



Diversity and Inclusion Best Practices

US Lacrosse seeks to foster a national lacrosse community that encourages understanding, appreciation and acceptance of all within its membership, volunteer base, and staff. Further, US Lacrosse believes that broad representation and participation add significant value to the lacrosse experience of each of us, and that these valued experiences are enhanced by embracing underrepresented and underserved communities.

-- US Lacrosse Diversity and Inclusion Statement



Creating a Sustainable Inclusion & Diversity Strategy

The goal for each program, chapter or league should be to become an organization where diversity and inclusion are a fundamental part of the values and culture of the program. Bringing together varied life experiences and perspectives adds significant value to your community and reinforces the concept of inclusivity. Ask any successful lacrosse coach and they will tell you, a team is not at its best with 25 defenders or 25 attackers on one roster. You need a diverse group of players that fit various roles for your team to be successful.

Why should you run your organization any differently? If you appoint 12 coaches and staff that look and think differently than you, you will reap the payoffs resulting in increased creativity, improved productivity, global understanding and added insight for your organization.

Despite the benefits, diversity continues to be one of the most elusive challenges in our sport. Many organizations find themselves saying: “We know inclusivity is important and we value that in our organization, but where should we start?”

These ten best practices were compiled to assist programs, US Lacrosse chapters and organizations with inexpensive ways to integrate inclusivity and accessibility into your organization. Each topic includes a general description with overarching strategies, complete with practical, ready-to-use information for any program or organization that needs to advance their diversity and inclusion practices.

- 1 - Communicate the importance of inclusion within your team and organization.**
- 2 - Create an inclusive team environment and practice inclusive team behaviors.**
- 3 - Create strategic partnerships with organizations that feature diverse populations.**
- 4 - Review your local diversity data annually to assist in setting goals.**
- 5 - Implement a volunteer or staff diversity protocol that outlines the process for securing diverse leadership in your organization.**
- 6 - Mentor and create a pipeline.**
- 7 - Examine your assumptions.**
- 8 - Allocate funds specifically for outreach initiatives to alleviate barriers to participation.**
- 9 - Revamp your outreach efforts.**
- 10 - Continually evaluate your Diversity and Inclusion Plan.**



1 -- Communicate the importance of inclusion within your team and organization.

Nearly all successful organizations have a mission statement or philosophy that establishes the platform for their values and identity. Your organization should engage in continuous discussion on how to strategically implement diversity priorities from the top down. Conduct a culture assessment of your organization, using interviews, surveys or a focus group to determine what adjustments could be made to maximize cultural awareness and open communication. Some basic examples of how to communicate your organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion:

- Create and fully embrace a diversity and inclusion philosophy and mission statement for your organization. Make sure to publicize your mission statement and communicate your philosophy to all staff, parents and players.
- Add a non-discrimination policy to your bylaws or team rules to include sexual orientation, gender identity and bullying.
- Create a public mechanism to share best practices throughout your chapter, league or program.
- Emphasize your organization's diversity in your publications, documents and media materials including skill, ability, race and gender.
- Train all of your coaches and volunteers on instructions designed to enhance the learning environment on the field and adopt coaching styles that reflect the values of diversity and inclusion.
- Highlight successes in diversity on your website and in media communications.

Defining diversity as an organizational priority states the significance of these expectations and objectives with your administration.



2. Create an inclusive team environment and practice inclusive team behaviors.

Here are some easy guidelines to help your organization create an inclusive team environment both on the field and in the office:

- ***Establish initial ground rules for interaction.*** This will assure that your coaching staff and your players are also being inclusive and respectful. In order to generate total buy-in into the ground rules, you can involve the team in the process of establishing them. This will be a continuous effort, so you will need to enforce your team rule and use those non-inclusive statements as an opportunity to correct and educate your team as a whole.

- ***Provide necessary accommodations for students with disabilities.*** Coaches and instructors are required by law to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. No player learns or communicates the same. Plan to adjust a practice plan or the way you teach, so that each player gets the maximum learning experience from practice.

- ***Surveys are a great tool to help understand your players and coaches.*** Based on survey results you can create or modify teaching techniques to motivate each individual to be more productive. Ask questions such as “What type of learner are you?” or “How do you handle conflict?” and “How do you like to be rewarded for a job well done?” The answers to these questions can give insight that can help your players and staff excel in their current roles.

