

DELTA INSTITUTE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delta Institute was founded to directly address systemic environmental issues that were disproportionately impacting low-income and BIPOC communities throughout the Midwest, focusing on ways to both improve the environment and create new economic opportunities in areas that had been left behind by the standard way of doing things. Since our earliest years, Delta has focused on assisting communities to find ways to remediate brownfields as part of our larger Thriving Communities work. Even an institution dedicated to addressing systemic injustice with its work can get complacent and take diversity, equity, and inclusion for granted.

That's where Delta found itself several years ago - with work focused on creating new solutions to these longstanding problems, but without taking a step back to assess its own role in the current system and how it could be improving internally and through its many partnerships and collaborations to continuously learn, improve, and fully integrate DEI principles throughout the organization.

After several conversations at the board and staff level, outreach and learning from others, and assessing how to move forward beyond just a checklist, Delta created an ad hoc committee comprised of Delta's Board of Directors, Associate Board, and staff to build a roadmap to further our organization and make sure that DEI was fully ingrained in everything we do. An ad hoc committee was chosen so that a small group could work on setting the stage for the organization; and, after its task was completed, the rest of the institution would be included. The objective was to make sure that DEI wasn't off to the side, or only stewarded by one part of the organization. It had to be a part of all aspects of Delta.

DEI is not an easy topic to just jump into without support from leadership and the entire organization. Delta had long held that the more voices, experiences, and perspectives that were included in our work, the better the outcomes. But trust needs to be established to make that happen and show that voices are not only heard but utilized in the work. The DEI committee chose to establish rules of engagement for its meetings and work through the establishment of a Brave Space statement. This was read aloud at the beginning of every meeting and centered the committee members with the expectations of the group, created a space where we could trust group members, question ourselves and each other, call out privilege and have difficult conversations.

Objectives

- Full integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion into all internal processes and structures for our board and staff, and external processes and structures for engaging with our partners, communities, stakeholders, and supporters.
- Create a shared awareness, understanding, and language around DEI principles.
- Create a supportive, respectful, and trusted environment for challenging conversations around these personal and complex issues.
- No one-off stuff: true integration will create a cycle of continuous experimentation, failure, and improvement that will strengthen the organization.
- Create actionable strategies to meet our objectives, with an understanding that there are true systemic issues that influence what is possible and practicable for our organization.
- Increase the cultural competencies of the organization.
- Acknowledge, identify, and reduce inherent biases in our processes, structures, and culture.
- Increase diverse representation and accessibility throughout Delta's staff, board, partners, funders, stakeholders, and supporters.

At the very outset of our work, we knew that, much like the problems we tried to tackle every day, this work was never really going to be finished. That helped us be okay with not having all the answers, with knowing that we wouldn't know what we wouldn't know, and with making mistakes (but learning from them). We also knew that there wouldn't be one, shiny thing that was THE solution to all things DEI for us as an organization. The committee's work can be broken into roughly four overlapping and iterative steps.

1. Assess Everything

And if we couldn't assess something, finding a way to be able to. And if we still couldn't, know that's where we were, and that could be a place to look again in the future. We took a dive through all our operations, policies, and processes as well as partnerships, funding, staffing, board, communications, and anything else that we could identify. From that list, we assessed where DEI principles and best management practices might be shaped positively, negatively, neutrally, or unknown. We also identified areas where we had already been actively making strides at being more equitable and inclusive, promoting diversity, and acknowledging where we were not.

One example of this was aligning our data collection from our board, associate board, and staff so that we could compare data around demographics, identity, and perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the organization. We take data seriously, but we found that we had different timelines, formats, and questions in each

of these internal stakeholder groups. Our updates now gave us a full look at the organization and could compare baseline and trend data across the whole organization.

