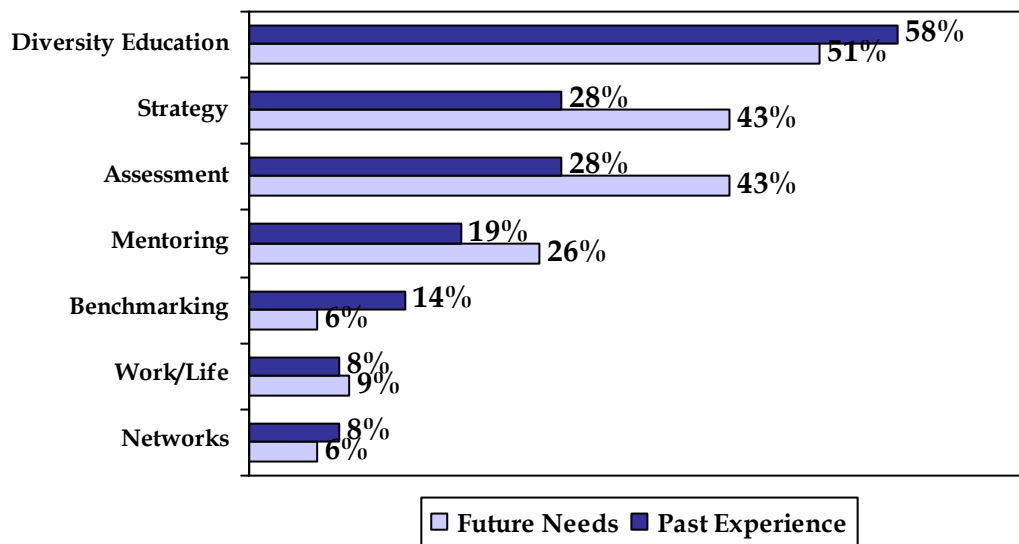


Getting Help: Selecting and Working with Diversity Consultants

Many organizations retain external consultants to assist in their diversity efforts—from conducting an internal assessment to designing a strategy to implementing concrete programs such as mentoring and diversity training. On March 10th, Anna Brown, Diversity Management Attorney and Executive Director of the Diversity Committee of Shearman & Sterling LLP led the working session, Selecting and Working with Diversity Consultants.

Based on the responses of 37 signatories to the New York City Bar’s Statement of Diversity Principles, over two-thirds have retained a diversity consultant in the past. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters anticipate using a diversity consultant in the future. The majority have or intend to use a consultant to deliver diversity training and education programs. Over one-quarter of respondents have relied on outside expertise for diversity strategy and assessment work. However, 43 percent intend to do so in the future.

Types of Diversity Consulting—Past Experience and Future Needs



The key elements in selecting a diversity consultant involve upfront thinking and planning.

1. Know your organization. How conservative is your organization? Is your organization more cerebral or more practical? How much buy-in is there for diversity already? Understanding your organization’s culture is essential to evaluating which diversity consultant is the right fit. Also, keep in mind the particular culture of the organization that is providing a referral and whether the culture is similar to your organization or not.

2. Know your audience. What levels will the consultants be working with? What types of personal styles tend to work well with these various groups, e.g., partners versus associates? Ideally, a consultant “flexes” their style to work effectively with a wide

range of personalities. A consultant may win over your diversity committee, but it is advisable to witness them with different audiences as well. This is further complicated if you have a global constituency to serve.

3. Know your diversity plan. As Anna Brown asked, “What’s the plan? If you just say, ‘we need help,’ then you may get more than you bargained for.” Think through strategically about what you need from the consultant and how it fits into your overall diversity agenda. A consultant that is effective at delivering diversity training may not be the right person to help you develop a diversity strategy. At each step of the process, an organization should step back and assess whether a particular consultant has the appropriate skills and experience to be successful. This is particularly true when you are moving from strategy development to implementation—the best trainers may not be the best strategists and vice versa.

4. Know your recommendations. It is certainly advisable to seek referrals from trusted colleagues at other organizations. It is equally important to ask probing questions about what type of work the consultant performed for the organization, the specific strengths and weaknesses of the consultant, and what kind of formal feedback they received.

To forge an effective partnership with your consultant, it is essential to explicitly communicate your expectations upfront. This includes your requirements for responsiveness, your ability to preview and revise materials as necessary, and if any summary of lessons learned will be provided as a follow-up. A contract should be drawn to be sure there are no surprises when the bill arrives. Finally, be sure to have the consultant sign a confidentiality agreement.

Sometimes it is necessary to create a partnership between two different consultants in order to meet your organizations needs—whether it’s to bring together a gender expert with a race/ethnicity effort or meet the different needs of partners and associates. In this case, you want to be sure to lay-out in writing each of their respective roles.

To learn more about selecting a diversity consultant or upcoming diversity working sessions, please see our website at www.abcny.org or contact Meredith Moore, Director of ABCNY's Office for Diversity at mmoore@abcny.org.