NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
BRAD LANDER

Designing & Regulating for Equity
A Guide for Practitioners

NOVEMBER 2025

Introduction

In 2025 the New York City Comptroller's Office organized and led *"Designing & Regulating for Equity"* Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) practitioner roundtables that convened key stakeholders in the field to build alignment, share their methodologies and best practices. In partnership with the NYC Commission on Racial Equity (CORE) we gathered prominent DEI leaders and practitioners from across sectors including the Chief DEI Officers from the NYS Governor, NYS Attorney General and Mayor's Office. Our goals were to identify areas of collaboration and collective action in response to being in an industry that is facing regulatory, legislative and communications barriers to survival.

These convenings allowed us to collaboratively address the current challenges facing the DEI landscape. *Designing & Regulating for*

Equity: A Guide for Practitioners synthesizes insights from the events discussions, providing effective strategies to continue and strengthen the work for all practitioners.

Participants emphasized the need for ongoing commitments to long-term DEI initiatives, community engagement, and the importance of accountability and support from their leadership teams. This guide highlights strategies that can significantly strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of DEI efforts in organizations. We believe that engaging diverse voices, implementing organizational changes, and fostering transparency are essential to drive meaningful progress in the pursuit of equity and inclusion.

Shared Language

DEI Practitioners come from all walks of life and experiences, and it is important to us that there is common grounding for terms and definitions. We acknowledge that none of us share a single vocabulary for talking about the complex way our city has approached Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Racial Equity and more. Participants in these convenings normed around the following framework that guided our conversations.

Diversity asks: **who is at the table?**

Refers to difference or variety of characteristics, identities, and experiences.

Equity asks: **does everyone have what they need at the table to participate?**

Refers to resources and the need to provide additional or alternative resources so that all groups can reach comparable, favorable outcomes.

Inclusion asks: **how will we make sure everyone is heard?**

Refers to internal practices, policies, and processes that shape an organization's culture. It gives them the opportunity to meaningfully contribute. It makes people feel welcomed as well as connected to each other and the mission. As a result, it creates cultures of belonging where authenticity thrives.

Designing & Regulating for Equity: A Framework

Long-term Commitment
Invest in DEI initiatives and policies that focus on tangible, sustainable outcomes.

Community Engagement
Include community members in policy development and implementation to ensure that the most impacted voices are centered. This practice demonstrates the importance of modeling collaboration and inclusivity.

Shared Language
Establish clear understanding for terms and definitions. Shared language strengthens communication strategies and combats anti-DEI rhetoric.

Accountability and Metrics
Create systems and tools to hold leadership accountable for DEI outcomes. This ensures that the work remains continuous and that progress is measurable.

Empathy
Implement strategies that foster understanding across diverse groups. When empathy plays a central role in an organizations culture it provides a foundation for meaningful dialogue and relationships.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data
Utilize both numerical statistics and lived experiences to inform DEI initiatives and goals. It is important that we use data to tell stories that propel people into action.

Designing & Regulating for Equity: Promising Practices and Effective Strategies

Resource Allocation for DEI Initiatives

Allocating resources for professional learning such as training, outreach, and program development and execution solidifies an organization's commitment to advance equity. Organizations should budget for investing financial and human capital to advance DEI goals. Funding and supporting these initiatives will result in sustainable and impactful outcomes.

Attendees mentioned the critical role of committing specific budgetary and human resources to strengthen DEI efforts. "*By allocating funds for training, programming, and outreach, we demonstrate our serious commitment to creating systemic change.*"

Leadership Accountability:

Supportive leadership is mission critical to a DEI Office's success. Organizations that are committed to the success of DEI establish transparent accountability measures that ensure ongoing support, so that this work remains at the forefront of an organization's priorities.

> The discussions underscored the need for "**continued support from leadership teams regarding DEI work and its universal benefits.**" Establishing transparent practices and holding leaders accountable is a necessary step in ensuring DEI initiatives do not lose momentum.

Empathy as a Driver

Developing a better understanding of other's lived experiences is the bedrock of advancing DEI work. Creating spaces, investing in professional development, and designing strategies that cultivate understanding across diverse groups is foundational for DEI to become a shared value in an organization.

> Group members envisioned creating "**spaces to build personal connections and learn about other people**" helping to foster a culture of empathy. This goal emphasizes the importance of prioritizing connections alongside equity initiatives, allowing individuals to engage more freely and effectively.

Strategic Communication

Organizations should develop a clear equity voice that both invites people into the conversation and articulates the benefits of DEI work. Strategic communication grounds organizations in shared language, shared values, and helps to provide clear direction to all team members.

> Attendees shared that using inclusive language encourages broader participation and buy-in. Message discipline enables members of the team to clearly articulate what DEI means and the positive impact of DEI efforts within their specific organizational context. Message discipline can help empower team members to advocate for its significance and helps build alignment across an organization.

