



The **crucial role of DEI** in community building



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When we feel we belong, we thrive

Our need to belong is a key driver for joining communities.

We seek communities where we feel we belong to fulfill an innate need for connection. These communities provide us emotional support, a shared sense of identity and purpose, and often help us better ourselves.

In communities where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is prioritized, members from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and represented. Everyone can belong, authentically contribute, and flourish.

And when everyone prospers, it is better for all of us.

This guide will explore what DEI is, why it is critical for successful communities, and how community builders can embrace and adapt meaningful DEI strategies in their communities.

What is DEI?

Let's get started by taking a closer look at what the individual components of DEI actually mean.

Diversity

Diversity refers to who is represented in the community. Some examples of diversity in a community include (but are not limited to):

Gender: What is the ratio of men, women, and nonbinary people in a community?

Age: Are people in a community from mostly one generation, or is there a mix of ages?

Ethnic: Do people in a community share common cultural or national traditions, or do they represent different backgrounds?

Physical ability and neurodiversity: Are people with disabilities, whether apparent or not, able to participate?

Equity

Equity refers to fair treatment for all people. It makes sure that everyone has a fair chance to participate and thrive in the community.

An example of this in an online community could be incorporating visual cues, such as icons or images, to assist users in understanding content and navigating the website more effectively.

The difference between equity and equality

While equality assumes that all people should be treated the same, equity takes into consideration a person's unique circumstances and adjusts the treatment accordingly so that the end result is equal.

Equality in an online community could be giving every member the same level of access. However, equity would involve recognizing that some members may need additional support for a more inclusive and fair experience. For example, providing accessibility features for members with disabilities is an equitable approach in community management.

Inclusion

Inclusion means that all community members feel valued, respected, included, represented, and heard. In inclusive communities members can be themselves, have a voice, and feel they belong.

Combining these elements helps create a community where everyone feels respected, has fair opportunities to participate, and senses that they belong—creating a richer experience for all.

A quick history of the evolution of DEI in online spaces

Internet forums and social networks often lacked diversity, reflecting broader societal biases.

As digital access expanded globally, there was a growing recognition of the need for diversity and inclusion in online spaces. This was fueled by social movements and a deeper understanding of global interconnectedness.

Today, modern online communities are increasingly embracing DEI principles. Community leaders are recognizing the immense value of diverse voices and the need for equitable and inclusive practices to foster vibrant, innovative, and supportive environments.

The benefits of DEI in **community building**

Creating spaces that are diverse, inclusive, and equitable reflects a commitment to fairness and human rights.

Beyond being a matter of social responsibility, embracing DEI can significantly (and positively) impact a community's overall success.

Here's a closer look at some of the benefits:

Enhanced innovation

Members from different backgrounds have different experiences and perspectives. This leads to more diversity of thought, which drives more creative ideas and vibrant discussions, fostering more innovation!

Quick stat

According to [Boston Consulting Group](#), companies that had greater diversity among their leadership or management teams had **19%** higher innovation revenue than those with less diverse leadership.



Improved decision-making

Members of different backgrounds and experiences can offer unique viewpoints and challenge each other's assumptions and biases. This leads to more informed and fair decision making.

Quick stats

According to research by [Cloverpop](#):

- Inclusive teams make better business decisions up to **87%** of the time.
- Teams that follow an inclusive process make decisions **2X** faster with half the meetings.
- Decisions made and executed by diverse teams delivered **60%** better results.

Increased reach and engagement

When all members of a community feel valued, they are more likely to engage. Diverse communities can also appeal to a wider audience and drive growth.

Quick stat

According to [Deloitte](#), **83%** of millennials are actively engaged at work when they believe the culture of their organization is inclusive.

Increased member satisfaction and retention rates

When members feel valued and included, they are more likely to remain active and engaged in the community.

Quick stats

According to [Great Place to Work](#), when employees feel like they belong at work they are:

- **3x** more likely to say their workplace is fun
- **5x** more likely to want to stay at their company a long time

According to [Delloite](#), belonging at work can lead to:

- **56%** increase in job performance
- **50%** reduction in turnover risk
- **167%** increase in employer net promoter score

How to embrace DEI in your **community building**

By prioritizing DEI principles, you can build a vibrant community that celebrates diversity, promotes fair opportunities, and ensures that all members are heard and can actively contribute to the collective success of the community.

But how does this work in practice?

Here are some actionable strategies and considerations to help community builders to embrace and integrate DEI principles.

Define DEI values

Start off by clearly articulating your community's commitment to DEI in your community's mission statement. Doing this sets the tone and foundation for all subsequent actions.

