

10 Tips for a Successful Campus Diversity Initiative

Get public pleas from the campus big cheese. You need some sign of tangible support from the campus executive. Even if they haven't yet develop passion about the initiative, pull strings to get her/him to write a letter of support and to make a 3 minute video.

Surveys can be fun! An anonymous survey of attitudes towards whatever diversity issues are relevant can be sharpen the focus of the effort, raise awareness and build anticipation for the initiative, and help move folks who might be initially skeptical. If it's done electronically the difficulties in analyzing the data can be minimal.

Just the facts, ma'am. Develop a concise statement (1-3 pages) of the business case for a diversity effort; the document should not assign blame to particular stakeholders, but plainly and unemotionally make the case that some improvements on diversity issues are needed. Such a document will be helpful to persuade some top administrators and other skeptical stakeholders about the need for the effort.

Hearing many voices leads to questions that really sing. Take good care in designing a good process that will help you craft the initiative in ways that will be appealing to a broad array of people. One important element of a good process can be spending time investigating how relevant diversity issues are conceptualized by stakeholders with multiple racial and ideological perspectives. With this understanding, you can build the initiative in ways that appeal to everyone where they are and invite them to a new place.

Headlines, but not just Talking Heads. It is useful to have an attention getting public event to build momentum. A famous speaker, or clips from a provocative film can help. But try to make sure the event includes a dialogic component so people can get more personally engaged than they can as mere observers in an audience.

Use a frame that spreads the blame (and responsibility). Consider defining the problem as one shared by students, staff, and the institution. One successful organizing question: "What could the college and students do to fully deliver on the promise of diversity on campus?"

Bring the mountain to Mohammed. Don't wait for student or staff groups to come to you. Send allies to their meetings to initiate building rapport and trust.

Everybody needs some tools. Establish a set of fundamental concepts and/or frameworks that everyone in the initiative will be exposed to. The perpetrator, victim, bystander, liberator model of oppression is one example.

Offer a mile, but be ready to take an inch. Don't expect everyone to have a high level of commitment to diversity from the very beginning. Design your initiative so that people can get started in a range of experiences, from one-time events to extended commitments.

Evaluate early and often. Building in feedback mechanisms can be very important to keep the effort on track. It helps make sure participants feel heard and care for. More importantly, it gives a chance for initiative organizers to learn about any ways the initiative may be going off course.