- ***Use team-building exercises to generate open discussions.*** This is a fun and effective way to help your staff and players get to know one another and appreciate their differences. Have a team-building day where everyone answers a list of questions ranging from “Where did you grow up?” to “What is your favorite movie?” Getting to know your players and staff on an individual basis will allow for additional opportunities for interaction and social connection.



3. Create strategic partnerships with organizations that feature diverse populations.

Minorities and other diverse participants are often times not necessarily looking for playing opportunities in the same way as non-diverse participants. You need to be prepared to publicize and showcase your program where your target audience is looking. Cultivating strategic partnerships with other organizations that have a direct impact on the underserved youth you are looking to include will allow you to get your organization's message to another group of potential participants. Examples of organizations in your community that cater to a large diverse population.

- Boys and Girls Club (www.bgca.org)
- Churches or religious affiliates
- Local Girls and Boys scout troops
- Playworks (www.playworks.org)
- YMCA (www.ymca.net)
- Kids in the Game (kidsinthegame.org)
- Up2Us/Coach Across America (www.up2us.org/)
- Summer day camps
- Day care or after-school programs
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- All-women colleges or universities

4. Review your local diversity data annually to assist in setting goals.

One candid way to identify diversity recruitment opportunities is to simply measure your lacrosse program's actual diversity and compare it to your local city's diversity. For example, if one percent of the youth on your team or in your league are African-American, but African-Americans make up 30 percent of the local community, you know you have an opportunity.

It is a valuable tool to break down your program and look at diversity across a variety of categories. For instance, are you diverse at the leadership level? Does your board of directors have enough diversity? How about your coaching staff?

Check out your national census data to see what the diversity breakdown is in your region at: www.census.gov/#

See the USL Diversity and Inclusion Assessment Toolkit for Leaders for more information about how you can evaluate your organization's overall diversity and inclusion.

If you are going to be recruiting diverse youth players, it makes sense to ascertain that diversity is adequately represented in your leadership as well. Ask yourself, does your program represent the diversity that you aspire for the sport to be?

5. Implement a volunteer or staff diversity protocol that outlines the process for securing diverse leadership in your organization.

The staffing process should be consistent and clearly defined to all involved in your organization. It's important to create detailed strategies that can help you increase the number and quality of applicants for your open staff and volunteer positions.

It is one thing to acknowledge that diversity is important to your organization. It's another thing altogether to deliberately seek diverse representation.

Your players and parents look to see if there are people in the organization who look like them and who can identify with their values and culture.

To recruit and retain a diverse pool of high-potential staff, your organization must:

- Understand demographic changes in your organization and track the data when possible.
- Educate staff that the word diversity does not always mean minority. Find ways to recruit beyond issues of race, while at the same time increasing access and opportunities for people of color and other minorities.
- Develop a diversity-friendly culture both on the field and in the office.
- Understand the value of hiring millennials and be conscious of hiring across generations.
- If possible, collect information about who is applying for your volunteer and/or staff positions (veterans, race, disability, age, gender) and use this information to help set a strategy or recruitment method.



6. Mentor and create a pipeline.

Mentoring can be an effective practice for less experienced individuals at all levels to be able to connect with and learn from highly seasoned individuals with many years of experience. Mentors serve many roles for their mentees and also contribute to team or staff success and serve as a means of identifying and promoting high-potential leaders in your organization. By mentoring a diverse group of young future leaders, you cast the broadest net possible to look for a diverse group of up and coming candidates to join your team or staff. Talk about how a mentorship program can create a pipeline for diverse individuals to serve in leadership roles within your own group or other similar organizations and create an ongoing support structure for your mentees.

7. Examine your assumptions.

It is very common for coaches to assume that each player on their team shares his/her own background, but this is not necessarily so. Do you sometimes find yourself addressing your team as if they all share your religious faith, sexual orientation, or socio-economic class?

All too often we automatically assume other people have our same frame of reference and we speak as if everybody is familiar with them. We might not realize that the terms or examples we use do not resonate as strongly with certain players, and ultimately our language and focus can serve as a barrier.

Here are some examples of questions we might ask ourselves.