Helpful resource: [Why you need a mission statement for your community](#)

Create clear guidelines

Community guidelines help safeguard your members while encouraging the culture you want to create within your community.

Develop community guidelines that explicitly prohibit discriminatory behavior, hate speech, and harassment. Establish a reporting system for members to address violations, and communicate clear consequences for those who do not respect the guidelines.

Helpful resource: [How to create compelling community guidelines](#)

Expert insights

“We want our community to be a welcoming environment for individuals from all backgrounds. We conducted an image audit to ensure that the visual representation of our community reflects its diversity, promoting inclusion and representation for all members, contributing to our mission to create a world where everybody can access and enjoy sustainable, safe, and healthy food.

We ran an “ask me anything” on diversity and inclusion in our community, inviting our members to ask our experts about D&I to further their understanding of D&I and its practical application. This proved to be our most successful “ask me anything” session to date and we plan to build on this event in the future.”



Linn Vande Populiere

Digital Community Manager

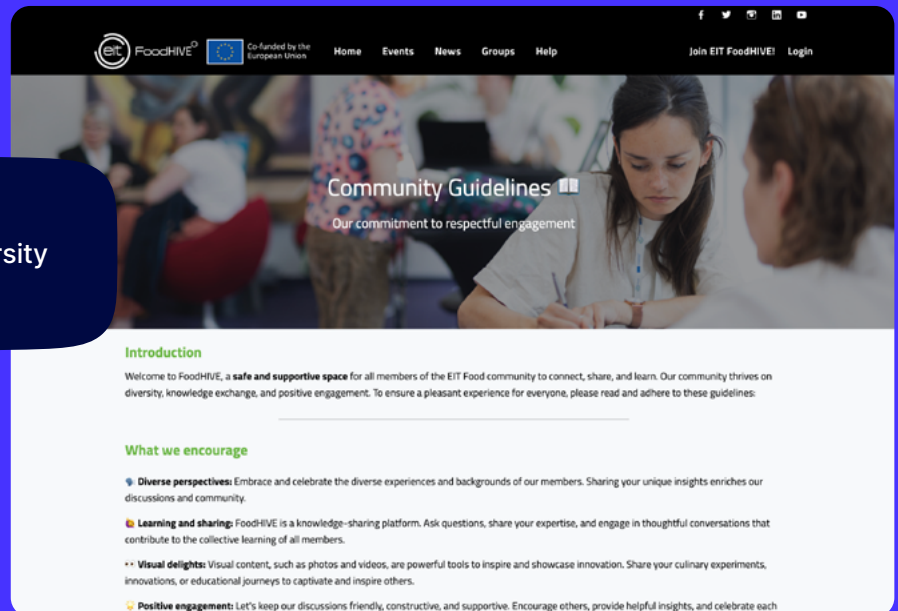


FoodHIVE^o



Co-funded by
the European Union

EIT Food's guidelines outline the community's commitment to diversity and inclusion from the start.



Quick tip

Don't forget to revisit your community guidelines and mission statement to ensure they remain relevant and effective in embracing DEI.

Ask your members for feedback from the community, and be open to making changes to enhance inclusivity.

Establish equitable access

Ensure that community resources, opportunities, and information are accessible to all members. This could include features such as providing content in multiple languages and different time zones for events.

Consider also digital accessibility when designing your community so that everyone can participate regardless of visual, hearing, physical, or cognitive differences.

Expert insights

Designing online communities with DEI in mind is important in order to create spaces that are welcoming and accessible to all participants.

As a designer, here are some considerations you should always keep top of mind:

- **Representation and diversity:** ensure that your community reflects a diverse range of perspectives, backgrounds and identities. Actively seek input from underrepresented groups and strive for inclusive representation in imagery, language, and content when building your community.
- **Accessibility:** Keep accessibility in mind to accommodate users with diverse needs, Check color contrast in your designs, incorporate alt text for images, captions for videos, and create intuitive layout structures with a clear navigation to ensure everyone can enjoy your community and its content.
- **Inclusive design:** Create intuitive interfaces with clear navigation paths and consider the needs of users who have various levels of technological proficiency. Everyone should be able to engage with the community in a meaningful way.

And last but not least, empower your users to contribute to your community's growth and evolution. Be open to hearing their feedback and collaborate with them to make sure their voices are heard and valued.



Brenda Olalde
Head of Design at Hivebrite



hivebrite

Promote diverse representation

Actively seek diverse perspectives in leadership roles, moderators, and decision-making processes. Encourage participation from members with different backgrounds and experiences to highlight your community's commitment to inclusivity.

