

Building a Diverse Workforce

»»» **TOOLKIT**



 NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
LANDSCAPE
PROFESSIONALS
FOUNDATION



Building a Diverse Workforce Toolkit

Business owners, managers, and many others in the landscape and lawn care industry state that people are the most integral part of their organization. A component of building the strongest, most qualified workforce possible is ensuring that teams are made up of diverse employees. This is part of a strategic process of continuing to hire the right people for your company, while also actively working to tap into all populations within your geographic area.

Within this guide you will find information on:

Identifying and Eliminating Barriers to Entry

- Definition
- Common barriers to entry
- Assessing your organization for barriers to entry
- Action plan for eliminating barriers
- Tips on making your culture more inclusive

Recruitment Strategy

- Building a strategy to attract and hire a diverse workforce
 - Partner with organizations
 - Target areas with more diverse populations
- Interviewing
 - Interview style
 - How to conduct an unbiased interview
 - Interview questions

Attracting a Female Workforce

- Assessing your workplace
 - PPE/Uniforms
 - Working conditions
 - Benefits
- Recruitment
 - What to highlight in your job postings
 - Where to post jobs

Identifying and Eliminating Barriers to Entry

Barriers to entry are the obstacles that make it difficult to enter a given career field. When committing to hire a more diverse workforce, barriers to entry are the obstacles holding back those candidates from applying or accepting positions with your company. Addressing these barriers for prospective employees is a first step in diversifying your workforce.

Common barriers to entry among minority applicants in the lawn care and landscape industry include:

- Seasonal work with inconsistent pay
- Unfamiliar or unknown company
- Perception of demographics based on company marketing
- Scheduling flexibility regarding childcare and school schedules
- Lack of benefits and family leave
- Perceived existing company culture

In order to eliminate a barrier for candidates and employees, your organization first has to understand what those are and how they are impacting candidates and employees. Assessing your culture, recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts will give you an idea of what barriers to employment you're dealing with.

Assessment

- Are your jobs posted in places where they will be seen by diverse candidates?
- Evaluate your pool of applicants. Are you seeing diversity?
- Do you offer family-friendly benefits - including flexible start/end times, family leave, year-round work?
- What are your competitors doing differently to attract a diverse workforce?
- Are you partnering with a diversity-based organization?
- Are you hiring various religions, races and sex based when they are applying?
- Do you have uniforms and restrooms that accommodate all employees?
- Do you pay well, and fairly? Do you promote within?
- Are you training and mentoring your employees for career progression?
- Do you have clear and defined training programs and career progression paths?
- Do you have policies in place such as harassment? Are you constantly reviewing them with workers?
- Are you open to hiring persons previously convicted of a criminal offense?
- Are there any language barriers in your application or recruitment process?
Or in general in your organization?
- Are you utilizing technology in a way that is applicant/employee friendly?
Text vs email, QR codes to link to applications
- Assess your online reviews.

We've done the assessment, now what? After identifying where there are barriers to entry, the next step is to start breaking them down. Acknowledging these barriers and committing to an action plan will help keep your entire team focused on your efforts. Action plans should include measurable statements so you can track your progress and re-evaluate as needed.

Your action plan will be specific to your hiring goals and location, but some general action plan items could be:

Limit requirements in the job posting and job description

- Limiting requirements can lead to higher confidence in applicants. For instance, women tend to only apply to a job where they know they can meet 100% of the requirements, so don't put in more than what is needed.

Examine if Minority or Gender Pay Gaps Exist

- If you discover that minorities or women employees are paid less than their white or male counterparts, close that gap to attract more applicants.

Ensure your workplace is safe from any form of discrimination

- Diversity in the workplace goes beyond hiring; you need to ensure that your workplace is safe and inclusive for women and minorities.

Determine if your company is employee or family friendly.

- If you can only offer seasonal work, partner with off-season businesses to assist your employees in being employed all year.
- Offer paid training programs throughout your off-season - investing in your employees and ensuring you have qualified, and motivated workers the coming year. You can read [here](#) about off-season training tips offered by NALP.
- Support parents by offering flexible schedules and family leave. See how one business is making the effort to support parents [here](#).