Commitment to Long-term Change

Achieving a diverse, equitable and inclusive organization doesn't adhere to traditional deadlines. It requires continuous examination, modification, and support. Over the long term, goal posts may shift, progress will have been made in certain areas, but not all. In order for DEI to be done well, it necessitates adaptability, flexibility and continuous commitment to iterating on where progress can be made. Organizations should be cautious of "quick fixes."

Participants shared that investing in long-term impact is essential for creating systemic changes. As one attendee noted, "***We are committed to seeing results; this is not just a temporary effort.***"

Community Engagement

Community engagement is both a method for disrupting traditional power dynamics and an opportunity for cultivating collective wisdom. Involving community members in decision-making is key to practicing equity because it purposefully draws attention to and includes institutionally marginalized populations and those most impacted by the decision-making. This may look different for every organization, however centering institutionally marginalized and oppressed groups should remain a priority.

Attendees spoke about the importance of involving community members in decision-making processes. Suggestions included "***compensating them for their time, providing meals, childcare or transportation***" and ensuring their input is valued. This approach not only fosters a sense of ownership but also enhances the effectiveness of DEI initiatives allowing practitioners the chance to model inclusivity.

Statistics and Stories

The discipline of DEI work requires leveraging both numerical statistics and lived experiences as the data that informs all initiatives and goals. Utilizing one without the other can do a disservice to the scholarship that should guide the work forward.

Participants highlighted the significance of combining numerical data with storytelling because one without the other would be an incomplete snapshot of the issues being discussed. One attendee stated, "***We need both data and personal experiences***" to illustrate the efficacy of DEI work convincingly.

Forming Internal Committees

Including multiple voices in shared decision making is a pillar of being a DEI practitioner. Establishing internal DEI committees is a strategy to ensure that the organization's DEI Leaders are listening and gaining knowledge across the organization to their colleagues, to create a framework for continuous dialogue and action.

Attendees emphasized that establishing internal DEI committees can create a vital structure for ongoing discussion and action and fosters collaboration. As one participant noted, "***Having diverse voices directly involved in decision-making ensures that everyone feels represented and heard.***"

Cross-Sector partnerships

Partnerships are a vehicle to build relationships and alignment across the field. Sharing resources, messaging and best practices can generate and expand collective knowledge among practitioners. Connected DEI networks can strengthen community-wide DEI initiatives that promote equity and inclusion.

> Participants suggested that "**working together can amplify our reach and create more robust initiatives that benefit the entire community.**" Building collaborations with local governments, educational institutions, and non-profits to strengthen DEI efforts at a time where DEI is under attack is necessary to create a bulwark against threats.

Regular Feedback Mechanisms

DEI initiatives require consistent adaptation and responsiveness to evolving needs. Surveys, focus groups and systems of (quantitative and qualitative) feedback can: ensure clear understanding across an organization, facilitate dialogue among teams, and should inform future practices. Feedback should be incorporated into future DEI work plans.

> Participants pointed out that establishing ongoing feedback channels ensures DEI initiatives remain responsive. "**Listening to our employees and community members helps us adapt and improve our efforts**," one individual commented. Participants also highlighted that these mechanisms cultivate transparency and boosts morale.

Conclusion

Designing & Regulating for Equity: A Guide for Practitioners comes at a poignant time when our Civil Rights are under attack. As a result, the Office of the NYC Comptroller convened fellow practitioners from across sectors in New York to generate collaboration and collective action.

We want to thank all of the attendees and members of the planning committee. Their dedication, commitment to equity and improving the lives of New Yorkers is what made this roundtable possible.

Equity and inclusion are not only matters of justice; they are essential for our collective prosperity. Evidence demonstrates that narrowing disparities can yield a "solidarity dividend" through improved educational outcomes, enhanced public safety, and greater economic vitality that benefits all residents. Our mission goes beyond mere compliance; it is rooted in a shared commitment to a future where everyone, regardless of background, has equitable access to opportunities.

This is generational work. Together, we must keep going as if our multi-racial democracy depends on it.

Partners and Gratitude: We want to thank all the members of our planning committee and presenters

Bianca Wheeler and Harold Miller, the Office of the NYS Attorney General

Carra Wallace, National Action Network

Diana Noriega, Good Shepherd Services

Julissa Gutierrez and Priya Nair, NYS Governor's Office

Kazeem Shinaba, City Year NY

Lola Martin, Partnership with Children

Linda Tigani, NYC Commission on Racial Equity

Nakeeba Wauchope, YeyeX Educational Consulting/Productions

Steven Gordon, NYC Administration for Children's Services

Tyrik Washington, NDMG Films and 4TE Capitol Solutions