

DEI at OIT CMS



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How We Got Here

*A Foreword by George Hoffmann,
Deputy CIO & Deputy Director at OIT*

The death of George Floyd and the resulting Black Lives Matter protests was an inflection point about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) for so many of us. OIT leadership recognized the pain and frustration within our community and responded by engaging in listening sessions. Our intent was positioning our people to be their best, authentic selves so they can deliver innovation, value, and collaborative governance.

As the Front Office leaders listened, we were compelled to do more than sympathize. As I listened to my friends and colleagues, I was struck not just by their pain but the range of experiences that caused that pain. I had anticipated hearing many of my co-workers' reactions to current events; I had not anticipated hearing about the lifetime of similar and burdensome experiences they carried.

Though we lived in similar areas and worked in the same place, it was evident our life experiences were not similar. They had repeatedly experienced a sense of not belonging in their communities and our country. I could recognize moments in my own life where I felt I was not seen, heard, or valued. I was dismayed at the commonality many of my co-workers experienced; the repetitive nature of their experiences was eye-opening. I realized that creating a space for these stories to be told and heard was crucial. I also knew that action was needed to create potential solutions and opportunities.

As a former programmer and life-long tech-geek, I felt embarrassed by the common language used within IT. Now having the right context, I could see through a different lens. It didn't take much time to realize the industry I was part of continued using insensitive words. Language such as "master/slave" and "black listing/white listing" are routine jargon within IT. I had never given it a second thought because I knew there was no negative intent behind those words.

I now realize that intent is not the same as impact. Whether or not the wound is intentional, it is still painful to be on the receiving end. The best way to help is to heal the wound first and then actively avoid situations that cause pain, intentionally or not.

The need to change words and take positive actions to be more inclusive was one concrete step we could take to build a work community where all people within OIT could feel valued. All could feel like they belong here. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are integral parts of our mission and strategy. How we do and what we do is the unique differentiator in what we do that centers on people — our team as they do the work, our stakeholders as they provide feedback and get support, and ultimately the citizens this agency serves.

I asked a group of like-minded people to help me form what became the OIT DEI Coalition. This group focused on creating a safe space for the conversation to continue, working to change our thoughts, words, and actions. I was happy too, and I agreed to be the executive sponsor.

This dedicated group of people took on the responsibility to listen and learn on top of a heavy workload exacerbated by the shift to a fully remote work posture because of the global pandemic.

Even as we adjusted our language and changed our individual actions, we realized that it wasn't enough. It became our shared mission to no longer tackle diversity one issue at a time. Instead, we're working to make real, institutional changes by examining our own culture, beliefs, and processes and making changes as we discover needs. Therefore, our approach to DEI is intrinsically tied to our communication loop, so our work is transparent and focused on the same values.

We saw many opportunities within OIT and CMS to be more inclusive once we started looking with this new sense of awareness. Through actions initiated by the coalition, we are exploring opportunities to challenge thinking and continue to refine our approach. A hallmark of a healthy culture is the art of thinking independently together. The DEI Coalition has made significant efforts, and I am proud of what we've accomplished together. We also realize that weaving diversity, equity, and inclusion concepts "into our DNA" within OIT is going to be a long journey. Happily, we have awesome people and are committed to following through by utilizing the DEI space for engaging, meaningful action items we enrich those around us and those we serve.

About DEI

Introduction

DEI is a strategic priority for OIT as well as being embedded within our Workforce Resilience program. We appreciate that having a diverse and inclusive culture, where everyone will feel seen and heard, will best position our office to serve our stakeholders with innovation and value delivery. Fundamentally, we want to continue to attract and retain the best talent to better serve all those who depend on CMS for healthcare.

Our journey over the past two years has been both fulfilling and fruitful and continues to evolve as we learn. We're sharing some of what we've learned and leveraged through this shared journey.

What is DEI?

DEI stands for "diversity, equity, and inclusion." The phrase represents a value system and approach that seeks to create spaces and places where everyone can be their full selves. This means acknowledging, embracing, supporting, and accepting all facets and differentiators that makes us human.



Diversity

Diversity is the presence of different groups of people in one place as defined by their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, language(s), abilities or disabilities, and age, among other signifiers.



Equity

Equity is ensuring that systems and institutions are impartial, fair and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual. Equity recognizes that each individual may have different circumstances and allocates the necessary resources and opportunities to reach an equal outcome.



Inclusion

Inclusion is leveraging diversity to create a fair, equitable, healthy, and high-performing organization or community. An inclusive organization is one where all individuals are respected, feel engaged and motivated, and one for where their contributions are recognized and valued.