Tips on making your culture more inclusive

It's important that all of your employees feel safe and welcome at work. Not only will employees be happier, they'll also be more productive if they're given opportunities to succeed. Here are some tips on making your workplace culture more inclusive:

Communication is key

- Having direct and open lines of communication with all employees will set the tone for your workplace.
- Openly discuss your goals, values, and expectations with all employees. Employees will follow your lead - make sure you're being a good example.

Examine your mission statement and company values

- Ensure they include language regarding diversity and inclusion

Use gender-neutral and unbiased writing

- When writing a job description, advertisement, or any other marketing materials, be sure to use gender-neutral writing. NALP's blog *The Edge* lays out how to craft an effective job posting [here](#).

Include diversity in your marketing

- Your marketing images should be culturally diverse, including an equal display of men and women. Avoid using images of women solely in female-oriented roles and men in male-dominated careers.

Diversified management team

- Prospective employees need to be able to envision themselves working for your company and promoting within the organization. One way to do this is by ensuring they can see themselves in your management team.
- Some statistics: NALP Foundation (NALPF) found in a 2021 demographic study that Hispanic employees makeup sixty-eight percent of non-management production staff, but only six percent of owners and executives and nineteen percent of office staff; and African American or Black employees account for fifteen percent of non-management production staff, but only three percent of owners and executives and three percent of office staff.

Diverse and inclusive hiring efforts

- Set realistic, measurable recruitment and hiring goals and keep track of your progress, adjust the goals as needed.

Support and celebrate your employees' differences

- Use a shared calendar for employees to add holidays that are important to them. Use this as an opportunity to celebrate what is important to your employees.
- Offer cultural or language training classes to help employee relations.

Assess your current benefits programs

- Benefits like salary transparency, flexible schedules, family leave and healthcare, and flexible holiday schedules should be considered when hiring diverse crew members.

Offer diversity training

- Diversity training, including cultural diversity can help educate your employees. Trainings will also give you the opportunity to reinforce your expectations and goals, along with your anti-discrimination and harassment policies.

For more on how and why to improve your company culture, head over to the NALP's blog, the Edge, to read "[The Secrets to an Impactful and Resilient Workplace Culture](#)," and "[Creating a Top Workplace](#)."

Recruitment Strategy

It's important to understand that recruitment is more than just hiring. Your recruitment strategy includes all efforts towards finding, assessing, and hiring employees for your company. Building and maintaining a diverse workforce takes concentrated effort but the work will pay off in the long run. Businesses that embrace diversity and inclusion efforts as part of their business strategy statistically perform better than businesses that don't. You'll need to look at all areas of your business to ensure they align with and support your diverse hiring goals.

Your website is a visual extension of your company's culture and should accurately reflect the values of your company. It should be easy to navigate and attract both customers and prospective employees. You can use a recruitment page to collect applications or offer directions for applying for open positions. A prospective employee will infer a lot from your website, so make sure it's attractive to them, not just customers. This can be done by:

- Showcasing diverse staff photos
- Highlight the Mission and Vision statements (consider rewriting your current statements to make them more inclusive)
- Including videos on what life looks like in the company and the role itself
- Highlighting promotion stories of your current employees
- Advertising your benefits, career paths, and training opportunities
- Highlighting community involvement (such as volunteering or charity work)
- Linking to a company blog or social media page and using those tools to highlight your diverse workforce and inclusion efforts.

Now that you've looked at your company's culture and website, see how you can partner with other organizations to build your diverse workforce. Building relationships and establishing your business's reputation within your community will further your recruitment efforts more than any job advertisement online can.

Set aside some time weekly or monthly to partner with local organizations. Building relationships within your local networking groups will help to establish your brand within the community. Chambers of commerce, professional associations, and community organizations serving minority populations are all great places to meet business and community leaders in your area and advertise your hiring efforts. Though the organizations will vary based on your location, a quick online search or chat with your chamber of commerce liaison will give you an idea of the organizations working in your area.

Advertising at community buildings, convenient stores, libraries, churches, and local (English and Spanish) radio stations will help reach your local applicants offline. Make sure your current employees and customers know you're hiring and ask for referrals. If possible, set up an incentives-based referral program to reward employees or customers who assist in recruiting quality candidates.

