Chapter 5

A Guide to Comprehensive Diversity Work

The previous chapters have described the story of the Campus Diversity Initiative, related quantitative and qualitative findings, and promising practices to help institutions build and sustain successful efforts. Drawing on the experience of the CDI as well as the broader experiences of the ERT, this chapter offers a step-by-step guide to developing and implementing comprehensive diversity work, using an organizational learning approach that is built on evaluation. As stated at the outset of this monograph, an organizational learning approach increases the likelihood that a campus will achieve and sustain institution-wide goals for diversity. These steps reflect the goals of the CDI—increasing access and success for URM and low-income students and building campus capacity to enhance and evaluate overall diversity efforts in ways that promoted organizational learning—and cover four areas:

- **Envisioning diversity efforts in relation to institutional mission.** A broad-based committee reviews and reflects on past diversity efforts—related to institutional viability, access and success, education and scholarship, and campus climate—in order to envision the "next generation" of comprehensive diversity work that reflects institutional mission.

- **Developing both campus-wide goals for diversity and strategies that are linked to institutional mission.** The committee uses a framework for diversity, with indicators, to create a set of measurable goals and strategies that are linked to institutional mission and values.

- **Generating and implementing an action plan to achieve goals and an evaluation plan to monitor progress.** The committee involves a wider set of constituents to outline goals and carry out strategies. The committee also sets up a manageable, evidenced-based evaluation plan where constituents monitor the strategies and processes being used, gather data to demonstrate whether progress is being made, and use results for educational improvement and organizational learning.

- **Establishing infrastructure to sustain organizational learning and meet evolving goals for diversity.** The committee identifies specific curricular and co-curricular actions, administrative units, and individuals needed to support goals, strategies, and evaluation in the future. This is done to ensure that diversity is integral to the institution’s day-to-day functioning and that evolving goals for diversity are met.
Chart a Path for Future Success

At one CDI institution, campus leaders charged an individual with systematically compiling information about previous diversity work so that the leaders could begin charting future directions. This individual collected information from a broad group of constituents, summarized the findings, and validated this document with the campus leaders. The institution’s next generation of work grew out of discussions of this document and centered on a particular aspect of mission related to graduate education. A broad group of constituents agreed on a plan of action, which entailed (1) engaging every member of the campus academic center that was to oversee the specific project to increase the number of graduate students of color, and (2) linking that work with larger institutional efforts to increase the number of URM faculty. The campus also hired a capable leader to guide and monitor URM faculty hiring and retention efforts. Over the course of the initiative, the campus had established a process of monitoring URM faculty hiring in each of its schools and colleges using the turnover quotient developed by the ERT.

1. Establish a Broad-Based Committee to Oversee the Work and Networks to Carry It Out

Establishing a broad-based committee is a crucial first step in engendering widespread responsibility and accountability for comprehensive diversity work. The presence of people with different vantage points allows for multiple perspectives to enter into the process and can help the group better recognize various internal and external forces for change. Campus leaders can conserve resources and create synergy with other efforts by utilizing existing committee structures, but regardless, the group should include

- senior-level decision makers, including senior admissions, academic affairs, and student affairs officers;
- academic deans and faculty members with expertise in diversity and evaluation;
- student leaders, especially those with experience in diversity work;
- the chief diversity officer and institutional research officer, where such positions exist.

The group should have strong inroads into decision-making processes, both through its membership and its reporting line. Because of the particular focus of this work on URM and low-income student access and success, campus leaders should ensure that the committee includes several students from these groups and that there is overall compositional diversity.

