

New York State Independent Living Council: Creating an Organization that leads with Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity

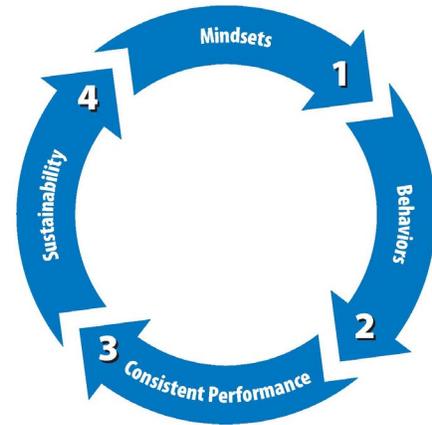
The uncertainties brought by 2020 are profound, but there is one thing we know for sure—now is not the time for half-measures or incremental change. With two major events—COVID-19 and the systemic racism that is the focus of Black Lives Matter—testing the limits of our institutions, our organizations, and our people, “slow and steady” and “check the box” approaches are not only insufficient, they are detrimental to an organization’s culture and reputation in the new normal we are experiencing. The public and many employees have little to no patience for platitudes or baby steps—there is a call to action. They want to see meaningful change and they want to see it quickly. Many organizations were already on a path for change and identifying where progress needs to happen for a more equitable, inclusive work environment and how to increase the diversity of their workforce and members to reflect who they serve. These times call for organizations to take a *leap forward*.

At The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc. (KJCG), we have partnered with organizations for 50 years to ensure they have and are gaining from the diverse range of talent they have or need for success and that individuals and teams are positioned to do their best work together through enhanced interactions. Founded in the 1970s, we are a black and veteran owned business and one of the first firms to leverage the concept of inclusion to improve individual, team, and organization performance. We have assisted organizations at every stage of the journey including conceptualizing and launching large-scale change strategies which align the culture to the mission; vision; and strategies of the organization. What follows is an overview of our approach to culture change and some initial thinking about how we would partner with the New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) to assess its current state and needs related to inclusion and diversity, both in support of the council and also for the populations served by the organization.

Approach to Change: How We Work

Mindsets for Transformation

When addressing a need for change, particularly related to inclusion and diversity, many organizations begin with prescribed lists of behaviors—“dos and don’ts” people should adhere to. Efforts that begin in this manner while well-intentioned, rarely achieve the desired success. Such efforts are often marked by inconsistent and uneven practice of behaviors, low levels of understanding about “what’s in it for me” to interact differently, little support for applying the expected behaviors, and a lack of accountability for behaving differently. Often missing from the conversation are the foundational mindsets that are needed to provide context and the “why” for any behavioral expectations. When the underlying mindsets are clear, they can guide people on how to conduct themselves in new and changing situations—no list of behaviors can be comprehensive enough to cover every possible situation, so the mindsets become guiding concepts that inform people’s behaviors so people can bring those mindsets to every situation.



In an inclusive culture, people at every level have more than just awareness of the unconscious bias that might lurk in their interactions—they practice ***Conscious Inclusion***—a range of simple but effective behaviors that enhance every interaction and enable people and teams to join each other across differences to connect and collaborate more effectively (*Conscious Actions for Inclusion: A Common Language to Drive Uncommon Results*, Katz & Miller, 2016). Once the talents of the people of the organization become unleashed in service of organization’s success individual, team, and organization performance reaches new heights. Viewed this way, inclusion is not a “nice thing to do” or even the end result, but an essential *HOW*. Inclusion becomes a way of life that underpins everything the organization does: how it develops strategy, sets goals, makes decisions, runs meetings, solves problems, executes operations, and engages people to accomplish its goals. The result is deeper engagement and satisfaction; the ability to respond to challenges and opportunities with speed and agility informed by the thinking of many, not just a few; and greater collaboration and innovation.

What follows are some initial thoughts about how we might partner to meet NYSILC’s desire to practice inclusive mindsets and conscious inclusion as it continues to assess and improve the State Plan.

Sample of the Council and State Plan Development on Education and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Positioning for Success

Prior to establishing the education and discussion focus of the diversity, equity, and inclusion sessions, KJCG will conduct initial virtual interviews, both one-on-one and in trios, with the Director, council members, and staff of NYSILC. The purpose of these conversations is to gather perspectives on the organization, identify what is going well and areas of strength, and discuss what challenges or barriers the organization needs to focus on to position itself to best serve its members internally and externally.

We would also want to review any content that could assist us in further understanding the mission, vision, and culture of NYSILC, where the organizations wants to be in 2-3 years, and any previous and/or existing education related to its culture, and diversity, equity and inclusion. From these conversations and review of information, we would fine-tune the groups focus and outcomes of the sessions and discuss headlines with Brad and the Chair of the Council.

