



SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE MEDIA CONCERNING DIVERSITY WORKS

1. What is "Diversity Works?"

Diversity Works is an opportunity to promote, recognize and celebrate how workplace diversity helps organizations achieve their mission. It is a month-long event during October for which all workplaces are invited to develop at least one activity that communicates how diversity positively impacts business. The Partners for Workplace Diversity develop a set of such activities that are collaborative in nature and open to various segments of the community.

2. Who are the Partners for Workplace Diversity?

The Partners are an alliance among area employers committed to developing diversity initiatives for themselves and for the community. The initiatives supplement each partner's own firm-specific programs. There are some events, such as Diversity Works, which cannot be undertaken by a single organization; and there are others that are more cost effective if undertaken in collaboration. The partners have learned that a diversity advantage is not easily achieved in isolation. By interacting with other organizations, they can benchmark their activities, share information and experience, and exercise leadership in the community's culture. To be competitive, our Valley's firms require a community that is rich in diversity, that is diversity competent, and that values diversity as a business asset. Our economy depends as much on these characteristics as it does on the technical and educational talents of its labor pool.

3. What are the goals of the Partners for Workplace Diversity?

The primary goal is to provide education and facilitation activities that leverage diversity to build a climate that supports competitiveness and growth of our area's economy.



4. Diversity is a new "buzz" word today; does it name a new way of thinking or is it just a new name for what we already do?

“Diversity” represents a new way to think. Since the equal opportunity legislation of the 60s, affirmative action programs have shaped our understanding of demographic differences. Those programs are concerned with social justice towards particular groups of the United States population, emphasizing access to education and employment opportunity. Diversity thinking is a second set of ideas, grounded in the bottom line of business. Given the current demographic make-up of our population and the importance of globalization for competitiveness, even the smallest business or organization needs to be competent in addressing the needs of small, niche markets. The increases in manufacturing in recent years in the U.S. are due largely to globalization and small business. Net population growth is not from changes in birth and death rates, but from immigration. Effective businesses understand their markets in detail and interact with them effectively. Today’s rate of change also means that effective organizations will be constantly looking for opportunities to address new markets and respond to changes in current markets.

5. What are diversity competencies?

Diversity skills include the ability to listen from someone else’s perspective. Diversity competence requires that a person can change how he or she thinks about a product or service, a work process, and about how the environment operates. To be competent, an organization needs to recognize that each person in the market and each employee have a unique background and a variety of identities. Each identity brings perspectives to the workplace. Having a competitive organization means recognizing this fact and capitalizing on it. Being wedded to particular processes or to one set of values inhibits an organization’s abilities to think of and try new things, to relate to a variety of cultural and individual values and needs, and to create vision for itself. Interactions among employees, or between employees and members of the market, should be rooted in personal and organizational perspectives that define variations in identities and values as highly desirable. Such variations are not seen as problems or disagreements. Otherwise, the organization may communicate impatience or indifference to customers making new demands. It may miss opportunities.



6. **How does an organization benefit from diversity?**

If an organization recognizes that competing in today's economy means commitments to more customized approaches to the market place, then it will learn that homogeneity is deadly. When people are the same, norms develop that create inertia and resistance to change. Some values emerge which are presumed to be better than others.

Responsiveness declines. An organization, committed to maximizing the relevance of the variety of talents and perspectives available, adopts an approach that gives it several competitive edges including the following: it adopts a learning stance, it can view work and mission from multiple perspectives, it listens to its customers and employees about those matters, and it continuously renews its vision and identity. It then becomes an organization whose members take a mission perspective and who can interface with people whose perspectives and values are not the same as their own. This enables a hospital, for example, to treat the full community effectively. Such competencies enable a bank, for example, to provide products and services that actually meet needs of different customers; and they permit a university to attract and soundly educate a variety of different individuals (e.g., working adults, graduates of urban and rural schools, new immigrants).

7. **What kinds of differences are captured by the term, "diversity" as you use it?**

Diversity includes the full range of talents, skills, identities, experiences and perspectives in a set of individuals. We differ not only by gender and race (terms often used in affirmative action discussions) but also by age, memberships (labor/ management), religion, social class backgrounds, sexual orientation, education, job experience, work history, and physical, mental and emotional capabilities. Each of us has multiple identities, not one. The perspective associated with each one of them is potentially a valuable asset to growing a firm and our valley's economy. Older experienced individuals have much to learn from the perspective of someone much younger, right out of school. Similarly, the new employee has much to learn from the older, experienced employee. Managers have much to learn from union members working on their factory floors, and union members have much to learn from managers. If we stifle difference, we lose the diversity advantage. White men are diverse; young women entering the labor force are diverse; welfare-to-work persons are diverse; college athletes are diverse. It is about treating each individual in terms of his or her own heritage, skills, values and goals.



8. **What, then, is the goal from a diversity perspective?**

The goal from the point of view of this perspective is to create a very competitive workplace in which each individual contributes to mission in ways that improve both the mission and the individual's competencies. Obviously, a firm cannot do this on its own. It requires a cultural change toward work. The goal is not agreement, consensus, uniformity, etc. This is not a "melting pot" perspective. The goal is to build an economy that thrives and provides for the well-being of citizens and their communities by appreciating the range of individual choices about their own cultural, religious, economic and social life roles. This requires a culture as promised in the earlier days of this country--a culture in which individuals enjoy freedom of values and culture while participating in the larger economic and political life of our country.

9. **What might you say to those who see the diversity perspective as a way of avoiding the really difficult issues we face such as racism?**

Diversity initiatives are not directly programs aimed at reducing racism. However, a good diversity program should enable individuals to recognize that racism is not good for the economy or the community. It should also create a culture that is more responsive to initiatives and information directed at improving social justice issues related to racism. Diversity programs tend not to compare people using the experience of Euro-American as the norm or standard. They do not tend to stereotype races by social class, and they do not use racial identity as a "master" status. In the U.S. both types of programs are needed, since diversity perspectives are grounded in business thinking while race initiatives tend to be grounded in social justice.