To target areas with more diverse populations online, utilize diverse job boards and websites to reach a wider pool of applicants. Among many other organizations, DiveristyJobs and iHispano host job boards showcasing positions seeking and advertising to a diverse candidate pool.

Attend career fairs at high schools, community colleges, universities, and military bases in your area. All of these institutions have an office or point of contact who specializes in assisting their members in transitional career planning and could be a valuable contact. Inquire about offering internships, apprenticeships, or job shadowing opportunities so future applicants can gain real insight into your industry and organization. One way to start building a following and relationships with high school students is through the NALP Foundation's High School Program to engage and educate students on all the profession has to offer through a virtual platform. More information about this can be found [here](#).

Be sure to have translators or fluent speakers on your recruitment staff of the languages spoken by your applicants. If you can't communicate with your applicants, they'll quickly move on to a company that can. In the same regard, make sure you're communicating with all applicants in the way that's easiest to them - most people prefer text over email and are less likely to check or reply to email quickly.

The Young Professionals Network of NALP has a great podcast episode with three hosts discussing their businesses' recruitment, hiring, and training efforts. You can listen [here](#). You can listen [here](#) to another episode of the podcast with a business leader's perspective on attracting young professionals to the landscape industry.

Once you have a pool of applicants to choose from, you'll need to check your biases. Bias is a natural inclination in all humans and can either positively or negatively affect your decision-making skills. An easy way to decrease unconscious bias is by using "blind recruitment" or "blind resume screening" – the practice of removing any personally identifiable information from resumes or applications before screening them. This can include the applicants name, phone number, address, and schools.

Now it's time to interview. Preparing for the interviews is a crucial, often overlooked step in the recruitment process. You should ensure that interviewers have plenty of time to prepare for each interview. The interviewer should be familiar with the advertisement, job description, any required qualifications, their assessment for rating each applicant, and the applicants' resumes or applications before the interview. Ideally interviewers will receive diversity training and are aware of your diversity hiring goals, and their own personal biases, as well.

Below are some recommendations when conducting unbiased interviews

- Be prepared to discuss your diverse hiring initiatives with applicants during the interview process, along with your mission statement and company goals to give the applicant an understanding of the company's culture.
- Use a diverse panel of interviewers – diverse in job type, background, and race and ethnicity. Using a diverse panel of interviewers will minimize the impact of first impressions and personality biases. It will also give the interviewee an introduction to the company's culture and structure.
- When using a panel of interviewers, assign one panel member as leader, with the others acting as factfinders. The leader will ask the primary questions with factfinders asking follow-up questions for clarification. Ensure panel members know their role in the interview process and are prepared to evaluate applicants.
- Interview questions should be pre-planned, the same for competing candidates, and performance or accomplishment-based questions, with follow up questions as needed.
- Use a standard assessment scorecard immediately after the interview for panel members' input. The best time for the panel to discuss a candidate is right after the interview. Schedule time for this conversation and assessment after each interview.
- Ask candidates for feedback about your interview process – especially after implementing changes to your interview process.

Sample interview questions

Along with your interview questions regarding the position, you should ask some questions in relation to your diversity and inclusion efforts. You'll need to be prepared to discuss these efforts along with your mission statement, company values, and goals. Let prospective employees know what is important to you and how you handle difficult situations, if they arise.

Although there is no magic list of interview questions that can ensure you hire the best candidate for every job, we've compiled a list of questions that will help convey your diversity and inclusion goals and give your applicant's a chance to show you how they'll perform in your organization's culture.

- What type of work experiences are you looking for in this position?
- If ever available, would you be interested in a leadership role within our organization in the future?
- How would you contribute to our workplace to elevate our values?
- How would you react if you saw a co-worker do or say something that goes against our values?
- Pose a situation involving issues of bias behavior or diversity, ask how the applicant would respond in that situation.
- What experience do you have of working with people from different backgrounds?
- How do you build a relationship or understanding of coworkers from a different background or culture?
- Are you willing to be wrong about your opinion on the world?
- Can you give an example of when you have challenged inappropriate behavior in a working environment?
- What are your concerns about working with diverse populations or communities?
- How do you ensure diversity and equality in your management style?

