

Expert Forum Article

Improving the Efficiency and Success of Your Diversity Recruiting Efforts

By [William \(Bill\) Shackelford](#)



One of the biggest challenges in diversity recruiting today is not building commitment but, turning commitment (and action) into results. Despite decades of focus – first on minority recruiting and then broadening the focus to diversity recruiting – too many organizations still struggle with building effective diversity recruiting efforts. I think I know what the problem is and how it can be effectively addressed.

For the past three decades I have provided diversity recruiting consulting services for public and private sector clients in diverse industries. Usually I am asked to help them improve their existing efforts. Although each client and their specific situation are unique, I have found several similarities. For example, most of them come to me with the same dilemma... they are frustrated with the poor results of their diversity recruiting efforts and unsure about how to turn things around. What I have found is that I can perform a preliminary diagnosis of their situation with just three questions.

Diagnosing the Situation

Q1: “What are you doing?” - What I usually find is that the organization is doing a lot. They researched best practices and incorporated a lot of what they learned into their efforts. This may include attending diverse job fairs, supporting diverse organizations, advertising openings in diverse sources, asking hiring managers to include diversity considerations in hiring, tracking EEO statistics and more. They know they are doing a lot of the right things but, success is still elusive.

Q2: “How much time and money are you spending on diversity recruiting?” – I typically get one of two responses to this question. Some will say that, percentage-wise, they spend more time and money on their diversity recruiting effort than they do on general recruiting. Others will proudly state they do not have a separate diversity recruiting effort. They often justify this approach with a statement like, “We don’t recruit for race or gender, we recruit for talent”. I don’t disagree with the intent of that approach.

However, if the organization has – for whatever reason – identified diversity as a business necessity, then that recruiting approach will not meet the needs of the organization until race, gender and/or other key diversity dimensions receive a higher level of focus.

Q3: “How effective is your diversity recruiting effort?” – Obviously the clients are not satisfied with their current efforts or they would not have reached out to me. However, I use this question to explore in more detail what they have tried that worked; and to identify strategies they have not tried that they should consider.

Describing the Problem

What I find to be the problem all too often is that recruiting leaders often do not have the same level of familiarity with the diversity recruiting market as they do with the general recruiting market. Therefore, they jump at any diversity recruiting opportunity that presents. This approach results in a series of unconnected activities that do not build one upon the other. For example, they may have a scholarship program with an institution but, not have that institution on their recruiting schedule. Or, they may give to several charitable organizations but, not stop to ask the question, “Are we supporting causes that are near and dear to the diverse communities in which we recruit?” These kinds of disconnects are what leads to frustration when the diversity recruiting results do not match the organization’s level of effort (and commitment).

Because they know they are committed to diversity and are doing a lot of the right things to recruit diversity, organizations often look externally for the source of the problem. One obvious target is the pool. I have clients that are convinced that their lack of diversity recruiting success is due to the fact that “the pool of qualified diverse candidates is too small”. In reality, the problem may not be the size of the pool but the time, resources and – most importantly – the strategy used to source the pool. For example, if 10% of the pool is diverse candidates and 5% of your hires are diverse, you should be asking the question “Who is hiring our other 5% and what are they doing that we are not doing?”

The Solution

In my previous WDN Expert Forum article “Strategic Diversity Recruiting Process: It’s the Process That Creates Success” I addressed the question of why some organizations have such great success with their diversity recruiting efforts while others struggle. I stated,

“When you benchmark organizations that have achieved high levels of success in

diversity staffing, you find one thing in common. They all take a strategic approach to diversity recruiting. They understand that a healthy diversity recruiting effort comes from a process that starts with building relationships within key sources and includes implementing strong strategies for retention.”

I went on to say,

*“To reach the highest levels of success, organizations must abandon tactical approaches to recruiting in favor of a **Strategic Diversity Recruiting (SDR)** approach. The strategic approach to diversity recruiting links all activities together such that the synergy accelerates success. It allows organizations to avoid the problem of investing time, energy and resources on recruiting activities that do not lead to sustained results. A SDR process has five components $\frac{1}{4}$ **Readiness, Outreach, Recruiting, Retention and Management Infrastructure.**”*

Shortly after writing that article I developed an instrument to assess organizations based on the Strategic Diversity Recruiting model. For each component of the SDR process I identified key activities or areas of focus. Each area of focus is assessed (on a Likert scale of 1-5) and rated. Ratings for all five components are tallied to produce an overall SDR rating. Finally, the instrument provides an interpretation of the score and actions that can be taken to improve the score.

This instrument was designed to be used in a facilitated session – ideally attended by all key stakeholders supporting the diversity recruiting effort. However, Human Resources/Talent Management leaders have found it also to be a tool they can use to quickly identify gaps in their diversity recruiting efforts.

The areas of focus for each SDR component are listed below. They were developed by analyzing the diversity recruiting activities of public and private sector organizations that have been recognized as having world class diversity recruiting efforts. It should be noted that some of the activities will be more difficult for smaller employers to incorporate into their efforts. However, every employer must have effective strategies in each of the five SDR components to reach a high level of success. For smaller employers, those activities may be vastly different from what others are doing.

SDR Areas of Focus

Readiness – Creating a culture of acceptance

- Cultural Assessment
- Diversity Recruiting Assessment
- Executive Development
- Management Development
- Employee Development

Outreach – Building a positive, consistent image

- Image Building
- Advertising
- Community Outreach
- Supplier Diversity
- Philanthropy

Recruiting – Identifying and attracting talent

- Identifying
- Attracting
- Applying
- Screening
- Hiring

Retention – Committing to the long-term growth and development of talent

- On-boarding
- Inclusion
- Developing
- Career Counseling
- Affinity Groups

Management – Building the infrastructure

- Strategic Direction
- Implementation Plan
- Implementation Team
- Leadership Support

- Return On Investment

Closing

I have introduced this strategic approach to diversity recruiting in organizations large and small; corporate, government, university and not-for-profit organizations with great success. I am confident that if you take a more strategic approach to diversity recruiting you will see a higher level of success.

About the Author

William (Bill) Shackelford is the Managing Partner of the Atlanta Consulting & Training Alliance (ACTA, LLC) a leadership development and strategic consulting company. Bill has nearly 30 years of diversity recruiting-related consulting experience. He is the author of the book *Minority Recruiting... Building the Strategies and Relationships for Effective Diversity Recruiting*. Mr. Shackelford can be reached at (404) 925-5440 or by email at bill@iecenterprises.com.

I have several copies of the Beta version of this tool that I am willing to share with the WDN audience (while supplies last). It is a hard copy so; I will need to mail it to you. Your contact information will only be used to mail you the SDR instrument and will not be retained.