



# Implementing a Diversity and Inclusion Committee at Cuso International

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## Context

Cuso International is an international development organization that works to eradicate poverty and inequality through the efforts of highly skilled volunteers, partners and donors. It was founded in 1961 by a group of Canadian university graduates who had a vision for a more connected world where everyone can reach their full potential. Since then, Cuso International has mobilized thousands of volunteer professionals with various backgrounds and skillsets who work with local partners to create positive, lasting change.

At the core of Cuso International's values are respect and equality for all people, with an emphasis on partnerships. This is not only represented in the people we serve, or the volunteers we recruit, but also in our employees.

Cuso International's leadership recognizes the importance of diversity, and these values are represented in the organization's employee charter. However, as is the case with many non-profits, there has not been the capacity to operationalize inclusive initiatives.

## Work Plan

This project began by conducting informational interviews with people across the organization, in leadership, HR and programming roles, to better understand the current state of Cuso International's diversity and inclusion efforts.

These meetings helped to illuminate that although there was a lot of expertise and external practices in place for partners and volunteers, there was a lack of formal diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives for employees.

After discussing ideas with the Director of HR, the decision was made to develop a diversity and inclusion (D&I) committee, as a clear, concrete first step to the organization's efforts. There is already a commitment from Cuso International's leadership, so the goal of the committee will be to operationalize this commitment, to ensure that inclusion is infused into all departments/levels of the organization, and to bring diverse perspectives to the decision-making table.

## Benefits of a D&I Committee for Employee Engagement

- Employees see the leadership team as visibly committed to D&I, creating a culture of inclusion that will enable them to reach their full potential in the organization.
- Serves as another venue for employees to raise concerns, provide feedback and have their feedback heard.
- Members of committee will be representative of all levels/departments – they are accountable for progress of the organization's inclusion efforts and will create plans to embed these efforts into their own departmental or personal work objectives

- The committee works towards inclusion, social justice and fairness for all employees - treating people equitably and ethically.
- The committee, through its mandate and goals, will increase the competence of employees to interact effectively with each other and external stakeholders in the context of many similarities and differences.
- Provides diversity/HR with a wide scope/pulse of the organization by having all organizational units represented; strategies/initiatives can be tailored to meet the direct needs of the employees.
- Acts as an efficient point of contact that represents the entire organization.

## Project Focus

The implementation of the D&I Committee will be divided into 3 phases:

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### **Phase 1: Build a mandate**

Review the definitions of diversity, inclusion and any other relevant terms at Cuso International.

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Develop terms of reference that identify the committee's mandate, goals, procedures, role of the members and term of commitment.

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Ensure the mandate and objectives are in scope with an operational committee.

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Get leadership support and buy-in on the definitions and terms of reference

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### **Phase 2: Recruit**

Develop a list of required competencies for committee members.

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Ensure member recruitment also balances representation from different departments, perspectives and decision-making levels.

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Develop, with the help of the HR department, a selection process for members and assign lead decision-makers.

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Develop timelines and communications to managers and staff on nomination of employees/peers, and on application requirements.

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### **Phase 3: Onboard**

Design and implement an orientation process for committee members.

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The committee's first meeting will serve as the onboarding process: members will review the drafted definitions, the committee's terms of reference and mandate, role of members.

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Gain consensus on a code of conduct and guidelines of participation (time commitment, frequency of meetings, inclusive behaviours).

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Deepen the committee members awareness of inclusion practices - develop list of training materials for all members to complete: recognizing bias, power/privilege, anti-oppression.

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## **Timelines and Next Steps**

Phase 1 will be presented to the Director of HR and senior management for feedback in March 2019. Please see Annex for draft terms of reference.

Once approved, Phase 2 will be developed, with committee recruitment in April 2019. The goal is to complete Phase 3 and the first D&I committee in May 2019.

After the committee has been formed and onboarded, members will need to develop 3-5 clear, measurable goals to share with management to ensure everyone is aligned. To help achieve the goals, specific objectives that are to be achieved in the first year, as well as in year 2 and 3 should be articulated.

## **Recommendations and Limitations**

It is recommended that the terms of reference remain as a draft until the newly formed committee has the opportunity to review. The members will have more ownership if they are engaged in creating the guiding principles.

The committee needs to include members with a mix of experience, age, gender, abilities, thinking styles etc. However, due to the varied locations/time zones of Cuso International employees, convening a committee of international members may become a challenge.

In order to properly represent all employees and the nuances of challenges around the world, it is recommended that Cuso International use this implementation plan to develop a D&I Committee for each of its 4 regional hubs. While each committee would operate independently to represent the unique needs in their region, the co-chairs of the regional committees should meet once a quarter (or at a frequency deemed appropriate) to identify overarching initiatives or policies that can be presented to senior management.