Expert insights

Get to know your community members personally

One of the benefits of running a community is that community leaders have the utmost benefit of meeting diverse people from various parts of the world. By getting acquainted with community members begins in the DMs, you have an insight into the topics community members have expert knowledge of. So, when a community leader asks a question in the general community and tags the said community member, they aren't suddenly put on the spot and they can respond confidently.

In the Talentpoel community, our Poolers (Talents) are usually assigned a work buddy during their onboarding session into the pool. The onboarding call is the first step towards creating a bond with the new Pooler. The Pooler is welcomed into the new community by the work buddy and introduced to existing members of the community. The icing on the cake is the virtual welcome party every new Pooler gets. All the stops are pulled out; the invitation cards, music, and all. This party solidifies their membership in the pool.

These rituals are done in the community to encourage everyone to get to know each other better and not leave this task to just the community leader. With the initial barrier of communication removed, it will be easier for community members to contribute to conversations without feeling pushed.



Margareth Egbuchulam

Community Manager at Talentpoel



Training and education

Provide professional ongoing training and resources for moderators and community leaders on DEI principles, unconscious bias, and cultural competency.

Create partnerships with organizations or groups that specialize in DEI initiatives. This can provide valuable resources and expertise to enhance the positive impact of your DEI initiatives.

Celebrate diversity

Celebrate cultural, religious, and identity-related events within your community. This not only fosters a sense of belonging but also educates other members about different cultures and experiences.

Expert insights

Celebrating diversity: from symbolic gestures to meaningful impact

For mission-driven leaders, celebrating diversity isn't just about optics; it's about fostering a truly inclusive and enriching work environment.

This goes beyond temporary displays like pride flags. True celebration involves actively engaging with cultural, religious, and identity-based experiences for employees and the community you serve.

Here's how leaders can make a difference

Immerse yourself in the experience:

Organize cultural events: Integrate these into the employee lifecycle, from onboarding to team building. Offer food festivals, dance performances, or art exhibitions that reflect your diverse workforce. Do this to strengthen bonds and reinforce identity.

Promote learning and understanding: Offer workshops or training sessions on different cultural perspectives. Encourage employee input and feedback to create a two-way dialogue and enrich the work environment. Do this to foster mutual respect and build a culture of inclusivity.

Support Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): Empower these groups to connect, share experiences, and advocate for inclusion. They provide valuable support, mentorship, and professional growth opportunities. Actively engage with employee research groups to leverage diverse talents and perspectives, driving innovation and collaboration.

Embed diversity in your practices:

Align policies and practices with inclusion: Ensure inclusion throughout the employee life cycle, from recruitment to promotion. Offer equal opportunities for advancement and recognition, regardless of background. Do this to promote fairness and belonging, leading to higher retention - something worth celebrating!

Amplify diverse voices: Showcase the achievements and contributions of individuals from different backgrounds in your communication channels. Do this to create a more representative culture, encourage collaboration, and broaden the collective knowledge base.

Forget the rainbow flags and one-off diversity events! Real progress comes from actively engaging with these proactive steps. These tools empower leaders to make a genuine difference in celebrating the richness of diversity within their organization.

It becomes a more natural part of your organizational culture—fostering a sense of belonging, strengthens relationships, and benefits employees and the wider community.



Raúl T. Pereyra (RTP)

CEO at RTP Learning



Helping mission-driven leaders boost their confidence and effectiveness through transformational leadership coaching, so they lead with greater impact.

Use inclusive language

Employ words that are respectful and neutral, promoting a sense of belonging for all members and preventing unintentional bias or discrimination. Don't use terms that may marginalize or exclude individuals based on gender, religion, or other characteristics.

Helpful resource

For more information on inclusive language, check out Hubspot's guide: [Inclusive Language: How To Use and Promote It at Your Organization](#)

Diverse content creation

Include a range of topics in your community content plan that will appeal to the diversity of your community members. Get inspiration and practical advice to help you develop your community content calendar [here](#).

The success of your DEI initiatives also depends on the collective effort of community members who actively contribute to creating a culture that values and prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion. Here are some ways to encourage members to contribute:

Encourage dialogue

Start open discussions about DEI within the community. Create dedicated groups or forums for members to share their thoughts, experiences, and suggestions related to DEI initiatives.

Seek feedback

Actively involve your members in decision-making processes related to DEI. Conduct surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather insights from members about their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Establish clear ways for all members to provide feedback and ideas on DEI.

Diversity spotlights

Highlight diverse members or groups within the community through interviews or member spotlights. This celebrates diversity and provides visibility of different voices and perspectives.



Training and workshops

Organize DEI-related educational events and involve community members as facilitators or guest speakers. This not only provides valuable insights but also empowers members to take an active role in education.

