



Treasury Talk TAKE-AWAY: Inclusive Environments and *Your Small Business*

1) Set your company's diversity and inclusion goal(s) and work toward sustainable change.

- For an initiative to be successful, set *realistic* expectations and prioritize one or two strategies for your small business. Understand that your priorities will vary depending on your business model.
- Committing to too many strategies at once can lead to feeling overwhelmed, and to unfulfilled outcomes.
- The goal is to create sustainable change. You may not get it perfect the first time and that is okay. Stay flexible and adaptable, and evaluate the success of your initiative over time to make changes.

2) Building an inclusive environment for a small business requires a shift in thinking and operational culture.

- Creating inclusive environments is the act of considering how others are able to engage with your business. It also means removing any barriers that prohibit people from performing their work as employees or engaging with you or your products as customers.
- As individuals, we often engage in our communities and societies with the understanding acquired through our own lived experiences. Our lived experiences are shaped with several different factors in mind including our location (urban, suburban, rural) and our immediate exposure to other/different lifestyles than our own.
- A business owner can begin to build and grow an inclusive environment by taking the time to step out of their own lived experience and evaluate and remove unintended barriers for their employees and customers.
- In addition to encouraging and supporting employees to be their best selves and do their best work in a fair and just workplace, diversity and inclusion practices have added external benefits. Removing barriers so a product or website is available to ALL people will contribute to a greater consumer base, higher product sales, and increased profit margins for your business.

3) Use cultural awareness to be more sensitive of your employees and customer base.

- As a first step, use an annually updated 'recognized/celebrated' list of dates to maintain awareness of cultural or religious days and how they affect both employees and customers. For example, a business owner would not want to schedule a staff lunch if employees were fasting while observing Ramadan. Savvy business owners will both respect their customers' culture(s) and beliefs -- and opportunistically, market to customer holidays.

4) Translate your inclusive business environment to the web, and make your physical location services available to everyone.

- In an e-commerce space you may want to prioritize having a completely accessible website that can interface well with assistive devices such as screen readers for the vision-impaired – however, all customers can benefit from color contrast, video captions, and the ability to increase text size.
 - Refer to the information at [Web Accessibility and the ADA](#) for guidance.
- In a physical location you may consider how accessible your entrance, exits and aisles are for individuals with assistive devices such as wheelchairs, canes, walkers and service dogs. Questions you can ask yourself include:
 - If I was not able-bodied, would I be able to access the entrance?
 - Once inside the store, would it be easy to move around and view or access the products?
 - If you answer NO to any of the questions, explore what solutions are reasonable for your business model and work to implement them.

RESOURCES

Wordstream (2022): [11 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Resources for Small Businesses](#)

U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2021): [6 Small Business Owners on Making Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Part of Their Business Plan](#)

Harvard Business Review (2022): [Data-Driven Diversity](#)

Take-away information based on Treasury Talk PODCAST hosted by MI State Treasurer Rachael Eubanks, and guest, Ashley Kuykendoll, director of MI Treasury's Recruitment, Development, & Inclusion Division.