This plan is focused on operationalizing diversity and inclusion with employees and senior management at Cuso International. However, for an organization to truly embody inclusive practices, it needs to start at the top. It is recommended that senior management present the D&I committee plans to the board of directors and challenge them to implement their own strategies at the governance level.

## **Conclusion**

This plan has been created to guide Cuso International's initial development of a D&I Committee, but this is just the first step to becoming a leading example of inclusive practices in the international development sector. Due to the evolving nature of these initiatives, a monitoring and evaluation system will need to be implemented to measure the continued success of the organization's D&I objectives.

## References

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## Annex

### DRAFT Terms of Reference for the Diversity and Inclusion Committee

#### Statement of Commitment

Cuso International is committed to establishing employment practices that respect the dignity of individuals and make it possible for everyone to work and collaborate in a positive and supportive environment. It is important to note that creating a respectful and inclusive work environment is a responsibility of every employee.

#### Definitions

*Diversity* - A variety of people and ideas within an organization, defined according to unique and/or legally protected differences. People are multidimensional in their diversity. The elements and factors that contribute to diversity can be both visible and invisible. This includes but is not limited to: gender identity, age, race, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or ancestry, indigenous origin, mental/physical status, culture, nationality, language and accent, socio-economic status, religion, maternity status, veteran status, appearance, diversity of thought, perspectives, and life experiences including education, family status, values/beliefs, working-style preferences, job role and function and personality type.

*Inclusion* - An intentional effort to create an environment in which people feel involved, respected, valued, and connected - and to which individuals bring their “authentic” selves (their ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives) to their work every day. Inclusion focuses less on what makes people different and more on creating an environment that encourages people to bring perspectives, contribute, and be appreciated for all aspects of their diversity in the workplace.

*Diversity and Inclusion* - The recognition of the variety of diverse people and ideas within an organization, and the creation of an environment in which people feel involved, respected, valued, connected, and empowered to bring their “authentic” selves (e.g., their ideas, backgrounds, values, and perspectives) to work every day.

*Inclusive Organization* - An organization that proactively enlists intentional strategies to remove barriers to access, participation and success of those who were historically or are currently systematically excluded by or marginalized within the organization. That actively seeks the transformation of its organizational policies and practices, to foster the involvement and success of those who have been excluded or marginalized.

*Equity* - To treat everyone fairly. An equity emphasis seeks to render justice by deeply considering structural factors that benefit some social groups/communities and harms others.

## **Mandate**

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee will:

1. Develop a comprehensive inclusion plan, identify benchmarks, monitor and report progress made annually
2. Identify equity and diversity issues pertaining to the needs of employees, as well as review the organization's policies and practices through an inclusive lens
3. Provide input to the CEO and senior management on how to increase engagement in initiatives or address concerns related to diversity or inclusion
4. Recommend related strategies to the board of directors via a board liaison
5. Review organizational policies and procedures through an inclusive lens to ensure they are meeting the needs of all employees, volunteers and partners
6. Implement measures to ensure that its members are well informed and trained to act in an advisory capacity.
7. Review recruitment and retention strategies and make recommendations towards more inclusive hiring practices.
8. Review and advise on office environment and infrastructure for compliance with set accessibility standards.

\*Requests for additional research and/or initiatives will be subject to committee approval.

## **Workplan**

The Committee members will work with the senior management to set out a work plan for the Committee and outline objectives. The Committee will report to the Director of HR on a regular basis and will present its accomplishments once a year to senior management.

## **Procedures and Frequency of Meetings**

- The Diversity and Inclusion Committee will meet for 1 hr bi-monthly for the first year or as determined by the committee, or at the direction of senior management.
- The dates of the meetings will be confirmed upon agreement of the D&I workplan so as to integrate well with the plans and projects under discussion.
- The agenda and any required pre-meeting reading materials will be sent to members 1 week prior to the meeting
- The committee members will reach a consensus on their decision-making process at the first meeting
- A committee member (excluding co-chairs) will be assigned as secretary at each meeting on a rotating basis.



## **Member Competencies**

- Regarded by managers or colleagues across an array of diversity dimensions as change agents and role models that inspire others to take responsibility and become role models themselves
- Publicly support internal and external diversity related initiatives
- Fully committed to holding people at all levels accountable for achieving D&I
- Knowledgeable and engage in D&I issues, are actively involved in diversity networks or have a willingness to increase their knowledge or competence outside of the workplace

## **Role of Co-Chairs**

To manage meetings of committee. Finalizing agenda and sending any required preparation material 1 week before. The co-chairs can only take on other specific roles if they have been authorized to do so.

## **Role of Rotating Secretary**

Organising and taking meeting minutes. Deploying meeting minutes within 1 week following the meeting.

## **Role of Committee Members**

All members take equal and shared responsibility for the committee's work. Specific roles or tasks will be assigned as needed at each meeting. Committee members can only carry out specific aspects if they are authorized to do so.