



Diversity + Inclusion Best Practices Case Study

AAON:

DEI Best Practices for Working with
Diverse Populations



About AAON

AAON (NASDAQ:AAON) is a leader in engineering, manufacturing, and selling of commercial heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment. Headquartered in Tulsa, Oklahoma and with additional locations in Longview, TX and Parkville, MO, AAON's 2,400 employees serve customers nationally. AAON's Norman Asbjornson Innovation Center provides its engineers with cutting-edge technology to design, test, and refine innovative HVAC products that meet its customers' needs. Additionally, AAON's Technical Academy trains service technicians through classroom and hands-on instruction to perform maintenance and updates on HVAC systems. Dedicated to sustainability, AAON prides itself on developing an energy-efficient work environment that also results in the creation of high-quality products for its customers.

Program Summary

While AAON's success is in part due to its innovative and customized HVAC systems, its success can also be attributed to its ability to customize and implement diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices. Through both internal programming and external community partnerships, AAON's DEI work supports employees to develop their skills and advance within the company. This work began when, seeking to grow and expand, AAON leadership recognized the crucial asset of its diverse employees, many of whom are immigrants or refugees. With more than 65% of employees identifying as a race or ethnicity other than white, the leadership has made it a priority to ensure that all employees are welcomed, accepted, and supported.

AAON began this work first internally by ensuring that its Human Resources team reflected the diversity of the employee population it served. This helped promote and recruit a diverse range of individuals for employment.

Furthermore, the diversity of the HR, Quality and Training team has expanded access to training and development opportunities for employees. The HR team speaks three different languages, including Spanish, Burmese, and Zomi, and the company has access to Vietnamese and Russian translators. Having individuals who speak non-English languages expands the access of AAON's hiring and training programs to individuals for whom English is not their primary language. Specifically, for all internal training, AAON provides translators if needed so that all can access the content. Recognizing that language barriers exist for many employees, AAON created signage in different languages

Tags



English as a Second Language,
Community Partnerships, Immigrants,
Refugees

Launch Time



1-2 years

Location



Tulsa, Oklahoma

Complexity



2 out of 3 light bulbs

"We have a large immigrant and refugee population. They are coming to this country wanting to work, and we want to help equip them with the skills that will help them to be successful and to advance within our company."

and visual images that correspond to instructions. This helps employees easily understand practices and protocols to produce the highest quality of work possible.

AAON has also advanced its DEI work by providing internal programming. To do so, the leadership has capitalized on the resources within its community to form partnerships that further meet the needs of its diverse employees. Since 2018, AAON has partnered with Tulsa Community College to provide on-site English as a Second Language classes. Employees can participate in courses after their shifts, and with the classes being on-site, AAON has eliminated an additional barrier of needing reliable transportation to partake in educational opportunities.

Knowing the value of community partnerships, AAON has expanded its relationships beyond the education arena. AAON partnered with YWCA Tulsa to develop Welcome Week, an orientation for immigrants and refugees that informs them of available resources and services.

Program Impact

AAON's efforts to create a supportive network for prospective and existing employees from diverse backgrounds have resulted in many successes. The language expertise of the HR team has led to the hiring of increasingly diverse employees. At present, the diversity makeup of AAON is 35% Asian, 15% Hispanic, 13% African American and Black, and 6% Native American. The efforts to translate key instructions and provide visual images for employees create a working environment where language barriers do not prevent employees from being successful in their work.

Steps for Implementation

- Gain a deeper understanding of a company's employees who are immigrants and refugees. Learning the needs of prospective and current employees can help companies know the systems, processes, and skills they should use to best meet employee needs.
- Develop an HR team that meets the language needs of prospective and current employees. Hiring HR individuals who can effectively communicate in different languages can enhance employee recruitment, hiring, and training processes.
- Create signage in the primary language of employees for whom English is a new language. Add visual images to the signage to further help employees understand instructions and tasks.
- Offer English as a Second Language classes on-site for employees to attend before or after their shifts.
- Design internal training that develops employees' skills and helps them advance within the company. Ensure that all can access these training courses by offering translators if needed.
- Form relationships with community partners to assist with facilitation of training and hosting of events. Community organizations and agencies that specialize in providing support are key partners that can help companies enhance their training offerings.

Best Practices

- Rally around one key aim and let that drive a company's actions. AAON saw a need to expand DEI access and opportunity to and for its diverse workforce. By rallying behind that initiative, AAON has reached a broader range of individuals in search of employment and has met more of the needs of its employees.

- Start small and start internally. Beginning on too large of a scale and expanding too quickly can result in superficial changes that fail to have a deep impact that meets the needs of employees and employers. AAON started small by considering the makeup of its HR team and instituting translation services. It then grew incrementally by developing internal training and later forming partnerships to expand its reach while staying focused on its key aim.
- Utilize the assets of the community. As a company expands its impact and reach, there are often community organizations and entities that can be partners in collaboration. Community partners know well the needs of the community members they serve. A partnership with them can help companies better customize their offerings and support, which will assist employees seeking to grow their skills and advance in their careers.

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