Know, Do, Share ... for Managers



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

DEI is a strategic OIT priority and critical to workforce resilience

- Managers play a crucial role in raising awareness of DEI and securing support for DEI principles and goals.
- Organizations that fully embrace DEI hire better, retain the best, innovate more, and achieve higher productivity levels. Numerous studies make clear the connection between diversity and greater innovation, increased engagement, productivity, retention, and employee satisfaction.
- We're doing this because a diverse and inclusive workplace will make us a more productive, innovative agency that attracts and retains the best talent and better serves all those who depend on CMS for healthcare.
- We're also aligning with President Biden's executive order advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accountability within the federal government.
- Our commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workspace is exemplified and driven by the OIT DEI Coalition.



WHAT YOU COULD DO

Become a catalyst for DEI

- The best way to engage employees is to become a passionate advocate for DEI, incorporate DEI messages into your conversations, and spotlight success stories and best practices that demonstrate the benefits of DEI.
- Raising awareness of DEI can best be achieved by staying on message, sharing or liking DEI-related articles, and creating an environment that fosters DEI.

What's needed ...

- Discuss our DEI goals with your teams regularly.
- Cite best practices and success stories that illustrate how we're meeting our goals.
- Join the OIT DEI Coalition.
- Share DEI resources and tips in the #oit-all and #oitdeicoalition slack channels.

Immediate focal points ...

- Our focus is on raising internal awareness of DEI and why it is so important to our future.
- Fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace requires building awareness of our DEI strategy by encouraging mentorships, developing a solid community of practice, and reinforcing the need for alignment with CMS's DEI strategy.



WHAT YOU COULD SHARE

Share directional messages with your teams

- DEI is a strategic priority for us and a key workforce resilience component.
- If you want to prepare a workforce for the future, it has to be diverse and composed of the best and brightest talent.
- DEI enables empowerment. If we don't create a diverse and inclusive environment, people won't feel safe to say what they need to say.
- We're doing this because a diverse and inclusive workplace will make us a more productive, innovative agency that attracts and retains the best talent and better serves all those who depend on CMS for healthcare.
- We're also aligning with President Biden's executive order advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accountability within the federal government.
- Current leadership supports this and are advocates for a DEI environment.

What Makes Something Accessible?

You've spent a great deal of effort and thought into creating beautiful and engaging content. Yet not everyone will be able to access your content.

In 2018, the American Foundation for the Blind reported that an estimated 32.3 million, or 13% of adult Americans either struggle with vision or are unable to see at all.

We are fortunate to be part of an on-going effort to create accessible content for all audiences. Companies and designers alike are responding to these statistics. A 2021 survey by Forrester reports that 84% of companies are actively increasing their efforts to be more digitally accessible.

In the world of design, we're seeing a rise in current trends which embrace accessible style choices. High contrast color combinations, large, clear fonts, and overall clean presentation and effective simplification are a few examples of accessible design evolution.



Let's Explore Accessible Practices



Structure content in a linear way that makes logical sense for users. Web users look for relevant information, so break up content with lists, subheadings, and multimedia elements.



When adding images, infographics, and other visual elements, provide alternative text or 'alt-text.' For audio content, provide closed captioning, so that individuals who have hearing challenges can also access and realize value.



Although figurative language can make your content more exciting and it may be appropriate in certain contexts, literal language is more appropriate for accessible content. Idioms, metaphors, and other figurative expressions can create confusion for some readers.

Practicing DEI in the Workplace

Keywords: Inclusive Language for the Tech Workplace

We all know that keywords are critical to safety and security. This is just as true of professional relationships as it is for information systems.

Inclusive language goes a long way to creating a work environment that is welcoming to everyone. A workplace where everybody feels like they belong will lead to healthier interactions, equitable access to resources and opportunities, and more motivated employees.

Some of the language we use by default might communicate messages we don't intend. For instance, using male pronouns (he, him, his) could suggest that tech workers are normally men, even if that is not your intention. Because our word choices are often the result of ingrained habit, it takes effort to communicate with a more welcoming vocabulary.

This list of keywords provides a starting point for more inclusive language and helps avoid some of the most common pain points.

1 ACCESSIBILITY

The practice of designing and developing interfaces and content that provide a great experience for all users. (Sometimes abbreviated as a11y, presenting "accessibility" as "a" followed by 11 more letters, followed by "y").

2 DIVERSITY

Individual differences (ability, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations) that can shape how we experience and interpret the world around us.

3 EQUITY

Ensuring that systems and institutions are impartial, fair and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual. Equity recognizes that each individual may have different circumstances and allocates the necessary resources and opportunities to reach an equal outcome.