From the start, the committee should consider how it can involve additional constituents in the work. This will help connect a broader group of people to the work and protect the institution from the negative effects of transitions and turnover. Campus leaders can help constituents share a larger vision of diversity and prevent diversity work from becoming localized or isolated. Moreover, when the process is inclusive and different constituent groups are engaged, there is less chance for diversity efforts to become marginalized as other issues come into focus.
Committee, Know Thyself

Whether the committee is newly appointed or pre-existing, the group must recognize that some members may be new to diversity work. Others may have a long history with diversity efforts but be new to using an institution-wide approach. Many committee members may be unfamiliar with evaluation and monitoring processes. Those in charge of appointing the committee should ascertain what skills, experiences, and knowledge areas members can contribute to the work, and the committee members should share this information with each other. It is also important that the committee take the time needed to build cohesion and trust among members as well as to understand and incorporate the experiences and perspectives that members bring to the work. If a review of past diversity work has not already been undertaken, the committee should identify a means for gathering information about such efforts so as to avoid “reinventing the wheel” when developing future plans. The review and planning documents can also help socialize new members of the committee to the work ahead.

Tailor the Committee to Institutional Size

Institutional size has a strong influence on campus mission, and so it will also play a large role in how comprehensive diversity work will unfold on a campus. Campus leaders should consider this context carefully when deciding on the best structure and composition for the campus-wide committee. For instance, large institutions with many schools and colleges may want to adopt a two-tiered structure—where smaller, unit-specific committees are connected to a larger, university-wide committee. Several CDI campuses ultimately moved to this two-tier approach after beginning their efforts within a particular sub-section of the university. The unit-specific committees developed goals and strategies that were tailored to each college’s or school’s area of focus (e.g., law, education, arts and sciences). The university-wide committee made sure that various efforts connected to the institution’s mission and goals for diversity and achieved coherence across units.

2. Review Past Efforts and Envision “Next Steps” in Relation to Institutional Mission

Committee members should examine the campus’s previous diversity efforts in the context of institutional mission and, where needed, identify ways to establish stronger links between diversity work and mission. Linking the two will help ensure that diversity work has integrity and is taken seriously by various campus constituents. The ERT is aware of campuses that have established diversity committees within boards of trustees. Given their fiduciary responsibilities, trustees who are members of a diversity committee can be powerful advocates for comprehensive campus efforts when they understand the critical link between diversity and institutional viability and vitality. They can also play a role in helping other trustees, and the general public, understand this important link.
3. Develop Institution-level Goals for Diversity That Are Linked to Mission

The committee should begin with a discussion about what it hopes to accomplish with its comprehensive diversity work and why. Five questions can help focus the committee's conversation.

1. **What are the challenges that our institution faces that require altering the status quo?** The committee would be wise to use a framework, such as the one developed by Smith (1995), to identify specific challenges across different areas of institutional functioning.

2. **Why is it important for our institution to undertake a comprehensive diversity effort to address these challenges?** This establishes a common understanding about why it is critical to do the work with an institution-level approach.

3. **What strategies can we use to address these challenges?** Strategies can be drawn from the research literature, from promising practices of peer institutions, or from previous campus action. This brainstorming process should generate as many ideas as possible.

4. **Which of the identified actions are manageable for the committee to pursue?** To answer this question, the committee should audit what the campus is already doing in comparison to what it wants to accomplish and examine the gap between current work and aspirations. The committee should also audit internal and external resources that may be available to undertake comprehensive diversity work, including people's time and expertise, materials and facilities, and financial resources. Committee members will not necessarily know about all potential sources of support, so they should include institutional advancement staff in this process.

5. **What will the institution accomplish as a result of this work?** The answer to this question becomes a goal to guide campus action. From a set of goals, the committee can draft a plan of action and a plan for evaluation.

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**Move Past the Plateau**

Many campuses will enter the goal-setting process already having done some work on diversity, often in the areas of student compositional diversity, cultural programming, or a diversity requirement in the curriculum. These institutions often have difficulty figuring out strategic next steps beyond people and programs. Campus leaders need to push themselves and others to envision what structures, policies, and rewards would help embed diversity efforts more broadly and deeply into institutional planning, campus culture, and day-to-day work.
4. Design Strategies to Meet Goals

As the committee begins to develop strategies for achieving institutional goals for diversity, members may want to approach the task from their individual vantage points. For example, a faculty member in the biological sciences may want to develop strategies to enhance the success of URM students majoring in her field. An administrator with broader responsibilities may want to focus on strategies to increase URM student retention more generally. A student leader may want to devise strategies to increase student-led programming around diversity.

