.

»» **How do you handle employees, especially those from underrepresented groups, who aren't included in succession planning?**

Not everyone is a candidate for top leadership. How does your company encourage those it wants to stay—but not be put on the fast track—to feel good about themselves and their role in the organization?

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III Exposure to Senior Executives

Whether it's through formal or informal [mentoring/sponsorship](#), rotating positions for employee-resource-group leaders on the [executive diversity council](#), or talent-development programs for high-potentials, getting younger people, especially those from underrepresented groups, before top management regularly is critical to retention, engagement and a healthy pipeline.

Many successful talent-development programs, such as [EY's Career Watch](#), recognize the benefits of exposure to the top ranks. This gives the high-potential employee valuable skills in presenting, networking and understanding what it takes to move to the top level. It also creates the ability for organic mentoring, sponsorship and one-on-one coaching. It also can lead to a top executive seeing the potential for a new career path for the employee or recommending further training or education.

The methods of this exposure vary widely, and some companies use several simultaneously. Some organizations mandate that their top executives must start a relationship or mentor or sponsor at least one high-potential from an underrepresented group. This is increasingly part of performance reviews and compensation. Other organizations hold specific events in which top leaders are exposed to these high-potentials. Putting employee-resource-group leaders on the executive diversity council or having the group leaders regularly present to top management also is increasingly valuable exposure.

?? Guided Questions for Staff

»» How much exposure to top levels do your employee-resource-group leaders receive?

Are you picking resource-group leaders from lower levels so you can develop talent? Are you scheduling small-group meetings with the CEO and senior leadership on a regular basis to give the leaders the benefit of the resource group's insights and to increase their involvement with one another? Are your most senior executives the [sponsors of resource groups](#)?

»» Do your executives receive cultural-competence training?

This training, especially on hidden biases, is necessary to create successful relationships, especially in mentoring and sponsorship pairs.

»» Are your top leaders being held accountable for developing these relationships? Is becoming a cross-cultural mentor or sponsor part of their performance reviews?

While most executives will embrace the idea of mentoring or sponsoring high-potentials from underrepresented groups, not all will—and not all will be successful. How are you “forcing the issue”? How are you assessing the success of these relationships?

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▣ Mentoring/Sponsorship

The most important aspects of a successful mentoring program are that it be formal and cross-cultural, that mentors and mentees be given cultural-competence training, and that there be checkpoints and metrics to assess success.

- **Formal vs. Informal:** All of the DiversityInc Top 50 companies now have formal mentoring (compared with 72 percent in 2005). They have learned that informal mentoring can't be controlled and can lead to employees' getting the wrong messages from disgruntled mentors. [Formal mentoring](#) means the company assigns and monitors pairs, creating cross-cultural (by race, ethnicity, gender, orientation and disability) pairings as much as possible to ensure bidirectional learning. It's also important to reach the maximum number of managers so the program has significant impact.
- **Cultural-Competence Training:** If mentors and mentees aren't aware of pitfalls, as demonstrated in our popular [Things NOT to Say](#) series, they can inadvertently offend each other and torpedo the relationship.
- **Checkpoints and Metrics:** Without metrics to assess success, your organization has no way to understand what is working and what is not or to make the case for more resources for the initiative. The most successful metrics are engagement, retention and promotions compared with those not participating in the program, broken down by race, ethnicity and gender.

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Guided Questions for Staff

»» **What percentage of your managers is your mentoring program reaching? Are you able to include virtual mentoring to reach managers in remote locations?**

Assess whether your program has maximum impact or is just affecting a few people. If you have limited mentees, are you ensuring that those who are not invited to participate remain engaged?

»» **How are you ensuring as many cross-cultural pairings as possible? What is your process if a mentor or mentee relationship isn't working out?**

Examine the racial/gender breakdown of your pairings and whether there is sufficient mix. Also factor in orientation and disability if possible. Examine the engagement, retention and promotion rates of mentees versus those who have not participated and share the results with senior management.

»» **Have you considered sponsorship? If so, how are you encouraging your senior executives to find cross-cultural protégés?**

Do your executives understand the [difference between mentors and sponsors](#)? Are you exposing them to high-potentials from underrepresented groups? Are you giving them a toolkit or guidelines on effective sponsorship as well as cultural-competence training?

NEXT MONTH

Veterans for all employees and Employee Resource Groups for employee-resource-group leaders and for D&I, HR, marketing and communications staff.