- Do I expect my players to share my cultural and political views?
- Do I expect most of my players to come from similar backgrounds?
- Do I expect most of my players to understand my culture or media references?
- Do I link certain individual characteristics or tendencies with levels of intelligence and ability?
- Do I treat my players as if they are all heterosexual?
- Do I treat all of my players as if they are all of similar faith or religion?
- Do I think all players look like the gender or race they identify as?
- Do I think I naturally know which players have physical or mental/learning disabilities?
- Do I assume most players of certain races come from lower income families or have weaker academic standing?

There are life lessons associated with these questions that you, your staff and your players can learn from and discuss.

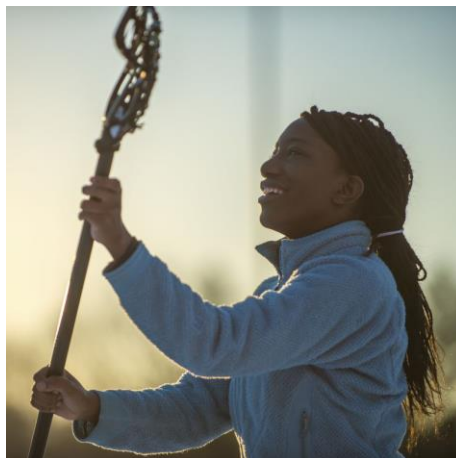


8. Allocate funds for outreach initiatives to help alleviate barriers to participation.

Allocate money in advance to go towards scholarships and assistance for participants with financial needs. With increased equipment costs, continued escalating costs of clinics and traveling club programs, access and opportunity challenges exist within the sport. You will need to develop new efforts to increase access to the sport.

Simple outreach strategies may include:

- Provide advertising about financial aid opportunities to low-income and other underrepresented groups.
- Support team development efforts that prioritize resources for financial need.
- Allocate funding in your budget each year for diversity initiatives, recruitment efforts, and financial assistance.
- Develop alternative sources of scholarship and financial aid through community sources and donors.
- Create a recurrent program scholarship pot for low-income students in order to assist them in with the financial cost associated with membership, fees and equipment costs.
- Have staff members attend an annual local diversity and inclusion awareness training.



9. Revamp your outreach efforts.

So how do you do this? There is no one standard approach, but there are many different creative ways to find diverse players and staff. Also, not all outreach strategies are best for every location, so your program or organization can always benefit from trying new approaches to find the best candidates. Some recruitment strategies and how they might work:

- Prior to the season, design specific multicultural recruitment efforts to introduce underrepresented groups to your lacrosse program.
- Create presentations to expose underrepresented students and coaches to lacrosse in classrooms and pass out flyers at your local schools recruiting both coaches and players.
- Cultivate relationships with guidance counselors from diverse schools in your area to assist with recruitment efforts.
- Invite neighborhood public schools to lacrosse practice/game for a day or a week.
- Run free (or minimal cost) clinics in PE programs or after-school programs.
- Develop relationships with diverse community organizations and let them know about the opportunities you have in your program.
- Always send a recruitment staff that understands diversity and inclusion sensitivity and is willing to go out of their comfort zone to attract the best students and coaches for your program. If there is no one on your staff that feels comfortable to engage in these exchanges, actively recruit or develop relationships with individuals who can assist with your efforts.

10. Continually evaluate your Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

Create accountability for the items in your program's inclusion plan. Set monthly goals for your program or organization and meet each month to go over the steps needed for each goal and where you are in the progress. Create and STICK TO a timeline to measure your effectiveness and create policies and procedures to enforce your strategies.

Other guidelines for your inclusion plan should be as follows.

- Create policies and procedures that will sustain and retain new staff.
- Make time each meeting for your outreach advisory board or diversity representative to give an update on current initiatives.
- Put various staff members in charge of each strategic inclusion initiative. Don't place all duties strictly on your D&I volunteer or staff member.
- Create a diversity statement and an accompanying plan to develop and sustain diversity.
- Conduct student and coaches exit interviews (where possible) to uncover areas needing improvement.
- Provide continuous professional development opportunities like leadership and training.
- Build a dynamic, innovative work and play environment.
- Take active steps to continually ensure the office and field of play is free of unprofessional language and conduct
- Institute a recognition/reward system.

Continuously placing focus on inclusion is not always an easy process. It will take time and effort, but it's a significant component of any community and should be woven into the fabric of the daily operations in your organization.



See the [USL Diversity and Inclusion Assessment Toolkit for Leaders](#) for additional information about how to incorporate greater diversity representation into your lacrosse organization.