



## Planning a D&I program

Many aviation businesses in Canada are well aware of the importance of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) and the benefits to be gained from a more engaged staff, a broader range of ideas, higher productivity and the approval of customers. The challenge is often what a program looks like, what practical steps to take and in what order. In short, not so much “why” but “how”.

There is no magic or fixed way to build a D&I program and each one will reflect the needs and philosophy of the individual company. Like Safety Management Systems (SMS), the program must be customized to best fit the company. In general, though, there must be preparation in which senior management commits to the program, the engagement of support groups within and outside the company, research into where the company is currently positioned, and then planning involving a business case and a detailed strategy to move the program forward.

After that comes implementation which for convenience can be divided into awareness and training on the one hand, and on the other hand, work on each area of the company’s personnel management processes. It is perfectly possible to pick specific implementation items such as awareness training or policy review, and work on them at an earlier stage.

**Preparation** includes establishing clear and consistent senior management commitment and support, reviewing the broad range of types of diversity groupings which may be involved, establishing D&I as a clearly stated core value of the organization, and assessing and developing the inclusive leadership competencies of the senior leaders, since they will be actively engaged in the entire journey.

**Support** is most often obtained from what are termed Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), each group usually reflecting one area of diversity, such as Women, LGBTQ, generational, ethnic or ableness, to list a few. It is generally wise to look for outside partners in some of these areas who, because they are seen as unbiased, can add support for best practices. Finally during the development of the program, focus groups can be set up internally to look at specific needs.

**Research** is the next step and this looks into the needs of the organization. It is the second part of demonstrating employer buy-in. This ranges from employee engagement surveys, gathering HR data on trends, doing customer surveys of their diversity and expectations, assessing whether suppliers actively support D&I programs, and auditing the company environment for challenges which need to be addressed.

**Planning** now follows and includes assessing the data results, and developing a solid business case for improving the health and growth of company. This provides focus and direction for the program. Finally a strategy is developed to guide the implementation. Typically these tasks are undertaken by a senior-management-led Diversity Council, and the direct involvement of senior management is essential for this to succeed. It is important that this council have a good sense of how cultural change occurs in an organization and how it must be led in order to succeed. We will discuss this aspect in a later article. ■