2. Tying It to Our Strategic Plan

One major priority for the committee was weaving everything we did as an organization into one integrated framework. Like most nonprofits, we regularly update our strategic plan and use it for guiding how we impact our mission; we wanted to use things that we developed in our current strategic plan as an organizing principle for our DEI work and roadmap. Our organizational theory of change is an iterative, innovation cycle where we work through several steps to increase the impact of our work by understanding the underlying systems, testing things out, and figuring out how best to scale. We used this theory of change structure as the continuous engine of our DEI roadmap work and defined what each part of the process entailed.

- **Engage & Discover:** Create a culture of reflection and awareness around DEI issues. Create a space for having difficult and challenging conversations. Baseline our activities, policies, structures that align with or inhibit DEI principles integrated throughout the organization's operations, communications, funding and partnerships. Be inquisitive both internally and externally.
- **Research:** Identify, acquire, assess, and analyze potential resources for utilization in furthering Delta's DEI integration objectives and helping to frame the organization's DEI work. Cultivate a resource library that includes knowledge and best management practices including materials, people, and organizations as well as potential training and funding resources.
- **Design:** Use Delta's scientific method, systems modeling, and human centered design to create pilots, initiatives, or policy adjustments from our assessment and research activities, along with quantitative and qualitative measurement and evaluation mechanisms as appropriate.
- **Implement & Test:** Try it out. Utilize the activities that have been designed and implement them.
- **Evaluate & Iterate:** Learn from observation and measurement to assess effectiveness of impact on meeting DEI objectives and moving forward on the framework. Identify what works and what doesn't, identify additional opportunities for improving Delta's integration of DEI and begin again in the Engage & Discover phase!

3. Finding Resources and Figuring Out How to Make Them Ours

The committee members actively went out to collect the best articles, videos, anecdotes, training tips, failures, and anything else they could around DEI principles, definitions, best management practices, things to learn from, and whatever else to start

with as much material and information as possible. This helped us define and scope what DEI was to us as an organization. We then figured out ways to collect and curate the information to create a compendium that could be reviewed and updated as we continued our learning as a committee, but also use these structures when the committee's work was done, and it was held by the entire organization.

We created templates for training resources so that when we were ready to undertake them, and had them in our budget, we were ready to go. We also created a running catalogue of our collected resources and labeled them across the many types of diversity, equity and inclusion. Currently, we have items selected for:

- Ability, Disability and Ableism;
- Age, Aging, Ageism;
- Country of Origin, Immigration, and Nativism;
- Environmental Justice;
- Faith, Religious Identity, Secular Worldview and Sectarianism;
- LGBTQIA and Heterosexism;
- Nonprofit Sector and DEI;
- Race, Ethnicity and Racism;
- Deeper Anti-Racism Learning;
- Sex, Gender, Gender Identity and Gender Discrimination;
- Socioeconomic Status and Classism;
- Working Life; and,
- Deeper Dive Resources.

4. Coming Up with a Way to Integrate It All

An important part of the committee's work and with the DEI roadmap overall is the acknowledgment that there really is no beginning and no end. So we needed to make sure that the objectives were clear, the infrastructure we had was solid yet flexible, and that we were okay with trying something out, learning from it, and figuring out how to weave that into our systems and culture. The committee was to create the momentum for this motion to start, and the organization would then steward and keep the energy going by integrating into our every day.

The DEI committee work established several key pieces of framework that can now be built off of so that we are an organization that treats diversity, equity, and inclusion as a central tenet of our work, which enables us to better achieve our mission to create a thriving Midwest.

- Statement of Commitment to DEI
- DEI Processes and Protocols Document
- Draft RFP for DEI Consultant
- Inclusive Vocabulary Guide

- Inclusive Events & Meetings Protocols Guide
- DEI Reference Guide
- Delta DEI Curated Resources Library
- Organizational DEI Literacy and Continued Learning
- DEI Consultants and Practitioners Directory

These form the beginning of our roadmap, some of which we share externally and some which is for our internal use only as it is specific to our Delta's operations and infrastructure. Our roadmap includes where these documents and resources exist, who is responsible for stewarding them, and how and when assessment of what we have, and don't have happens. And we are doing this with a truly authentic approach knowing that we are going to be learning, trying things out, engaging more people, adapting, but always moving forward.