

# Creating a Diversity and Inclusion Program



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## OVERVIEW

In 2017, BCAA decided to formalize its Diversity and Inclusion Program. While diversity and inclusion have always been key features of BCAA's culture, the organization felt that a more formal program would allow for more intentional strategies and evaluation, and would support their team to do even more to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce.

## OBJECTIVES

- Document and recognize existing best practices being implemented.
- Adopt practices to help BCAA achieve its aspirational vision of workplace culture.
- Prioritize inclusion – and give it more visibility – especially mindful of its importance to prospective employees in their initial assessment of an organization.
- Continue a proactive *People First* strategy by aligning impactful diversity and inclusive initiatives.

## APPROACH

In 2016, BCAA conducted a survey of all employees to assess their perceptions of the current workplace culture. Subsequent analysis and workshops by senior and executive leadership, helped determine BCAA's desired, aspirational culture and a road map to guide the organization's actions and decision-making to move towards it.

This work confirmed that only minor adjustments were required, and that BCAA's "People First" culture strategy was being received well by its employees. To further strengthen this strategy, BCAA decided to adopt a formal diversity and inclusion program, to support the objectives listed above.

BCAA's approach involved:

- Creating a business case around diversity and inclusion, including clear intentions for the program.
- Launching the idea of a diversity and inclusion program with employees at a town hall meeting.
- Researching and collecting resources from various sources to develop a plan.
- Surveying employees to get their feedback on the plan.
- Presenting a plan to the executive team.

## Creating a Business Case

BCAA's annual employee experience survey confirmed that the majority of employees felt that BCAA's focus was on its people; and that they wanted to be valued for the unique experiences they bring to the organization. With these points in mind, BCAA's People & Development (HR) team created a business case to describe the benefits of a diversity and inclusion program to the organization. The plan included the program's intentions and expected outcomes. It also shared a high-level overview of key strategic activities to undertake during the program's first year.

## Town Hall Launch

Shom Sen, BCAA's CEO, introduced the idea of a diversity and inclusion program and next steps at a quarterly employee town hall meeting. The response from employees was overwhelmingly positive and confirmed that this was the right direction for BCAA.

## Research-based Plan Development

While researching how to develop its diversity and inclusion plan, BCAA found that there were a lot of available resources in the market to support employers. Rather than starting from scratch, they were able to draw upon established expertise and best practices, to create a base plan it could then adjust and personalize to fit BCAA's culture and objectives.

Some resources used included: [www.accessibleemployersca](http://www.accessibleemployersca), The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion's toolkit, and articles from sources such as the Harvard Business Review. The team also found many organizations that were further along in certain aspects and more than willing to share knowledge.

## Getting Feedback

BCAA knows that a key aspect of ensuring relevance and employee engagement is soliciting feedback, both from employees, and from its executives. The team's next steps include engaging these two groups to ensure their plan makes sense and is impactful for the whole business.

## OUTCOMES

BCAA has already seen some early outcomes from its work. The team has noticed more conversations taking place about inclusion, across every aspect of BCAA and its business. For example, accessibility is now a more formal element of BCAA's Real Estate team's assessment of current properties and a key feature in searches for new space across British Columbia.

BCAA was also pleased to achieve a 75% response rate to its employee culture survey, and hopes to continue to use its employees' engagement to get feedback on strategies.

Overall, BCAA feels that formalizing its diversity and inclusion plan has prompted people to think differently about how to approach all aspects of business and operations.

## LESSONS LEARNED

BCAA shares the following early learnings.

### **Involve a Diverse Group of People**

BCAA found that it was extremely important and valuable to involve a diverse group of people from the outset, so it could take multiple, unique perspectives into account when building its plan.

### **Ensure Leadership is on Board**

The team knew that responsibility for diversity and inclusion could not sit only within HR – only full executive support would give it the reach to be successful. To ensure a diversity and inclusion plan was rated as sufficiently important to become a main priority, the HR team worked closely with the executive team at every step, to ensure full understanding of the positive impact for the organization, and how to embed diversity and inclusion into every day work.

### **Research Before Implementation**

When embarking on this work, BCAA found lots of valuable resources available, and many organizations to learn from. A big part of its focus was to use research to understand what already exists, and to learn from the experiences of others, before working to create its own plan.

### **Understand Your First Impression**

BCAA has always understood that people's first impression of a brand can set their lasting perceptions – for everything, including diversity and inclusion. BCAA wanted to be seen as inclusive in the market, through its customer experience and its job application process. Through extensive, careful research, it sought to gain a deep understanding of people's first impression of BCAA, to better identify opportunities to improve.

### **Tackle One Thing at a Time**

One of the challenges when creating a diversity and inclusion strategy can be the sheer number of possibilities and initiatives that an organization can undertake. BCAA was able to step back and appreciate that it would achieve sustainable change and meet its program objectives, through a carefully planned, multi-year strategy that delivered a combination of 'quick wins' and longer-term initiatives.

## NEXT STEPS

BCAA's next steps are to finalize its draft plan, and take it to employees for feedback. Once employee feedback is incorporated, the team will present the final plan to its executive team for approval and formal launch.

BCAA looks forward to applying a diversity and inclusion lens to the way its employees work with each other and with BCAA Members and customers.