Questions you can NOT ask during interviews

Categories

- Marital or family status, e.g., Are you married? Are you single? Are you pregnant? Are you trying to start a family? What does your husband do for a living? What daycare/school do your children attend?
- Race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, sex, orientation, gender identity, e.g., What gender do you identify as? What church do you attend? Who is your pastor? Are you a U.S. citizen? Can you provide your birth certificate? Where are your parents from?
- Address, e.g., Do you own your home, or do you rent? Who do you live with?
- Age, e.g., What year were you born? When did you graduate high school? When did you start working?
- Credit inquiries, e.g., Do you have a bank account? Have your wages ever been garnished? Have you ever declared bankruptcy? Are you in debt?
- Disabilities, e.g., Have you ever filed a worker's compensation claim? Do you have a disability?
- Organizations and memberships, e.g., Are you a member of the local country club? What sorority did you join? Are you a member of the Democratic Party? What is your political affiliation?

Questions you CAN ask

Be sure to ask all candidates the same questions, and the questions must be relevant to the position

- Address, e.g., How long have you lived at your current address?
- Availability, e.g., What days and shifts can you work? Are there any shifts you cannot work? Are there any responsibilities you have that could make it difficult for you to travel for work? Do you have a reliable way of getting to work?
- Citizenship, e.g., Are you legally eligible to work in the United States?
- Education, e.g., What university or college degrees do you have?
- Disabilities, accurately describe the position, and ask if the candidate can perform all the functions.
- Organizations and memberships, e.g., Are you a member of a professional organization?

Attracting a Female Workforce

The National Association of Landscape Professionals Foundation (NALPF) compiled 2021 demographic data from member organizations and found that although women make up forty-seven percent of the American workforce, they account for only eight percent of landscape and lawn care employees. Finding and hiring women to work in the landscape industry may seem like an impossible task, but there are many benefits to putting forth some effort. Co-existence of men and women in a workplace accounts for more creative teams, lower turnover and burnout, and a better overall work environment for all employees. If you're committed to hiring more women, you'll need to assess the barriers to entry, create an action plan, and strategically recruit and interview. Many of the action items for diverse recruitment and hiring will apply to finding female employees, but you may need to shift your strategy to focus on gender.

An example: blue-collar industries, in general, receive far fewer female applicants than white-collar positions. Teenage girls are often discouraged from pursuing manual careers and are therefore less likely to have any early training on industry standards. While you can try to create a gender-biased training system, you'll also need to create an inclusive playing field for your female hires. They may require more training up front on safety procedures to have an equal opportunity as their male counterparts.

When polled, women have listed the following as barriers to entry for blue-collar and manual labor jobs:

- Expect to experience discrimination
- Long, inflexible hours
- Harassment
- Inconsistent pay
- Physically demanding

Examples like this are why it's so important that you, as the business owner or leader, take the extra step if you want to have more women in your workforce. Assessing your workplace will be step one in this endeavor. This assessment will include workplace culture as before, but also the physical needs of women workers.

- Is your workplace or job site somewhere women will feel safe?
- Are you advertising jobs to women? Have you checked the language and location of your advertisements?
- Do you offer family-friendly benefits - including flexible start/end times, family leave, year-round work?
- Do you have uniforms that will fit everyone? Either gender-specific sizing or a wide range of gender-neutral sizing?
- Do you have restrooms that everyone can use? Either gender-specific restrooms or gender-neutral?
- Do you offer various sizes of PPE?
- Do you pay well, and fairly? Do you promote within?
- Are you training and mentoring your employees for career progression?
- Do you have clear and defined training programs and career progression paths?
- Do you have policies in place such as harassment? Are you constantly reviewing them with workers?
- Do you have a zero-tolerance policy in place for sexual harassment?
- What is your reporting plan if an employee is sexually harassed?
- What is your employee grievance procedure if an employee needs to report another for mistreatment or discrimination?