4 NONBINARY

Any gender identity that does not fit the male and female binary.

5 LATINX

A gender neutral term often used in lieu of the gendered "Latino" or "Latina" when referring to individuals with cultural ties to Latin America and individuals of Latin American descent.

6 LGBTQIA

Acronym encompassing the diverse groups of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, intersex, asexual populations, and allies/alliances/associations.

7 NEURODIVERSITY

Refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within people. It recognizes that every individual has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs.

8 INCLUSION

A dynamic state of operating in which diversity is leveraged to create a fair, healthy, and high-performing organization, or community. An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It also enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated, and valued for who they are and for their contributions toward organizational and societal goals.

9 PRONOUNS

Maybe you've seen a Twitter bio with a line that says "My pronouns are..." A preferred gender pronoun is a consciously chosen set of pronouns that allow a person to accurately represent their gender identity. A trans person may begin using a gender-neutral pronoun prior to transitioning, or a non-binary person may choose to use a neutral pronoun (i.e. they, their, them).

Inclusive Language Substitutions



MORE INCLUSIVE

Folks, People, You all, Y'all, Teammates

Women

Workforce, Personnel, Workers, Team

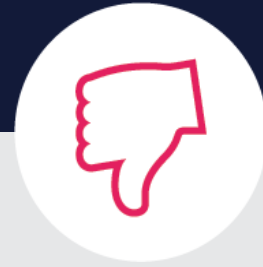
Chairperson, Chair, Moderator,
Discussion leader

Spouses/Partners

Parenting

Typical

Marginalized groups or
underrepresented groups



LESS INCLUSIVE

Guys (or women) when referring to
people overall

Girls (when referring to adults)

Manpower, Man hours

Chairman, Foreman

Wives, Husbands, Boyfriends,
Girlfriends

Mothering, Fathering

Normal

Minorities

How To Be a Good Ally



Appreciate that we all have different experiences

Taking the personal initiative to learn about the cultures of underrepresented groups and the challenges they face - both now and throughout history - goes a long way in helping us better understand the people we work with.



Acknowledge your own biases

Part of being human means that we all have unconscious biases. It's best to be aware of assumptions and perceptions, ask ourselves why we have them, and challenge ourselves to approach situations with a different perspective.



Amplify your colleagues's voices

We recognize that everyone's input is valuable, and yet this may not always happen for a number of reasons. If you feel someone's ideas are being overlooked, consider speaking up. You can either address it at that moment if possible or afterwards privately.



Use your privilege to help

Take steps to engage colleagues who may be less vocal or visible. If you feel another person would be well-suited for a particular project, ask that they be included. Pay attention to workplace dynamics that may be exclusionary and work to change them.



Hold each other accountable

If you see someone being treated unfairly, please do something. It is all of our responsibility to address the issue in the moment and/or bring it up to the person who may not realize the hurt they may be causing.



Continue to listen and learn

We're all on a learning journey, so acknowledge when you make a mistake and avoid repeating it. If someone questions something you say, stop, listen, and do your best to understand their perspective. Part of being an ally is acknowledging misunderstandings, even if they're unintentional.



Be consistent in taking action

Being a good ally is not just another assignment or task to mark off of a "to-do-list." It requires ongoing active effort and the rewards are worth it in creating a more inclusive place for us all.

DEI at OIT

OIT DEI Coalition

OIT's DEI Coalition works to co-create a supportive, welcoming, and inclusive culture within OIT where everyone feels heard, seen and valued.

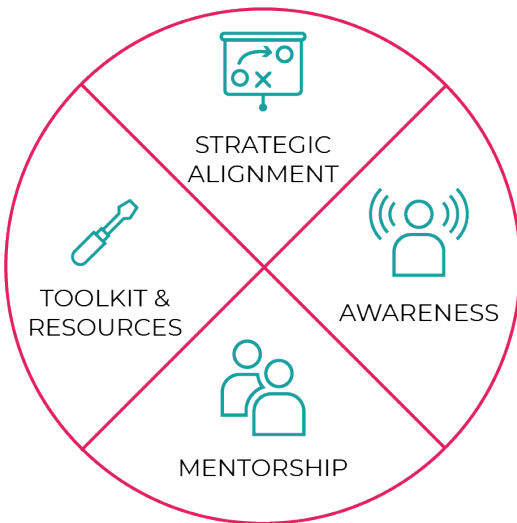
WHY DOES DEI MATTER?

When each employee brings their own perspective and thoughts to the conversation, it creates a broader, more innovative, and positive environment. In an effective environment where everyone believes in the same inclusive goal, individuals gain perspective into how to exist and interact in the workplace.

