

Creating a culture of inclusion and belonging: A look at Bi-State Development’s company-wide dedication to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

When Bi-State Development (BSD) began working on a strategic plan several years ago to reinvent its philosophy as an organization, the need to engrain one principle quickly came to the forefront — Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. These values inform everything Bi-State Development does, from the executive suite to the roads and rails of our region.

It began as a Racial Equity Pledge: *“Our vision is to commit ourselves to valuing each other for our unique experiences, insights and talents. To realize our vision, we will review and recommend policies and practices that align with BSD’s racial equity goals and strategic plan.”*

Yet it’s the action being taken on a daily basis that’s allowing Bi-State Development to live into that pledge; to “walk the walk” in every possible way.

To begin, BSD agreed upon a common language and a set series of definitions. This assured that nothing would be lost to interpretation. When dealing with such a wide range of human experiences, it’s essential that all initiatives begin with a sound starting point.

Diversity represents BSD’s dedication to representation from a range of traits and experiences. Equity means creating fair access to processes, procedures and resources. Finally, inclusion establishes how they can make their customers and



Many leaders of BSD’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts gather at the Civic Center Transit Center. (BSD/Metro)

team members feel valued, respected, and encouraged. These qualities are permanent considerations and inform the mission of every BSD initiative.

Among the current initiatives in motion:

Racial Equity Task Force takes action.

In 2020, BSD formed the Racial Equity Task Force. Its creation came at a critical time to turn empathy into action, following the murder of George Floyd and its representation of social injustice and

systemic racism. The Racial Equity Task Force goals include dismantling structural inequities and embedding equity in all we do to create a more inclusive workplace.

“We want to be more than reactive,” said Stacy McMurray, Director of Culture and Change Management at BSD. “DEI is about being proactive, continual change and putting strategies and initiatives in place before something happens.”

To start, the Racial Equity Task Force launched the Let’s Talk: Racial Equity

Initiative, working to build cultural awareness and develop a better understanding of team members. Over a year and a half, more than 100 people attended multiple sessions, sharing their experiences and fostering cultural understanding. Stacy said the task force developed several critical recommendations from those sessions on how BSD could create a more equitable and inclusive culture.

The recommendations include providing training, especially on cultural competency — the ability to communicate with people of different cultures. Another is studying data and creating plans to further equity, as well as providing resources to team members so they can further their professional development. The sessions also resulted in a suggestion to re-evaluate how BSD partners with underserved communities to focus on building ongoing and more strategic relationships.

Diversity and Inclusion Council helps drive cultural competency.

Formed earlier this year, the Diversity and Inclusion Council intends to promote and build the leadership within BSD needed to propel DEI efforts. Ultimately, the council’s goal is to connect diversity and inclusion efforts to BSD’s strategic plan by helping create an inclusive, welcoming environment.

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