Similar to the process of identifying the barriers to entry in the diversity recruitment section, after you complete the assessment, you'll need to create an action plan of how you'll overcome these barriers. Every organization's action plan will be different based on your community and the barriers your applicants face, but some action items might be:

Workplace culture

- Be aware of your workplace's culture and how inviting it is to female employees and applicants
- Don't try to find a "token woman" to work for you - find an employee who can do the work well and is a valuable asset to your team.

Gender-neutral writing

- When writing a job description, ad, or any marketing materials, be sure to use gender-neutral writing as much as possible.

Advertisements

- If you aren't receiving female applicants, look at different ways to advertise. A Referral program could be something to utilize, because an employee may know of women looking for work in this field or one that could become interested.

Uniforms and PPE

- Provide appropriately sized uniforms and PPE for all employees. Employees feel cared for, and an important part of your team if you're providing correctly sized and gender-specific uniforms (or gender-neutral uniforms in a wide variety of sizes) and equipment for them.

Benefits

- While career progression and remote work flexibility are common priorities, women might also be looking for benefits like salary transparency, a more flexible work-life balance, family leave, and healthcare.

Bathroom access

- Ensure acceptable bathroom access for female employees. An employee without access to a bathroom throughout the day will feel unimportant to your organization and unable to perform to the best of her abilities.

Career Progression

- Many women want career progression - provide and advertise mentorships and paths for growth.

Gender Discrimination

- Ensure your work environment is a safe place for women to work and that the grievance procedure for any harassment or assault is well-known.

Fair Pay and Promotion Potential

- Examine pay throughout your organization and work to eliminate any gaps.
- Examine your systems for promotion - make sure it's fair and equitable for all employees. If you find that you only promote a certain demographic of employees, find out why.

Recruitment Strategies

When advertising positions to women, you should be willing to try a few different strategies. Rewriting your job advertisements to include gender neutral language is step one, but you may also need to highlight different aspects of the position.

- Look for skills over experience - a skillful person can learn new equipment, and gain experience - perhaps they just haven't had the chance yet.
- Highlight your training and mentorship programs - this shows you are investing in your employees for their and your company's growth. Many women won't even apply for a position unless they feel they meet every qualification listed - by being willing to train and mentor, you're likely to get more candidates applying.
- Be aware of gendered-themed words - using only masculine-themed words such as active, competitive, and dominant make job advertisements less appealing to many women - whereas feminine-themed words, such as dependable, responsible, and committed, do not have the same stigma.
- List expected hours in the advertisement - phrases like "we work hard and play hard" imply that after hours work or events will be expected - and this is often a deterrent for many women. Advertise if you offer flexible hours, and what an expected schedule will look like to give applicants a clear picture of the position's time commitments.
- Advertise where women look - network and advertise with local women's organizations or clubs, women focused employment boards, and women's colleges.
- Advertise and offer policies/benefits that will attract women - maternity and parental leave, work life balance and flexible schedules, healthcare, and opportunities for advancement, to name a few.
- Use "blind recruitment" or "blind resumes" (where you remove all the personally identifiable information before reviewing resumes or applications) to ensure your focus is on the applicant's skills. This can include removing names and school - as these both might identify an applicant's gender. If you're looking at resumes with no gender information, you'll have a better chance to pick the best candidate - not just one with which you identify.
- Have a team of people working on your recruitment efforts. Your team should be as diverse as you want your company to be. If women are assisting in the applicant screening process, they're less likely to have the same biases as you.

After evaluating your organization's readiness, formulating a game plan, and preparing for a diverse workforce, it is now time to go out and hire! We hope these strategies work for you and your company!

SAMPLE EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

We are an equal opportunity employer and do not discriminate against otherwise qualified applicants on the basis race, age, color, creed, sex, religion, ancestry, marital status, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other protected characteristic.

Please carefully read and answer all questions. You will not be considered for employment if you fail to completely answer all the questions on this application. You may attach a résumé, but all questions must be answered.

