



## Diversity & Inclusion Roundtables

### Introduction

The Twin Cities, where I live, has been home to the “Twin Cities Diversity & Inclusion Roundtable” (TCDIR), an organization of diversity and inclusion professionals who regularly meet to share about D&I concepts and ideas. TCDIR meetings occur bi-monthly for two hours of networking and D&I programming. Additionally, the group hosts a day-long symposium every August. TCDIR is a completely voluntary organization; it doesn’t charge membership fees or dues and relies on the support of sponsors (various Twin Cities employers) for meeting spaces and refreshments. I am presently on the TCDIR executive committee.

When I train outside of the Twin Cities, my fee is usually quoted as a “day rate,” meaning that I am happy to engage in more than one activity during a nine-hour business day. Often that means I will conduct multiple trainings for my client; however, sometimes the client will ask me to fit in meeting with the client’s employee resource groups (such as an LGBTQ or women’s ERG) as part of the day.

On other occasions, a client will ask me to lead a D&I roundtable for local diversity and inclusion professionals. For example, in October 2018, The Bushnell Performing Arts Center in Hartford retained me to conduct multiple Gray Area Thinking® trainings over two days. In between those trainings, I chaired four meetings of diversity and inclusion professionals and human resource managers who were from Hartford area businesses, nonprofits and educational institutions.

### Why Convene a D&I Roundtable?

Working in the D&I field can be challenging—often, the person charged with overseeing an organization’s diversity and inclusion efforts has a limited budget or minimal staffing support. Frequently, there are degrees of institutional resistance to diversity and inclusion concepts, particularly when the organization undertakes D&I initiatives or action plans. Frustration and fatigue are hallmarks of this profession. Yet, this work is incredibly important since it fosters positive change that benefits team members (and potential team members) from marginalized communities who historically have been shut out from higher level employment opportunities or from upward mobility within organizations.

Given this, a primary goal of a local D & I roundtable could be to provide space for D&I and related professionals (human resource managers, compliance officers, in-house trainers) to brainstorm about challenges and successes in this field. Too often, this work is siloed where it’s difficult to hear about ideas/concepts/initiatives that either work or don’t. By convening a meeting of folks working in this field, people may view the roundtable as a valuable resource unlike any other.

A secondary goal of a D&I roundtable could be to provide fellowship with like-minded (and passionate) professionals. One cannot overstate the significance of knowing that someone outside one’s organization is there for emotional and professional support. Plus, it’s always nice

to have someone to laugh with—who will readily understand the nuances and inside stories of this work. Thus, organizing a roundtable could provide a unique networking opportunity that may benefit attendees long after the roundtable is over.

Another roundtable goal could be to give local D&I professionals a collective identity and voice. For the most part, D&I work is invisible; by coming together at a roundtable, professionals in this field may be able to feel a sense of affinity that otherwise could be difficult to achieve.

Finally, the organization convening a D&I roundtable very well could gain a reputational payoff—certainly, the entity would be able to rightfully assert that it values diversity and inclusion both as an organization and as a community member. Moreover, if there was an interest in on-going roundtables (such as what exists in the Twin Cities and now in other cities where my clients have convened an initial roundtable that I oversaw), the organization would retain “bragging rights” for having helped create an important D&I community asset.

## Mechanics

Convening a D&I roundtable isn't complicated. The convener need only promote the event with various groups or entities in the local metropolitan area, such as major employers; the local Chamber of Commerce; business trade groups; the United Way; the YWCA/YMCA; the local nonprofit council; and any other entity that represents a “hub” where word of the roundtable could be shared with others.

I can provide copy for an email/flyer/social media to promote the roundtable. Additionally, I will provide an agenda for the meeting. Generally, the meeting will start with me sharing some observations and insights about diversity and inclusion that I've gleaned from working across North America in all sectors. I will then open the floor to anyone who wants to share about challenges or successes they've experienced; usually from there, wonderful robust conversations flow.

The convening organization necessarily supplies the space for attendees to meet (which if possible, includes a “roundtable” room set up) and refreshments. Some conveners have served lunch if the roundtable occurs during the noon hour between morning and afternoon trainings.

## Summary

While there's some work to convening a Diversity & Inclusion Roundtable, the possible payoffs are immense—revitalized local diversity & inclusion professionals who will be better supported as they work to make their organizations more diverse and inclusive. From that can flow better opportunities for humans from historically marginalized groups. It's all about making sure that you keep the big picture in mind!

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