

**Diversity**

# How to Set — and Meet — Your Company's Diversity Goals

by Ellyn Shook

June 25, 2021



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**Summary.** The foundational first step toward creating a more diverse workforce — and realizing the many benefits it can bring to an organization — is the same as with any other business effort: setting goals. Accenture had set internal representation goals for many years, but... [more](#)

Becoming a more inclusive and diverse organization is not just the right thing to do — it's essential to innovation and business success. Yet as race has become a more visible and urgent workplace

issue, most organizations have not moved past episodic reactions to tragic events to creating sustainable change. The current reckoning on race in the United States has revealed that organizations have not made enough progress toward becoming truly equal workplaces.

From employees and consumers to community members and investors, the world is watching, expectations are growing, and leaders are taking a hard, long overdue look in the mirror. They are realizing that, while the journey is complex and making enduring progress can be difficult, the true risk is to do nothing.

At Accenture, we have found that the foundational first step toward creating a more diverse workforce — and realizing the many benefits it can bring to an organization — is the same as with any other business effort: setting goals.

In 2020, we published a series of ambitious goals to diversify our workforce: By 2025, we will increase African American and Black representation in our U.S. workforce from 9% to 12%, and increase Hispanic American and Latinx employees from 9.5% to 13% — in each case, this is an approximate 60% increase in the number of our people. At the same time, we will more than double the number of racially and ethnically diverse managing directors. We published additional aspirational goals in the UK and South Africa. (Similarly, in 2017, we announced our goal to become a gender-balanced workforce by 2025.) As we further expand our workforce — currently 540,000 people — to meet the growing needs of our clients, we believe that all of these goals have the potential to meaningfully strengthen the diversity of our company.

## **Getting to Setting Goals**

Developing ambitious but realizable representation goals can be challenging. A number of organizations focus on incremental, year-over-year increases. Others may set internal goals, but keep them private.

While we had set internal representation goals for many years, we realized that change would come only if we held ourselves publicly accountable, sharing our goals internally and externally. We had been publishing our workforce demographics since 2016, but we knew we needed to do more than just report our numbers. We were asking our people to make equality for all a personal priority, and we needed to be transparent about our own progress.

We looked outside Accenture for a robust set of best practices that would help us achieve the rigor and in turn, the confidence to share these goals, but came up short. So we created our own methodology based on a set of five key actions that keep the focus on human beings, not tallies on a spreadsheet:

**Analyze locally.** Goals need to reflect the communities where your people work and live. Look at the census and government population data for the countries in which you operate. But don't stop your analysis there, as demographics at the local level differ widely. With this data in hand, we prioritized growing our office locations in more diverse urban areas.

**Focus on skills, not education.** What percentage of roles truly require a four-year degree? What percentage can be accomplished with less formal education? Given the nature of our work, and consistent with market practices, we removed bachelor's degree requirements from 48% of our roles in the U.S., allowing us to access a broader talent pool with increased representation.

**Work the education-location equation.** To establish our goals, we looked at the proportion of people with and without bachelor's degrees, by race/ethnicity, in our largest office locations. For example, in the United States, labor force census data told us that 16.5% of people who live in the cities that are home to our top 10 office locations are African American, and 10.7% have four-year degrees in those locations—compared to 9.2% of African Americans in the U.S. overall. By understanding this mix, we determined a weighted goal of 12% for African American and Black representation

in our U.S. workforce. Had we not expanded our assumptions about education requirements and looked more closely at specific locations, our goal would have been several percentage points lower.

**Pressure test to ensure rigor and reasonability.** We weighed our goals against external benchmarks and asked our advisors Eric Holder, Aaron Lewis, Lindsay Burke from the law firm Covington & Burling LLP, as well as our African American board members, to examine and endorse our approach. We also pressure tested our goals against our existing racial/ethnic mix, attrition levels and recruiting trajectory to ensure a reasonable path to reaching them.

**Build your own pipeline.** Apprenticeship programs create new career pathways for non-traditional hires and re-skill people whose jobs have been — or will be — disrupted by technology. Since launching our program in 2016, we have trained more than 800 apprentices across the U.S. and have hired an overwhelming majority of them.

Once goals are in place, a critical next step can be determining how to hold leaders accountable for their contributions — an essential step on any road to change. We have adopted a scorecard that measures our top 500 leaders globally on a range of activity, including: sales, revenue, and profitability; retention of key talent; and the extent to which they advance our inclusion and diversity goals. Putting people metrics on par with financial metrics can be a game changer to accelerate progress toward your goals.

## **Percentages Aren't People**

We recognize that goals are only one step in the journey to creating sustainable and equitable change — and it's important to look beyond the numbers. Every organization must work to understand what representation truly means for its people. Without a vibrant culture that supports and sustains the desired change, there's a very real risk of creating an atmosphere of "divisive diversity."

These fundamental actions should complement any goal-setting effort:

- Are you actively listening to your people and holding open conversations about diversity? Are people comfortable speaking up?
- Does your work environment enable people to be their authentic self?
- Can people see others like themselves in your workplace?
- Are you taking new recruiting approaches to expand the pool of diverse candidates?
- Once people join, are your development and advancement paths helping them succeed?
- Are you sharing learnings with your business partners to multiply impact beyond the walls of your company?

By setting public goals and holding yourself to a higher level of accountability, your organization will build trust with all stakeholders. And by combining these goals with an investment in a culture of equality, you can help accelerate sustainable change and, ultimately, create value while leading with values.

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