The next step is to reach consensus on a set of strategies that can be monitored for progress, and here too, committee members can bring their individual interests and expertise to bear on the actions. For example, should the lack of URM students in STEM fields emerge as a priority for the group, the biology faculty member may be best suited to lead an outreach effort where URM students in biology general education courses are introduced to the major. Other STEM faculty may develop resources to integrate diversity issues into existing courses or undertake new research on the ways in which diversity can deepen students' learning.

In the end, it is important that the committee creates a set of strategies that span the different areas of campus functioning—using the diversity framework in this task, as in goal-setting, is helpful. Strategies can build on previous efforts, expanding or amending them so that they will have increased impact, or they may be adapted from practices that have been successful on other campuses.

5. Generate an Action Plan to Enact Strategies and an Evaluation Plan to Monitor Progress

The mission-driven vision for the diversity work, the comprehensive goals, and the associated strategies serve as the foundation for developing campus action and evaluation plans. A detailed action plan serves as a guide to enact the strategies and ensure that tasks related to the strategies are completed in a timely way.

An evaluation plan should chart how the committee and other constituents will know they are making progress. The ERT provided the CDI campuses with a template (see appendix 3) to help them create their evaluation plans. Committee members can use the template to identify the goals, strategies, and expected outcomes of comprehensive diversity work. While the template does not specifically address the resources needed to undertake an initiative, identifying adequate resources is critical at this stage of the planning.

Committee members can then use the template to list measures of progress that will be appropriate given the campus context and the nature of the work to be done. The committee must also consider the instruments and collection mechanisms that will systematically capture the data needed to monitor progress. These collection mechanisms work best if the evaluation includes gathering baseline data, establishing
benchmarks and timelines for data collection and analysis, and designating a set of individuals and units to oversee the process.¹

Completing the evaluation template may lead committee members to revisit the campus goals and the means for achieving them. This is to be expected, and goals and strategies will shift over time as the committee and other constituents learn more about what elements help or hinder success.

Do Away with Business as Usual

Early in the CDI, many campus leaders responded to the James Irvine Foundation’s call for institution-wide efforts and an organizational learning approach with familiar—and narrow—goals and strategies. These leaders wanted to create new programs that simply repeated what had been done previously, especially with regard to recruiting and retaining URM students. Likewise, many early evaluation plans were based on satisfaction surveys because of campus leaders’ familiarity with them and because of the ease of administration. The campus leaders needed to go through several iterations of goals, strategies, action plans, and evaluation plans before they were able to move beyond “business as usual” and develop institution-level work. Overall, campuses experienced greater success when leaders focused as much energy on learning from past and current work as they had on securing external grants for their work.

6. Use Data to Monitor Progress, Make Adjustments and Mid-course Corrections, and Learn about “What Works”

Accurate and usable data are necessary for strategic decision making, and good data are fundamental to organizational learning. Without data, it would be extremely difficult to determine objectively whether progress is being made toward institutional goals. Like a financial audit, data collection and analysis around goals for diversity gives leaders an indication of the institution’s solvency and well-being. Regular data collection and analysis over time help constituents understand the results of their actions in both the short term and long term.

The most effective evaluation process begins with the establishment of baseline data, which can be compared to later data sets for evidence of progress. The ERT devised a workbook to help guide institutions’ data-collection processes. Each campus used the data to inform their decisions and to make adjustments and mid-course corrections to their strategies. The ERT also used the standardized campus data to conduct analyses across the twenty-eight campuses in the project.

