

A Democratic GAIN Initiative: Increasing Diversity Within The Progressive Community

Background & History

Democratic GAIN was founded just over ten years ago as an association to support the individuals and organizations within the Democratic and progressive community who make politics their profession. We work tirelessly to promote and expand the pool of individuals doing this work and to support organizations as well to make our collective community stronger.

Over the past decade we have trained over 15,000 individuals and helped more than 10,000 find jobs in all 50 states (and a few other countries).

In that time we have also worked to address the institutional and epidemic lack of diversity in our collective workspace through our trainings, events and professional development programs.

And while we've recorded successes, they are only relative to the commitment of funding, participation and support for these types of trainings and events from progressive campaigns and organizations.

In short, we've made some progress, but much work is still needed to address and correct this wide scale deficiency in our professional community. That is why we are redoubling our efforts and build sustainable programs that empower and cultivate progressive leadership within the Rising American Electorate (RAE).

Defining the Problem

As a movement, progressives actively advocate for removing barriers, which play a role in preventing minority groups from fully realizing their potential in society. In order to most effectively address these barriers a focused effort must be directed to the empowerment of affected communities. But ironically, while this important work takes place daily through government, campaigns and organizations, there is a lack of well-trained, knowledgeable and diverse staff to support the work. There are several causes that we believe lead to this phenomenon.

No one entity has taken the lead on such a project: This is not to say progressive organizations do not see this as a priority because many do. However, it is hard for organizations to see past their own staffing needs in order to focus and act on the larger systemic problem facing the entire community.

A lack of collaboration: Ironically, many organizations find themselves in competition with each other for the limited diverse staff available. That stoking of competition limits the ability to cultivate and place diverse talent hurting both employers and potential employees. We should instead foster an atmosphere of communication and collaboration that will help meet the staffing needs of the progressive community.

Absence of a multi year commitment to recruit and retain diverse talent: Too often our hiring practices are short sighted as we staff up for the next campaign or initiative and just as quickly staff down when it is over. While this makes sense from a budgetary standpoint it wreaks havoc on the ability to keep diverse staff and properly prepare them for a career in progressive politics.

The insular nature of politics: Often times it easier for us to hire familiar faces – people we have worked with before or who are colleagues recommend to us. It makes sense to want trusted staff in a foxhole, but it limits the opportunities we have to expand our reach and find new, diverse professionals who are just as eager and capable to fight the good fight.

The Solution

In order to adequately address the lack of positions, junior and senior, filled by women and people of color in our major institutions and campaigns Democratic GAIN proposes the launch a multi-year sustainable program dedicated to expanding the pool of diverse talent and offering support to these individuals on an ongoing basis.

The groundwork for these programs began last year with a variety of meetings within the progressive community to assess some of the more specific issues and to gain support. Political leaders from party committees, progressive organizations, and labor unions all shared some common frustrations about not finding the quality and quantity of diverse staff for the leadership positions they have both in DC and across the country.

We propose a significant and ambitious diversity initiative to be launched this year and to run through the 2016 election. The initiative will focus on recruiting, training, placing, and promoting the individuals from the RAE with built in periods to monitor and evaluate the programs and gauge its successes.

Our proposal includes training and other programs to mobilize and engage, technology to communicate and organize, but fundamentally depends on a strong team of staff, supporters and volunteers to succeed.

Our Specific Plan

Democratic GAIN interacts with job seekers and employers regularly, providing a unique perspective about organizations' needs. Our goal is to take that experience and serve as

diversity recruitment, retention and placement center for the progressive movement, providing them with a vetted pool of diverse talent. Specifically, we propose:

- Providing foundational campaign training to 1,000 diverse progressive professionals over the first two years.
- Create a searchable resume database specifically for diverse talent in the areas of finance, communications, research, data & targeting, digital media and field.
- Serving as a diversity placement center by working with trainees to place them into jobs serving the progressive movement within 6 months of their training.
- Providing advanced political, leadership and professional development trainings to 60% of the original program graduates.
- Providing ongoing career support, training, and networking opportunities for program graduates resulting in increased retention in the progressive movement

These goals will be achieved through four key elements:

(1) Comprehensive political, leadership and professional development training

Building on the success of the pilot *National Diversity Conference on Organizing and Leadership*, scheduled for July 2016, which will be an annual training on leadership and professional development for diverse talent at a state and national level. Over the course of 2-3 day trainings, we will bring together diverse youth and second-career professionals for in-depth, intensive focus on how to effectively work for a political or issue based campaign. Graduates of the training will leave prepared to jump into a staff role on an active political campaign and we will partner with progressive organizations to place graduates in jobs following the training.

As a follow up to the foundational training, Democratic GAIN will also offer access to advanced leadership training for program graduates and other individuals identified through an open application process.

