

PRISM International, Inc.



**A COMPREHENSIVE AND FLEXIBLE PROCESS FOR**

# strategically leveraging diversity

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**A**t a recent diversity council meeting, members were discussing starting a “women’s network” when someone asked why they felt they needed it. “We need more women and we need to move them up in the company,” came the answer. The questions continued, “Does the company see it that way? With what business strategy would the women’s network be aligned? What problems do you foresee in sustaining and funding the network without real strategic alignment? What concerns do you have about addressing various behaviors, practices and policies in reaching your goal of bringing in more women and promoting them?” The council members became silent.

## Diversity is not a strategic process when it is a series of piecemeal activities

In this case, the women’s network was a piecemeal tactic operating out of the diversity council—separate and apart from a strategy aligned with the the “business of the business.” Piecemeal diversity occurs in the absence of a strategically focused diversity plan. Piecemeal diversity programs, celebrations and activities are seductive. Yet they result in a “siloeed,” less impactful and sustainable effort. And once

in the piecemeal cycle, it can be difficult to break out and set up a more strategic, business relevant, measurable process.

## Gap model process

When working with executives, diversity managers, councils, networks, supplier and mentoring program owners, value is added by encouraging the group to answer a series of thoughtful questions designed to drive answers for closing business gaps in ways that bring measured results. The questions and analysis are derived from a comprehensive process for strategically leveraging diversity composed of a flexible framework of six components. This process approach is not “lock step,” but begins with where the organization is, relying on the culture and actual workplace, workforce and marketplace business issues to enable them to flexibly, yet strategically use the process. This process utilizes gap analysis thinking to help organizations determine where they are relative to where they want to be, by identifying their gaps based on business realities in five different areas. The process then guides executives and council members to establish strategies and tactics linked to specific strategic priorities and tied to business outcomes.

The six components that comprise the PRISM PROCESS™ are:

- **Organizational Vision** or *How can strategically leveraging diversity assist in creating an organization with competitive advantage? (future state)*
- **Assessment** or *Where’s the organization now? (present state)*
- **Strategic Planning**
- **Implementation**
- **Measurement**
- **Continuous Improvement**

This systematic process is similar to those used in all areas of the business—from quality to marketing. Yet, when it comes to diversity, a process approach is often abandoned for an activity approach. While the model seems apparent, the execution of the components takes skill and experience.

**Organizational vision** —or *Where can the organization go? What can it be by strategically leveraging diversity? (future state)*

**Objectives:**

- Understanding/defining diversity for the specific business
- Clarifying organizational mission/vision
- Developing business motives and implications

- Establishing the business case
- Identifying Key Performance Measures

In this component, senior leadership is engaged and committed to defining their organization's vision and mission relative to diversity. From a bottom-line perspective, they get very clear on their business motives for implementing a diversity process. A business meeting is conducted to look at diversity as a lever for meeting business objectives. Strategies and tactics are established that support the goal. Key performance indicators are identified for tracking and measuring progress.

**Assessment**—or *Where's the organization now? (present state)*

**Objectives:**

- Gaining organizational understanding of current status of diversity related issues, thoughts and feelings, barriers and strengths
- Building awareness, energy and commitment for change
- Focusing and prioritizing change interventions and training programs
- Providing a basis for Action Planning
- Establishing a means of monitoring progress

This component answers the question, "Are there barriers to leveraging diversity that detract from meeting our business goals?" A "snapshot" of the organization through an assessment provides information that identifies real issues for future focus and provides a benchmark for tracking the improvement of some of the focused issues that have been identified. Assessment involves surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews and culminates in an extensive, action-oriented report by office, state, or region that encompasses the demographic slices that are chosen. Facts, perceptions and feelings are gathered and presented with analysis and recommended next steps to senior groups.

A communication plan is built for sharing the results with shareholders and stakeholders.

*"Piecemeal diversity programs, celebrations and activities are seductive. Yet they result in a 'siloed,' less impactful effort."*

*Linda Stokes  
President and CEO*



### Strategic planning

**Objectives:**

- Who, What, Where, Why
- Timetable
- Investment (financial and resource)
- Strategic Communications Plan

As a result of apparent gaps, strategic planning is the process used to build the road map for identifying and prioritizing strategies and tactics for connecting diversity to business realities. It prioritizes the tactics and sets the plan for closing the gaps. Essential and foundational questions of who, what, where, why, how and when are asked and answered. This component includes building an infrastructure to implement the plans and support the activities.

### Implementation

**Objectives:**

- Involve-Enroll-Empower-Measure
- Intervene
- Training
- Organizational Development

The implementation component is a tactical function to insure that the essential activities that have been identified in the strategic planning component are deployed. These tactics include training, job rotation, mentoring, work/life initiatives, minority supplier programs, recruiting, review of policies and procedures, etc.

### Measurement

**Objectives:**

- Process
- Outcomes

Every part of the business depends on measures. Diversity tends to rely on the kind of measures that send very mixed messages to managers and to the organization by focusing on representation alone or, as Dr. Mickey Dansby says, "counting heads." Done correctly, measurement ensures that impactful tactics are being implemented and accountability is established for closing the gaps. Through the identification and tracking of key performance indicators, the organization and the diversity process can realize progress and results. An organizationally tailored, consultative process that produces a customized, easy to maintain and use measurement tool should be used to measure, monitor and report progress.

### Continuous improvement

**Objectives:**

- Identify New Challenges/Opportunities
- Review Strategic Plan
- Follow-up Assessment

The business environment is not stagnant while strategies and tactics are being implemented. Measures should be updated to reflect strategy changes and the diversity plan must be continually realigned to meet current workplace, workforce and business challenges and opportunities.

When facing a strategic diversity process model, some diversity practitioners will react with, "this is not a new approach." Practical experience, however demonstrates the large gap between "knowing" and "doing" or "doing in a way that brings business results."

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