THREE STEPS TO IMPROVE STAFF AWARENESS OF YOUR DEI EFFORTS

By Lisa Boylan, senior editor of Associations NOW.

A new study reveals surprising findings about a lack of awareness among some employees of DEI efforts in their own organizations. An association pro offers three achievable ways to turn that around and improve DEI initiatives.

Many associations are committed to having diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. But a new study reveals that 16 percent of respondents didn’t even know if their workplace had a DEI program.

In slightly better news, the Avenue M Group study, Are Your Organization’s DEI Efforts Going Unnoticed by Employees?, found 43 percent of respondents said they did have a DEI program, and 19 percent said they didn’t have a formal program, but they had some policies.

“You would think in this day and age, in 2021, every organization would have a policy and a program, but that’s not the case,” said Sheri Jacobs, FASAE, CAE, president and CEO of Avenue M Group. Organizations have the desire to move forward and make a change, but the efforts are not as successful as they could be, and there are gaps.

“I don’t think it’s as intentional as it is unintentional consequences of just taking the first step and not taking every step,” Jacobs said.

The report outlines three steps organizations can take to better position DEI programs.

- Send out a short, internal survey to gauge awareness and knowledge about your organization’s DEI policies, programs, and initiatives. Because it’s internal, “you don’t have to hire anybody,” Jacobs said. “Short is the keyword here.” The survey will increase awareness about your organization’s DEI efforts, and it could reveal insights about next steps that will help increase awareness about your programs.
• Look at the results of the survey to see who in the organization knows about the DEI program. The study found that employees with more than four years in their field and in more senior-level positions tended to be more aware of DEI programs than employees in entry- and mid-level positions.

• If awareness of DEI programs is only at the top, those senior-level employees need to adopt an inclusive leadership approach that clearly communicates the expectations around DEI policies and programs to the entire organization. Also, identify champions of the organization’s DEI efforts at all levels so they are not—and do not appear to be—top-down only.

There’s a strong business case for having a DEI program: A McKinsey study found that ethnically and gender diverse companies tend to be more profitable. It’s also essential for seeking and retaining talent. More than 76 percent of job seekers and employees report that a diverse workforce is a high priority when considering companies and job offers, according to a Glassdoor survey.

And, while most organizations are aware DEI programs are essential, it shouldn’t be about checking a box. “It’s shifting the mindset from being just a peripheral task to something that is related to the success of all the initiatives you have at your organization,” Jacobs said.

It’s important to make sure all your stakeholders understand that the success of the organization is connected to more than just hiring a diverse workforce, but making sure stakeholders are represented, treated equitably, and heard. It needs to be clear everywhere—including staff, volunteer leaders, and presenters at conferences.

“If they do not see people like them, they will look elsewhere,” Jacobs said.