(2) Career support services

Specialized career counseling will be offered to all program participants by progressive leaders trained on the elements of strategic career development, resume and cover letter writing, interviewing skills and networking.

Dedicated job fairs for program participants will be held at all major training events and progressive organizations, unions, and campaigns will be invited to recruit from the pool of

training graduates. In addition, presentations will be given by program alumni and will highlight the specific challenges they faced upon entering the progressive workforce.

(3) Human Resource Round Tables

Our goal will be to work closely with Human Resource Directors by helping them identify ways to enhance their ability to pick more applicants who are people of color or women from their talent pool. These will be quarterly meetings where Democratic GAIN will continue to educate Human Resource teams within the progressive movement on a continually basis.

(4) Targeted resources and materials

To support the fundamental goals of the program, Democratic GAIN will develop a series of resources and materials specifically designed to support a diverse audience. Materials will include campaign manuals, job seeker guides, and alumni profiles. All resources will be available via an alumni portal on the Democratic GAIN site, and will also be disseminated electronically to allow for deeper programmatic impact beyond the alumni community.

Recruiting Diverse Talent From Outside of the Beltway

Washington, D.C. is the home of the national party, most major unions and national progressive organizations as well as a vast majority of senior political operatives across various sectors. GAIN believes any change in culture will only be achieved with buy in from our capital's leaders. However, success of this initiative is equally dependent on ground programs in individual states, especially as we work to recruit larger numbers of diverse staff.

Further, since we all know the work done in states is equally if not more important as what is accomplished nationally, a focus on recruiting and cultivating diverse talent outside of the beltway will be of great benefit to the progressive community whether these individuals make their way to D.C., stay in their home states to make their political mark or travel to other states to work on campaigns or initiatives.

Democratic GAIN seeks to pilot efforts in a limited number of targeted states where we have a combination of relationships and infrastructure. We will engage senior political professionals across the country to serve as recruiters, trainers, mentors and employers to help us successfully launch and guide these programs in their respective geographical regions.

We will also engage national party committees to help us conduct audits of 2014 campaigns to identify talented diverse staff to enroll in advanced trainings and retain for future placements.

To begin, we are currently exploring the launch of our diversity initiative in Ohio, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada and North Carolina. If directed, and with the proper support, we would certainly consider working in other states.

Staffing and Resources Needed To Get the Job Done

The diversity initiative we propose will not be successful without the proper resources and expertise, which will include a combination of current GAIN leadership and additional staffing.

Current leadership at GAIN will focus a majority of their time developing and implementing this marquee program while supporting Democratic GAIN's broader mandates.

Specifically they will work to recruit and engage the necessary talent and employers to achieve this ambitious agenda as well as supporters to endorse and help implement this initiative.

Additionally the following positions, dedicated exclusively to the diversity initiative will be need to be created, filled and funded:

National Diversity Program & Senior Placement Director: This person will serve as the primary liaison between GAIN and employers - working directly with national organizations and major in state institutions to develop internal plans to hire a more diverse workforce and create opportunities for individuals from the RAE to apply for all leadership positions.

National Diversity Talent Tracker: will serve as the primary liaison between GAIN and individual job seekers in order to ensure they are receiving the career support they need to find opportunities and advance professionally.

State Director(s): A state director will lead GAIN's program efforts in each state by recruiting and managing other staff, helping to build state based Advisory Boards, lead membership recruitment, and secure in state financial support.

State Placement Director(s): The person will be responsible for establishing relationships with all state-based campaigns, advocacy organizations and elected officials and will work closely with the National Talent Tracker to match appropriate candidates with employers. **State Talent Director(s):** This person will serve as the primary liaison in each state between GAIN and individual job seekers in order to ensure they are receiving the career support they need to find opportunities and advance professionally.

State Training & Networking Event Director(s): This person will be responsible for the logistic of all trainings, career fairs, and professional networking events in each state.

Working Together To Maximize Results

Nothing worth doing is easy and we understand what we are proposing falls into that category. GAIN's diversity initiative is ambitious, but we are pragmatic in our goals and have developed the initiative as a scalable multi-year program. The problems we are attempting to solve were

not created overnight and therefore it would be disingenuous to suggest a fix could be created as quickly.

However, the longer we wait to address the problem, the more costly the fix – whether monetarily or politically. A continuous effort that relies more on tangible support and resources than rhetoric will be needed and a commitment to long-term engagement will also be necessary to achieve long-term success.

We will not be successful doing this alone. We must bring together groups working towards similar goals. We understand and embrace that other organizations within the progressive community are also work to address elements of this problem with dedicated recruitment, placement and training programs and believe we are uniquely positioned to act as a coalition builder and convener of these various organizations and a coordinator of activities to ensure we are all working together.

Democratic GAIN is primed and ready to face this challenge head on effectively addressing the diversity needs of the progressive community today, tomorrow and well into the future.

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