Overview of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Education and Planning Sessions

The focus of the education and discussion sessions will be enhanced based on the outcomes of the interviews and further discussions with Brad and others as identified. Below is an overview of the structure of sessions with NYSILC.

Sessions 1, 2, and 3: Awareness, Education, and Action Planning (Three 4-hour sessions)

Our first session begins with an overview of “What We Heard” from the pre-session interviews and conversations thematically organized to retain confidentiality. This allows participants to see that their voices have been heard, identify with what others have said, and also begin on the same page with how others are experiencing their participation on the council, the work they are doing, and where there are areas for improvement.

Each piece of education throughout the three sessions is facilitated to invite conversation and, if appropriate, assess the individual, group, and organization levels to continue identifying opportunities for improvement and discuss next steps. Action planning is critical to not holding education sessions for a “check-the-box” experience but to continuously move an NYSILC forward. The group will spend time in small group discussions reviewing the 2021-2023 State Plan and identify how diversity, inclusion, and equity can be highlighted and emphasized. Where appropriate, identifying where on a list of priorities suggestions or actions should stand can indicate how strongly the

organization needs to act. A temporary committee of volunteers will gather, consolidate, and organize the suggestions for presenting to the council after the sessions are complete.

Session with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (One 2-hour session)

After the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee has consolidated and organized the suggestions made by the council, KJCG will meet with the committee to act as a sounding board before presenting the recommendations to the full council. KJCG can share best practices where applicable and give additional considerations for the plan.

Next, we have shared our initial thoughts on educational content for sessions with the NYSILC and the staff. This is a small sample of what education and discussions could be included in the sessions with additions and enhancements to be assessed throughout pre-session discussions.

They Are All Not the Same: Compliance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become terms synonymous with each other and as a result of being grouped together, their meanings have become misunderstood further watering down their power. A review of their definitions to create common language will enable participants to be on the same level of how to identify and analyze these across an organization. Further, participants begin to assess where their organization has focused on until now and where they feel the organization needs to improve to get where they want to be.

Judging and Joining

The decision to engage with someone as a friend or foe, an ally or a competitor determines almost everything about an interaction, from how we listen to them to how we respond or interact. Building an understanding of the ways we bring a judging mindset to our interactions with colleagues, members, and visitors can break this negative and challenging cycle (or at least speed it up to quickly move beyond it) so that we can join others for co-creation, partnership, and shared success. Participants will be asked to reflect on circumstances when they felt judged and joined, the impact on them, and how they can be individual and group contributors towards moving to a more joining mindset.

Conscious Actions for Inclusion

In this fast-paced and remote world, common language is even more important than ever before to eliminating waste, confusion, and re-work. The Conscious Actions for Inclusion establishes this common language by applying simple yet powerful behaviors with

anyone in the organization who can adopt them to immediately improve interactions and work culture. Discussion of the behaviors includes time for individual assessment; action planning; goal setting; and peer-to-peer problem solving and coaching. Participants use a self-assessment tool to create their own behavioral baseline against which they can self-monitor progress. The tool is also a valuable guide for each participant to use in initiating a discussion in a meeting, one-on-one with peers, or with their manager about expectations and performance.

Action Planning

We want the council to spend time discussing how they can apply the learnings to the NYSILC State Plan and other areas or documents where the organization can outline areas of improvement. Participants will be asked to propose enhancements and next steps based on their learnings and suggest how to prioritize the areas of change. A subgroup or committee of key stakeholders will be identified and tasked with incorporating the enhancements and suggestions of the group. The finalized document will be proposed to the full council for review and approval.

Again, we share the above outline as some initial thinking and expect, through discussions with staff and council members, that this outline should be enhanced.

Next Steps

We have estimated the reduced fees at a for the above-described assessment process, including all design and preparation, interviews, and sessions to be approximately \$33,000-37,000.

At this moment, we anticipate all meetings and sessions to be virtual. Should we have the opportunity to facilitate a session in-person, expenses such as travel, materials, etc. are additional.

Brad, we hope the above thinking on an approach to addressing the diversity, equity, and inclusion needs at NYSILC is helpful as you consider how to proceed. As we said, this is our initial thinking with adjustments to be made as we continue to have conversations. We see our client partnerships as just that—partnerships. We anticipate that any approach we take would shift to accommodate what we learn about the organization and its people and our partnership with you.

Attachments

Please find the attached documents sharing qualifications and certifications of KJCG and the consultants who may be included in the work:

- About KJCG
- Client list
- Selected biographies for those who may be included in the work (Melissa Núñez and Lata Chawla)

Please find the attached referenced and supporting documents:

- Article: *Conscious Actions for Inclusion: A Common Language to Drive Uncommon Results*
- Article: *Judging Other Has Not Worked...So Let's Join Them*