INTERESTED IN JOINING?

Contact the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team to learn how you can be part of creating a culture that works for all!

DEI FRAMEWORK



OIT'S DEIA COALITION ANIMATION

Watch an animated introduction to the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Coalition's mission at OIT. What is DEIA and why is it important to talk about in the workplace?



ALLIES AND ADVOCATES BY AMBER CABRAL

This book provides readers with a deeper understanding of this DEI domain. It includes specific accessible, actionable, and learning activities for individuals and groups.

Contact Ann (Ann.Turner@cms.hhs.gov) and AJ (Antoinette.Johnson@cms.hhs.gov) to learn more!

DEI Best Practices in Government

The federal government has long been a leader in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace. Today, the results of these efforts can be seen across the federal government through initiatives that serve as DEI best practices and a commitment to continuous improvement. Here are five federal initiatives that are fostering a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace.



U.S. Army Renews Emphasis on DEI

As federal workplace policies evolve, the [U.S. Army](#) is renewing its emphasis on DEI policies by maintaining a vibrant workforce that represents the varied backgrounds of the American people.

To do that, the Army says it is working to ensure that employees understand current DEI policies and requirements “while simultaneously recruiting from a comprehensive pool of potential workers.”

This effort builds on goals established in 2016 by the U.S. Army’s *Talent Management Strategy Force 2025 and Beyond* plan which called for establishing a ready, professional, diverse, and integrated workforce. “The Army possesses people and teams with the breadth and depth of talents that collectively make our profession highly adaptable. In this context, diversity includes race, gender, and other demographics as well as the talents — skills, knowledge, and behaviors — of the total force.”

To learn more about the Army’s commitment to DEI, visit <https://www.armydiversity.army.mil/>.



FBI’s First Chief Diversity Officer Spearheads Cultural Shift

The FBI’s first chief diversity officer is spearheading a “cultural shift” to prioritize DEI by aligning the agency’s hiring goals with those set by the Biden Administration for the federal workforce.

Scott McMillion, a 23-year veteran of the agency and the FBI’s first chief diversity officer, cited several new efforts to recruit minorities and women.

In a recent interview with [Government Executive](#), McMillion cited the Beacon Project as a key DEI initiative that is designed to reach out to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to ensure that individuals who never considered the FBI for employment would do so in the future.

The FBI has multiple honors internship programs that emphasize on “hiring persons from diverse backgrounds,” McMillion said. “In fiscal year 2022, we are including other groups into that hiring initiative — Beacon — where we’ll look for women, Hispanics, Asians, and other indigenous people and Native Americans as well as Asian and Pacific Islanders.”





U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Apprenticeship

FASTPORT, a Labor Department apprenticeship partner — in conjunction with the National Association of Publicly Funded Truck Driving Schools — is sponsoring a pilot program to provide ASL training to commercial truck driving instructors at the Amarillo College Truck Driving Academy in Texas.

The pilot aims to increase the number of students with hearing impairments who can receive CDL training. It also addresses the lack of employment and training opportunities for the hearing impaired in commercial trucking because of the cost to employ qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for students.

When ASL training is provided to commercial truck driving license (CDL) instructors, training becomes considerably more cost-effective and a recruiting draw for hearing-impaired students.

Dave Harrison, Executive Director of National Apprenticeships, FASTPORT, told apprenticeship.gov, “this will provide exponentially more opportunities in multiple locations for deaf students to thrive in the transportation sector.”



USAID Makes DEI a Transformative Priority

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an international development agency, has made DEI a top priority.

USAID works to advance U.S. national security and economic prosperity, demonstrates American generosity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience.

In a November [speech](#) at Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service, USAID Administrator Samantha Power unveiled a new vision to make USAID an agency of “international development” and “inclusive development.”



State Department’s First Chief DEI Officer Aims for “Gold Standard”

The State Department’s first chief DEI officer, Ambassador Gina Abercrombie Winstanley, plans to make the agency the “gold standard” in governmental DEI and accountability practices. Winstanley must first reverse the State Department’s silence culture around DEI-related issues.

At the Senior Executives Association Federal Executive Leadership Summit in December, Winstanley said, “The department has an informal culture that hardwires employees to keep our heads down when bad things happen. This is no longer acceptable.”

To change things, Winstanley has established three pillars that the agency is now focusing on:

- Intentionality, or the repeated focus on who isn’t being represented and why;
- Transparency, by collecting detailed and accurate data on the demographics of the State Department workforce; and
- Accountability, by holding perpetrators of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation accountable.

Further Learning

DEI Learning Resources

The following resources can serve as a reference for how you can continue to foster inclusion and fairness within OIT.