DEI committees

Build a DEI committee composed of members interested in championing DEI in the community. The group can work with community leaders to propose and implement initiatives.

Mentorship programs

Develop mentorship programs within the community to connect experienced members with newcomers. This fosters a sense of support and inclusion, especially for those who might feel marginalized or underrepresented.

Recognize contributions

Acknowledge and celebrate members who actively contribute to fostering an inclusive environment. Recognize efforts through your community newsletters, announcements, or awards.

Expert insights

As a community builder, lead by example by demonstrating inclusive behavior and language in your interactions with members. Show that you value diversity and are committed to creating a welcoming space for everyone.

Take the time to educate yourself about DEI principles, terminology, and best practices. There are many resources available online, including articles, webinars, and courses, that can help you deepen your understanding of these topics.

Involve your community members in discussions about DEI. Create opportunities for open dialogue where members can share their perspectives, experiences, and suggestions for creating a more inclusive environment. For example, she thought provoking posts about the case for diversity, equity and inclusion).

Remember, feedback is critical. Continuously seek feedback from your community members about their experiences and perceptions of DEI within the community. Use this feedback to make informed decisions and iterate on your approach over time.

In short, nurturing inclusive communities demands a multifaceted approach encompassing leadership commitment, education, dialogue, representation, celebration, accountability, collaboration, and ongoing refinement.



Adriana Raines

Engagement Manager at YW Boston



Measuring and assessing DEI progress

So, how can you measure DEI success in your community?

The demographic makeup of your members is a good starting point, but there is a lot more that you can look at.

Feedback surveys

Periodically survey your members about their experiences with inclusivity, diversity, and equity within the community.

Who's speaking up?

Look at who's talking in the community and how much. A lack of engagement could suggest a lack of inclusion. At the same time, be aware that some people prefer to keep a low profile.

Inclusive language and content

Assess the language and content used within your community. Ensure that it is inclusive and respectful of diverse perspectives.

Accessibility

Is your community accessible to individuals with disabilities? Can people using assistive technologies navigate your community? Do you provide alternative formats for content when needed?

Helpful resource

- [Guidance on Web Accessibility and the ADA](#)
- [How Hivebrite is making online communities more accessible](#)

Community policies

Is your community's commitment to DEI clear? Do your guidelines address discriminatory behavior? Do you have clear consequences for actions that go against the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Training and education

Do you offer sessions or resources to educate your community members about diversity, equity, and inclusion?



Representation in leadership

Do the decision-making bodies and community leaders reflect the diversity you aim to achieve?

Once you've assessed the current state of DEI in your community, you can set objectives to further promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. These objectives need to be specific, measurable, and with achievable targets.

For example:

Objective: Increase representation of underrepresented groups in community leadership roles.

Metric: Increase the percentage of leadership positions held by individuals from underrepresented backgrounds by 20% within the next year.

Timeline: Achieve a 20% increase in leadership diversity within the next 12 months.

Be aware that building an inclusive community takes time and commitment. Regularly measuring and assessing your progress will help you identify areas for improvement and ensure that your community is a welcoming space for everyone.

Quick tip

Recognize and celebrate positive changes, even small ones, as this helps build momentum and can shift the community's perception over time.

Overcoming common obstacles to DEI initiatives

Despite growing awareness of the importance of fostering diverse, fair, and inclusive environments, numerous obstacles can impede progress.

Two common issues that can undermine genuine efforts to foster a truly equitable and diverse community are tokenism and checklists.

Tokenism happens when communities make superficial efforts to include members of underrepresented groups without addressing the underlying issues of inequality or providing genuine opportunities for meaningful participation.

Checklists relating to DEI training of percentage of hires from a certain demographic can be useful as a starting point. However, relying solely on checklists may result in superficial efforts rather than genuine cultural change. To avoid this, focus on:

Authentic inclusion

Create genuine opportunities for diverse voices rather than merely meeting a quota. Ensure that individuals from underrepresented groups are actively involved in decision-making and leadership roles.

Cultural shift

Foster a culture of inclusion throughout the entire community by encouraging open and honest dialogues with all community stakeholders—including members and your wider community team. Implement educational programs and resources to increase awareness about the importance of DEI.

There may also be resistance to DEI initiatives amongst members—this could be in the form of skepticism or outright opposition. Here are some proactive measures to help foster a genuine commitment to DEI principles among all members.

Address concerns empathetically

Address concerns with empathy rather than dismiss them. Understanding the root causes of resistance allows for tailored responses that address specific objections.

