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[Q: How do sport managers best “lay the groundwork” for confronting the issues of diversity and inclusion in sport?](#)

A: “Laying the groundwork” is an important concept to acknowledge and address when trying to enact change in areas where defensiveness or resistance is high. When you have a predominantly majority organization, most of the time white and male in the sports world, it’s easy to see where employees may interpret increasing diversity or inclusion as loss of opportunity for everything from continued employment or advancement to restrictions on choice where such restrictions were never previously imposed. Here are five suggestions for “must” steps in developing a “no fault” approach to gaining staff and student-athlete support of increasing work force and student-athlete diversity:

1. **Acknowledge existence of underrepresentation by showing the numbers.** Compare athletic department percentages of white vs. non-white and male vs. female employees at every level: clerical, custodial, entry level professional, middle managers, senior managers, head coaches and assistant coaches. Compare these numbers to national population averages. Do the same by team to illustrate the clustering of non-whites in only two or three sports, a national dilemma.
2. **Acknowledge the common bias toward hiring people “who look just like us”.** Emphasize the need to recognize and counteract this bias through diverse search committees and mandates for applicant and finalist and recruiting and scholarship offer pools that are diverse.
3. **Acknowledge that sport was once all-male and not open to persons of color – participation and management.** To a great extent, the lack of diversity is not intentional as much as it is a product of historical discrimination against females and persons of color. Thus, if the majority does not act to change this composition, it will not happen.
4. **Emphasize that civil rights laws do not change work force composition.** Rather, change agents are the people who conduct employee and athlete recruiting, make hiring decisions, and allocate resources to increase sports opportunities.
5. **Point out the simple fact that lamenting or placing blame for historical discrimination wastes energy.** We need to apply that energy to actions that result in change.

SMR has had the privilege of working with a number of universities in assessing their diversity and designing diversity strategic plans.

Topics

[Personnel Issues](#)

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