YOUTUBE

- [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)
- [Humanize Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Diversity is Being Invited to the Party: Inclusion is Being Asked to Dance](#)



TED TALKS

- [How to Foster True Diversity and Inclusion at Work](#)
- [How Diversity Makes Teams More Innovative](#)
- [Be a Better Ally in the Workplace](#)



PODCASTS

- [Inclusion in Progress](#)
- [Still Processing](#)
- [The Diversity Gap](#)
- [Diversity Beyond the Checkbox](#)
- [Crescendo Chats: Scaling Diversity & Inclusion](#)



ARTICLES

- [The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution](#)
- [The Six Signature Traits of Inclusive Leadership](#)
- [To Keep Customers and Talent, You Must Invest in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as a Business Strategy](#)

“The OIT DEI Coalition conveys the purpose and direction of our leadership’s commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workspace. Our DEI initiatives include bringing awareness, fostering mentorships, developing a solid community of practice, and ensuring alignment to our overall CMS DEI strategy. Through our leadership support, individual commitment, and the development of sustainable practices, I believe this work can create opportunities to modify barriers, access, and exposure and ultimately inspire others to answer the call to become a DEI Agent for change.”

- Ann Turner (CMS/OIT)

Division of IT Oversight and Governance (DIOG), Deputy Director

Where We Are Going

*A Look Ahead by Leila Rao,
Organizational Culture Consultant*

George has addressed why OIT launched the DEI initiative as well as why DEI means so much to him, so I'll focus more on the alignment between DEI and OIT's organizational and cultural efforts.

Challenges faced by organizations today don't often have easy solutions. Instead, they require a multi-disciplinary approach where people from different specialties work together to diagnose the problems, manage the various side effects, and adjust their approach based on emerging information and lessons learned.

Organizations that have developed DEI as a competency will be best positioned to respond and succeed in these situations because they will already have the building blocks — an environment where people can be their best selves and where people have learned to work with and value diverse perspectives.

DEI, as a response to change and complexity as well as a moral imperative, were intertwined for me when I joined OIT to support the front office leadership. The challenge in both cases was, how could we better provide strategic value to our stakeholders so that we collectively could better serve the citizens who depend on this agency?

To answer this challenge, we considered not just “what we do,” but also “how do we do it” and “how could we do it better — collectively?” How could OIT support innovative approaches to leveraging technology as an enabler for business value? How could the OIT culture shift from compliance to consultative?

OIT's DEI approach integrates our service and learning mindset through the ability to learn and improve the what and the how. It is about bringing our full selves into the workplace to apply our varied experiences and insights to deliver greater insight and value.

DEI, for us, is about embracing and benefiting from all the differences in what we see, perceive and experience. It includes facets such as gender, race, sexual orientation, national origin, sexual identity, sensory and cognitive challenges, and neurodivergence.

Working with Antoinette Johnson and Ann Turner, who head the OIT DEI coalition, and all of the federal employees who have embraced this commitment in addition to their other responsibilities has been incredibly fulfilling. This personalized approach to DEI that intrinsically connects DEI to business outcomes has enabled us to bring more people into the journey.

By integrating lean, agile, and human-centered design into our DEI strategy and delivery approaches, we've been able to experiment, iterate and learn — better. We now have a backlog of activities and actions designed to increase organizational competency around DEI. The backlog is a list we all contribute to and prioritize collectively based on balancing possible impact and bandwidth.

We realized that one result of having a DEI coalition with members who all had other “actual” jobs is that we have to be strategic and intentional in what we could do and how we could do it.

We switched to lighter lifts for design and facilitation. In addition, we became more intentional about how we invite people in, we made it easier for people to opt-in by scheduling events in advance, and we offered multiple ways for people to learn and share.

This ebook is one such outcome. The idea arose from a retrospective to capture and appreciate what we've learned and recognized throughout this journey.

Increasing DEI competency includes talking about things that we don't typically talk about openly in workspaces, learning to listen and learn from each other's experiences, and doing the difficult work needed to make our systems work better for everybody.

This cognitive approach to DEI ultimately serves our shared commitment to creating a workplace where everybody feels seen, heard, and valued.

The shared objective for OIT, in terms of strategic planning, culture change, and DEI, is to have a workplace and a workforce of the future. And this publication is a snapshot in time of where we are, how we got here, and where we are going next.

OIT COMMUNICATIONS

"A hallmark of a healthy culture is the art of thinking independently together. The DEI Coalition has made significant efforts and I am proud of what we've accomplished together."

- GEORGE HOFFMANN
DEPUTY CIO & DEPUTY
DIRECTOR AT OIT