

# How's Your Association Chapter's Diversity & Inclusion Programming?



As association chapters continue to look for ways to improve their benefits and become more engaging for members and potential members, one topic seems to be conspicuously absent: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). This is surprising, considering the importance of DEI in today's companies; many of your members' workplaces already place a significant focus on incorporating DEI programs and policies. So why don't chapters have that same focus?



Despite the undeniable importance of fostering diverse and inclusive communities, significant numbers of association chapters have yet to fully recognize and address the pressing need for DEI in their chapters.

But there are some that do. To understand the importance of DEI programming in association chapters, we spoke with Lisa Pecina, CLM, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer and Stephanie Henshaw, from the Kansas City Missouri chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators. They gave us some insight into the diversity, equity and inclusion programming in their chapter.

As part of their national organization's focus on DEI across their chapters, ALA, Kansas City started incorporating DEI into their programming "years ago." They have "had a visibility and diversity chair for years," she explained, "but we recently created the officer role and began to put programs in

place.” Today they have board members spearheading their DEI initiatives; a white paper that explains their focus on DEI; DEI programming specific to their chapter; and even a DEI book club. All of this was done to increase awareness of and sensitivity to the differences of their members and to advance inclusiveness and acceptance across the chapter.

“It is super important to be aware of and cognizant of your members,” Pecina says. “Our organization, as well as our clients, require a certain level of diversity. We wanted to be able to help [members] learn as much as possible.”

### **How did KCALA start their DEI program?**

KCALA’s initial focus was to ensure that their board and membership became more diverse. After that, they started to incorporate DEI-related educational programming. A conference called “Justice for All” was one of their first programs. With several speakers speaking on the different aspects of DEI, it was very well attended, and attendees found it highly educational.

### **The KCALA Book Club**

“We select books regarding diversity and biases,” Pecina explains. “It creates a great opportunity for members to connect with each other in a different way.” Wanting the program to be approachable, they meet every other week for a few months, breaking the books into sections for discussion. “Most of the topics are heavy,” she says, “so we give ourselves the ability to do the work without it being too overwhelming resulting in a better level of understanding.”

Members purchase their own books so that they can read in the format they want, and the meetings are held over Zoom. Books they’ve read so far include **The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias**, by Dolly Chugh and **Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America**, by Ibram X. Kendi.

### **Starting a DEI Program in Your Chapter**

Adding a DEI program can help your chapter in ways that include recruiting, engagement and retention. When members and potential members see that they’re being represented and valued, they can better relate to the organization and feel more connected to it.



Here are some easy ways to start or strengthen your association chapter's DEI program.

- **Add a DEI statement to your chapter website.** Create a diversity statement like ALA Kansas City's that discusses diversity, why it's important to your chapter and the ways in which you'll incorporate DEI into in your chapter.
- **Hold programming that is DEI focused.** Consider starting a DEI book club, holding meetings on timely, diversity-related topics or even full-day conferences on diversity, equity and inclusion in association chapters. To be sure you're holding the right programming, ask members what they'd like to see.
- **Create a DEI-related board position.** Rather than trying to put together a program in pieces, add a DEI position to your board. This way, you'll have a person responsible for ensuring you're doing what's best for your chapter.

## DEI is Critical to Association Chapter Success

It's your board's responsibility to be sure you're accurately representing your members and mirroring your association chapter population. Your program will only be strong when you have a plan to explore, address and incorporate the different opinions and perspectives of all your members.

"Our hope is to help everyone with more awareness and education regarding micro inequities," Pecina says, "getting a better understanding of their own biases, and gain more knowledge from others' experiences. This makes us better leaders and helps us create a healthier work environment."

Association chapter organizations need to prioritize DEI if they hope to foster a community where all members feel valued and empowered. By embracing diversity, organizations can better ensure that their chapter includes a wide range of perspectives to enrich discussions and decision-making processes.

Equity is crucial to providing fair opportunities for everyone to succeed, while inclusion creates an environment where all members feel respected and able to contribute. By promoting DEI, association chapters better fulfill their social responsibility and cultivate stronger member satisfaction and engagement. Having a chapter focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion isn't just a matter of compliance or social responsibility; it's also essential for its long-term success, relevance, and impact.