Highlight success stories

Showcase positive outcomes and success stories resulting from DEI efforts. Personal stories are effective for demonstrating the benefits of embracing diversity and inclusion.

Transparency and clarity

Transparency helps build trust. Clearly communicate the goals, processes, and intended impact of DEI initiatives.

Continuous evaluation

Regularly reassess DEI strategies to ensure they align with evolving needs of your members.

Starting points to evaluate your community's DEI

Here are some strategic actions you can evaluate to assess the DEI of your community.

Identify marginalized communities

What makes a community member different or similar to other members may include age, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographic location, or neurodivergence.

Content analysis

Review the content shared within the community to ensure it represents diverse perspectives. This might involve analyzing the topics discussed, the authors of posts, and the portrayal of different groups in multimedia content.

Accessibility check

Conduct an accessibility audit of the online community platform to ensure it meets WCAG standards. This could involve checking for features like alt text for images, keyboard navigation options, and compatibility with screen readers.

Community guidelines review

Review and update community guidelines to explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on factors like race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. Ensure moderation policies are in place to address violations promptly and fairly.





Language assessment

Use natural language processing tools to analyze community communications for biased or discriminatory language. Implement guidelines for inclusive language use and provide resources for members to educate themselves on the importance of respectful communication.

Engagement tracking

Track engagement metrics broken down by demographic groups to identify any disparities in participation rates or interactions. This data can help pinpoint areas where certain groups may feel marginalized or underrepresented.

Feedback mechanisms

Implement regular feedback surveys specifically asking about inclusivity and diversity within the community. Additionally, provide anonymous channels for members to report instances of discrimination or exclusion.

Training opportunities

Offer webinars or workshops on DEI topics like unconscious bias, cultural competency, and inclusive language. Encourage community moderators to undergo training to better handle diversity-related issues.

Resource allocation evaluation

Review how resources such as funding for events, promotional opportunities for content, and access to community features are distributed among different groups. Ensure equitable access to resources and representation for marginalized members.

Partnership assessment

Evaluate potential partnerships with external organizations to ensure they align with the community's values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Look for opportunities to collaborate with groups representing underrepresented communities and promote inclusive initiatives together.

12 DEI questions for your community

Answer the following questions to gain a deeper understanding of the diversity, equity, and inclusion dynamics within your community. This understanding will allow you to identify areas of strength as well as areas that require improvement.

1. How does your online community ensure an inclusive environment for all members?
2. What strategies are in place to attract and support a diverse range of voices within your online community?
3. Can you share insights into your current community culture and its alignment with diversity, equity, and inclusion principles?
4. What specific actions are being taken to address the needs and concerns of different demographic groups within your online community?
5. How do your affinity groups or community subgroups contribute to fostering inclusivity and equity?
6. In what ways do your online training and educational resources promote diversity and inclusivity among community members?
7. What data, both quantitative and qualitative, are you collecting to track progress in your diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within the community?
8. How does your community conduct comprehensive diversity and inclusion assessments, and what metrics are prioritized?
9. What steps are taken to gather valuable insights from community feedback and input regarding your culture and DEI efforts?
10. Can you elaborate on how your community identifies and addresses gaps in diversity and inclusion?
11. How are equity impact assessments integrated into your DEI evaluation process, and what trends have been identified?
12. In what ways do your community practices ensure fair treatment and representation, considering different backgrounds and perspectives?

Closing thoughts

As community builders, it is crucial to recognize that embracing DEI is an ongoing commitment that requires adaptability, openness to feedback, and a genuine desire for positive change.

The power to effect positive change lies in the collective actions of community leaders and members alike.

By building a culture that celebrates diversity, encourages dialogue, and actively involves members in shaping the community's future, we contribute not only to the strength of our individual communities but to the broader movement towards a more just and inclusive society.

We understand that DEI is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and the strategies and insights outlined in this handbook may need to be tailored to meet your community's unique needs. Nevertheless, we hope this guide has highlighted the importance and value of DEI and encouraged you to continue exploring new ideas and approaches to create communities where all members can belong and thrive.



About us

Hivebrite is an all-in-one community management and engagement platform.

The Hivebrite platform empowers organizations to launch, manage, and grow fully branded private communities.

Hivebrite is completely customizable and provides all the tools needed to strengthen community engagement.

Hivebrite supports communities across all industry sectors with clients diverse as Boeing, Roche, the Obama Foundation, the National Academy of Sciences, the Aspen Institute, the University of Notre Dame, the U.S. Naval Academy, and U.C. Davis.

Get in touch today to discuss how together we can build a vibrant and engaged alumni community that supports your institution's mission for years to come.



Schedule a demo of Hivebrite today at

hivebrite.io/demo