APPLICANT INFORMATION

EMPLOYEE'S NAME (LAST, FIRST, M.I.)		TODAY'S DATE
STREET ADDRESS		APARTMENT/UNIT #
CITY	STATE	ZIP CODE
PHONE #	EMAIL ADDRESS	
POSITION APPLIED FOR	DATE AVAILABLE	DESIRED SALARY
ARE YOU LEGALLY ELIGIBLE TO WORK IN THE U.S.? __YES __NO		HAVE YOU EVER WORKED FOR THIS COMPANY? __YES __NO

EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL	DID YOU GRADUATE? __YES __NO	DEGREE EARNED
COLLEGE	DID YOU GRADUATE? __YES __NO	DEGREE EARNED
OTHER	DID YOU GRADUATE? __YES __NO	DEGREE EARNED

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY (PLEASE INCLUDE THE 7 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE)

COMPANY	START DATE	END DATE
ADDRESS		PHONE NUMBER
SUPERVISOR	MAY WE CONTACT __YES __NO	
RESPONSIBILITIES		
COMPANY	START DATE	END DATE
ADDRESS		PHONE NUMBER
SUPERVISOR	MAY WE CONTACT __YES __NO	
RESPONSIBILITIES		

REFERENCES

FULL NAME	RELATIONSHIP	COMPANY	PHONE NUMBER
FULL NAME	RELATIONSHIP	COMPANY	PHONE NUMBER

DISCLAIMER AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I certify that the information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge.
 I understand that to falsify information is grounds for refusing to hire me, or for discharge should I be hired.
 I authorize any person, organization or company listed on this application to furnish you any and all information concerning my previous employment, education and qualifications for employment. I also authorize you to request and receive such information.
 In consideration for my employment, I agree to abide by the rules and regulations of the company, which rules may be changed, withdrawn, added or interpreted at any time, at the company's sole option and without prior notice to me.
 I also acknowledge that my employment may be terminated, or any offer or acceptance of employment withdrawn, at any time, with or without cause, and with or without prior notice at the option of the company or myself.

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

Voluntary Self-Identification

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requires all private employers with 100 or more employees as well as federal contractors and first-tier subcontractors with 50 or more employees AND contracts of at least \$50,000 complete an EEO-1 report each year. Covered employers must invite employees to self-identify gender and race for this report.

Completion of this form is voluntary and will not affect your opportunity for employment, or the terms or conditions of your employment. This form will be used for EEO-1 reporting purposes only and will be kept separate from all other personnel records only accessed by the Human Resources department. Please return completed forms to the HR department.

If you choose not to self-identify your race/ethnicity at this time, the federal government requires [Company Name] to determine this information by visual survey and/or other available information.

NAME: _____

JOB TITLE: _____

DATE COMPLETED: _____

GENDER:

(Please check one of the options below)

Male

Female

RACE/ETHNICITY:

(Please check one of the descriptions below corresponding to the ethnic group with which you identify.)

Hispanic or Latino

White

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Asian

Native American or Alaska Native

Two or more races (Not Hispanic or Latino)

I do not wish to disclose.

About the National Association of Landscape Professionals Foundation

For more than two decades, the NALP Foundation (a 501c3 organization) has supported education, research, and scholarships to strengthen the future of the landscape and lawn care industry. These efforts are furthered through programs that connect educators, students, communities, and industry professionals by developing initiatives to build and sustain a stronger industry.

The Foundation continues their mission to strengthen the industry through the following initiatives:

Diversity and Inclusion Project

1. Workforce Demographic Study (October 2021)
2. Recruiting a Diverse Workforce Toolkit (September 2022)
3. Retaining a Diverse Workforce Toolkit (September 2022)
4. Resources to assist underrepresented workers upward mobility in your organization and within the industry (October 2022)

High School Programs

1. National High School Competition through SkillsUSA
2. Connecting with students (k-12) in the classroom, virtually, to provide insight about professional careers in the landscape and lawn care industry through Pathful Connect

Benefits of Healthy Landscapes

1. Promoting the benefits of properly designed, constructed, and managed landscapes
2. Developing and applying an ecosystem framework to measure the economic, social, and environmental value of specific landscapes

The Foundation relies solely on the support of their donors to facilitate these initiatives and welcomes contributions year-round.

Donations can be submitted online via the QR code below. Or you can request a donation form via email, foundation@landscapeprofessionals.org.

If you prefer to talk with someone directly, **please call 703.456.4212.**

