

# DEI and LGBTQ+ inclusion in the St. Louis Metro region: “A Tale of Two States”



Jaimie Hileman

By Jaimie Hileman (she, her, hers)

I wrote here last September on some of the challenges in our region facing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and goals, particularly as they concern the LGBTQ+ community and the workplace.

What a difference two thirds of a year can make!

I’d like to address some of the changes we’ve seen and share some highlights as well as some opportunities.

My consultancy does everything from assessment, policy, and educational facilitation, from “LGBTQ+ Basics” to “The Business Case for Diversity” to “Creating Transgender Inclusive Space in Healthcare” and many points between.

I have clients on both sides of the river, but the regulatory playing fields between Illinois and Missouri are pretty different.

According to the MAP legislative tracker, we’ve seen over 650 anti-LGBTQ bills proposed in 46 states, a record for not only the most anti-LGBTQ bills in a single session in US history, but the most on ANY single subject.

Let’s compare the two state profiles of our region.

First, Missouri, whose legislature has proposed a record 48 anti-LGBTQ bills in 2023 alone. The state has a workforce in which 4% of folks are LGBTQ, 131,000 workers, but no protection under the MO state Human Rights Act (HRA) for sexual orientation or gender identity, for any attribute, including employment. There are several municipalities including Kansas City and St. Louis that have LGBTQ+ protections that cover about 47% of the state’s population.

Two anti-LGBTQ bills have passed the Missouri legislature and will likely become law.

Illinois has 326,000 LGBTQ+ workers, 5% of the total workforce. Illinois enjoys full inclusion of sexual orientation (SO) and gender identity (GI) as protected attributes in its Human Rights Act, for employment and all the other areas of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Here’s where some of the work I do helps businesses.

Companies large and small like having regulatory coherence where they do business, and not having to generate policy and compliance for 50 sets of rules if they don’t HAVE to. This is simply a dollars and SENSE proposition.

I help stakeholders assess and identify goals of inclusivity, develop strategies to achieve, and also provide the education and training to get there, as well determining efficacy, as in, “Did we do the thing we set out to do?”

Broken down, this work might look like policy research, removing unnecessarily gendered language, using more welcoming and inclusive language, deconstructing biases both implicit and explicit, and reducing assumptions that limit growth.

It sounds like what our folks and teachers used to tell us when we were “littles.” “To treat others as we would wish to be treated,” right?

While it sounds easy, it’s one thing when you’re SIX, another when it’s adults responsible for delivering an annual plan and all its goals, volumetric and qualitative, with a lot of different personality types, different skill sets, different leadership styles, and different areas of ownership in the plan.

That’s why we talk about the “Platinum Rule” in DEI. Like the good old “Golden Rule,” but updated: “Treat others in the way they would like to be treated.”

The difference seems small but it isn’t. The “Platinum Rule” implies that we KNOW how others would like to be treated. Here’s where cultural competency and a little humility become mission critical; we have to admit we don’t know everything, and that we might have to learn a little about others in order to reach that next level.

Some people are delighted to hear about this process and reach out excitedly to grab it with both hands, ecstatic that the training or discourse is evidenced base, engaging, relates to real goals, real world applicable, practical, and meets people where they are, vs. the fear of yet another HR training they have to battle to stay awake through. Others see it as change, which makes their blood run cold, because change for many people IS scary, and we have to acknowledge that in order to up the buy-in and group ownership.

This is the reason the evidence based platform and validation is so important.

Some of the tools we can look at involve measuring against benchmarks. For a lot of corporations, recommendations and ratings from civil rights organizations can provide valuable information about where a company is, and more importantly, how to chart a plan forward from there. They can serve as honest brokers outside of the corporation and its partners as third party validators.

Some of these examples include the NAACP (National African American civil rights advocacy) publishes reports on corporate social responsibility and the NAACP Opportunity and Diversity Report Card. The national LGBTQ+ civil rights group the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) publishes an annual CEI (corporate equality index), MEI (municipal equality index), and SEI (state equality index).

Unlike the 1-100 HRC CEI for individual corporations (almost every Fortune 500 company is listed and cooperates with the HRC in order to ensure accu-

rate reporting), the SEI or state equality index for LGBTQ+ people isn’t numeric but based on 4 different ratings:

- High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality
- Building Equality
- Solidifying Equality
- Working Toward Innovative Equality

The first, “High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality,” is the starting entry, and the fourth, “Working Toward Innovative Equality,” is the highest, reflecting a lot of hard work and achievement on legislation, education, and enforcement.

Missouri rates “High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality,” while Illinois is, “Working Toward Innovative Equality.”

Personally, I LIKE this scale!


Instead of a flat number like a high school exam for 100 points; where 90+ is an “A,” anything else is bad, these categories come with a lot of information that can be used to expand opportunity and develop positive change. It’s what any of us would request for feedback in our workplaces, or would like as leaders to be able to share with our direct reports; how do we bring everyone forward together using actionable metrics and identifying opportunities rather than playing a “blame and shame game.”

This is a good thing.





I’d one day like to see DEI viewed not as a “stick,” something we do to avoid risk, negative press, and reputational damage, but instead as the golden “carrot,” by creating value.

For more information on the work of TES, the Trans Education Service, please reach out and I’ll do my best to answer any questions.

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