¹ The ERT gathered data disaggregated by race/ethnicity for the University of California and the California State University systems in order to make comparisons on key indicators of undergraduate student access and success as well as faculty hiring. Data from these systems provided some benchmarks for the CDI campuses. However, campus leaders are cautioned about relying on peers as benchmarks when it comes to increasing the presence of URM students or faculty. Peer institutions may not reflect the URM student or faculty pool and thus may cause campuses to set their expectations too low.
It is critical that all data—including survey responses and focus group findings—be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, income level, and other factors that are important to institutional goals for diversity. Disaggregated data frequently yield valuable information about differences in perspectives and experiences among groups. Too often, campus leaders disaggregate only the most basic demographic data on students for inclusion in a viewbook or on a Web site. However, when information about access and success is disaggregated, leaders can learn a great deal more about how all students—and how different groups of students—are faring in their educational experiences.

It is also important that constituents rely on multiple sources of data. Similar findings across different data sets will help constituents speak with some certainty about the status of access, success, and other goals for diversity. Dissimilar findings will point out the need for further examination of a phenomenon. Leaders will find that the most meaningful data will result from incorporating diversity questions into all institutional inquiries and analyses—of student, staff, and faculty satisfaction; of student, staff, and faculty success; of campus climate; and of student learning and engagement. Collecting data at the department, program, and school levels also provides a fuller understanding of the status of faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and staff in the places on campus where they are most deeply engaged. It is not unusual to discover that some schools or departments are not making progress on one or more diversity dimensions while other units on campus are doing quite well. Such findings can help campus leaders gauge progress at the institutional level, identify promising practices that may translate across campus, and point to places where greater attention to diversity is needed.

**Use Multiple Sources of Data to Guide Decision Making**

One CDI campus proposed developing a summer bridge program focused on support for URM students in the STEM disciplines as part of its CDI. Campus leaders believed that URM students needed such a program to be competitive and that the program would reduce existing achievement gaps. Yet an analysis of the campus senior survey, GPA, and persistence data across various groups on campus indicated that the decision to start a summer bridge program was not well founded. Disaggregated data revealed that URM students were doing well in their academic pursuits but not adjusting well to campus life because of the small number of URM students at the institution. Campus leaders consequently requested and were approved to have grant funds redirected to a high school outreach program, to help more URM students become college eligible and possibly enroll at the institution. The timely use of campus data helped leaders to avoid establishing a support program that likely would not have improved overall success for URM students.
7. Share Results to Increase Understanding and Commitment across Campus

Data collection, analysis, and reporting processes should be an integral part of campus diversity efforts, but constituents often resist sharing data across the institution. Many constituents may worry that data will cause political fallout if they reveal “bad news.” Others may think that data will generate controversy, especially if related to diversity issues. Still others may want to show the institution in the best possible light.

Overcoming this resistance is important and can be done by showing constituents that data analyses will be used for organizational improvement rather than to punish individuals or units. While individuals and units must be held accountable for actions and for outcomes, they should be given the support and resources that will equip them to succeed. It is important to communicate this message to constituents and to back it up with examples of units or departments that have been given the chance to improve their performance on institution-level outcomes.

When constituents from across the institution gather and make sense of the data in the context of their own work, they will foster organizational learning and relationships built around shared goals and responsibilities. Just as the committee would benefit from engaging a broader group of constituents in planning, decision making, data analysis, and interpretation of findings, they would benefit from having such a group talk openly and constructively about the consequences of the findings. At this stage, campus presentations on diversity efforts—goals, strategies, findings, progress, and barriers—can help facilitate this dialogue.

To make an appreciable difference, the committee’s findings and reports must be valued by senior leaders, shared with the broader campus community, and acted upon in ways that will improve practice. On some CDI campuses, committee reports were not designed for a variety of campus audiences, limiting their utility as vehicles for organizational learning and marginalizing the work they represented.

Convenient and Easy-to-Use Data Make a Difference

On one CDI campus, staff, faculty, and administrators were able to access charts displaying numerical and graphical data through a secure Web-based system. The databases that generated the charts included demographic information on faculty, students, and staff. Users could make specific queries based on their unit or department, examine disaggregated data in order to focus on underrepresented populations, and make comparisons with peer institutions (e.g., regarding faculty racial/ethnic diversity or graduation rates of URM students). To foster broad engagement with the data, the Institutional research office staff also made regular presentations at administrative and departmental meetings and other key meetings. These efforts were successful because of the commitment on the part of the Institutional research staff to sharing information in formats and through channels that were convenient and easy to use.
8. Assess and Build Capacity to Do the Work

To meet accreditation requirements and public expectations, campuses must demonstrate that they have the intellectual, human, and financial resources to successfully undertake their research, teaching, and service functions. These resources represent the capacity of an institution to fulfill its mission and effectively operate on a day-to-day basis. Likewise, campuses will require a certain amount of capacity to successfully fulfill broad goals for diversity. Resources may be internal or external to the institution, but campus leaders should be careful not to rely too heavily on time-limited, external resources such as grant funds. These funds should be leveraged to help build internal capacity to do comprehensive diversity work.

Make Good Use of Existing Tools and Resources

Leaders should first look to their own campus to identify individuals who can assist in developing, implementing, and evaluating diversity initiatives. If people with the necessary knowledge cannot be found, leaders should consider using external experts in diversity and evaluation. Campus leaders can also identify diversity-related conferences and institutes to help build expertise among constituents. These events provide opportunities to discuss concerns and difficulties, learn about promising practices, refine goals and strategies, and even obtain individual coaching. Constituents can also increase the impact of these knowledge-building events by sharing information once they are back on campus.

9. Establish an Infrastructure to Sustain Organizational Learning

In undertaking comprehensive diversity work, campus leaders often struggle with whether to begin by developing an "infrastructure" for diversity (e.g., establishing a diversity office, hiring a chief diversity officer, meaningfully embedding a diversity into the mission statement) or by delving into the work itself (e.g., establishing a faculty re-granting program or revising URM student recruitment efforts). On the one hand, campus leaders may decide to invest in an infrastructure, but the seeming delay in creating tangible change can generate significant tension among constituents. On the other hand, leaders may decide to use existing resources to launch the actual work, but that work can falter unless personnel, facilities, policies, and other "scaffolding" are put in place to support it.

The ERT discovered that campuses were most successful when leaders attended to both components simultaneously—that is, when campus leaders invested in an infrastructure while also launching a few visible efforts that were likely to make a difference relatively quickly and without needing all aspects of an infrastructure in place.

In addition to consultations and meetings, there are many material resources campuses can draw on in this work. These include published studies, research journals, and articles on topics such as faculty hiring; relevant Web sites (e.g., www.DiversityWeb.org) and bibliographies on diversity and evaluation; survey instruments;
frameworks for diversity; and data workbooks to guide the collection of campus data. The CDI Evaluation Project Resource Kit includes all of the above (see appendix 4 for more information).

Whenever a campus is engaged in major planning or evaluation efforts, constituents should discuss the potential impact of choices and decisions on diversity efforts. This applies to budgeting, "downsizing," strategic planning, fundraising, expanding curricular offerings, and engaging in accreditation processes, to name just a few activities. If a campus has a chief diversity officer, he or she should be actively involved in such discussions to ensure that diversity is "at the table." Just as the chief financial officer ensures that budget implications are discussed in all decision-making processes, so should the chief diversity officer be empowered to raise important questions about diversity and ask leaders to consider the consequences of their actions—good, bad, or neutral—vis-à-vis diversity.

Finally, with each personnel transition on a campus, institutional knowledge and history regarding evaluation or diversity work is diminished. Because transitions are inevitable, campus leaders should develop processes to help diversity work weather transitions. This includes preserving knowledge (keeping a library of electronic and print resources), sharing knowledge (passing along relevant information from external and internal meetings and other sources), and transferring knowledge (providing sufficient time so that information can be transferred to new employees). Having a senior position dedicated to the diversity initiative can also help maintain an evolving knowledge base.

Four Critical Components of Diversity Capacity

1. Sufficient levels of human resources and internal expertise to mount a comprehensive diversity effort
2. Sufficient time for a broad base of campus constituents to plan, implement, and monitor the work
3. Sufficient financial and material resources to support comprehensive efforts, plus a broad awareness of available resources
4. Opportunities and mechanisms to communicate and engage with the campus community about the work