

Retaining a Diverse Workforce

»»» **TOOLKIT**



 NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
LANDSCAPE  
PROFESSIONALS  
**FOUNDATION**



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## Introduction

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After putting all of the time and effort into building a diverse workforce, it is critical that companies plan for how to retain and keep those employees. To get the most return on investing in a workforce, it is important that you take a comprehensive look at the organization and identify areas that may need improvement or revamping to retain a diverse workforce. We are defining a diverse workforce as including racial and ethnic diversity, women in the workplace, and a multi-generational workforce for our purposes.

Part of retaining a diverse workforce includes many of the same strategies and concerns that employers face in retaining their total workforce. There are some notable differences you may find in retaining a more diverse workforce when it comes to benefits, training and development, and recognition. We've compiled some comprehensive strategies and tactics, but it should be with the caveat that the workforce, as a whole, needs to be considered and that these may vary in degrees of effectiveness based on the individual needs of a business and team.

## Building a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion, often referred to as DEI or DE&I, is a phrase that broadly outlines an institution's efforts towards creating a welcoming environment for people of less-privileged identities.

Why is this important? Diverse, fair, and inclusive work cultures foster connections, increase acceptance and tolerance, create trust, and improve morale. Companies with diverse workforces have proven to perform better financially. When employees feel welcome to be themselves in their work environment, and see that success is attainable for everyone, it encourages them to bring their best selves to work.

Along with making your employees feel more welcome and fostering better employee relations, genuinely inclusive workplaces will also attract more talent, retain employees, increase creativity, and boost the company's reputation.

Now that we know embracing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace culture is so beneficial to employees and your company, how can you get started? Building a DEI program will look different for each company, but here are some areas to start with:

- 1. Assess the current diversity of your workplace** - Compile statistics regarding diversity of your current employees at all levels of your company and use that information to create your growth goals. As a reference, refer to the NALPF Workforce Demographic Study, [here](#).
- 2. Strengthen your diversity and inclusion policies from the top** - Verbal buy-in from senior staff is important, but formal policies and procedures are essential to ensure your diversity and inclusion strategies work. Leaders should set an example, as change comes from the top.
- 3. Improve communication** - Employees need to know their voices matter to you. Establish avenues for employee complaints and criticisms. Knowing what an employee's working experience is with your company will provide you with feedback on areas that need improvement.
- 4. Establish a schedule of "stay interviews"** - Regularly scheduled meetings to discuss employee satisfaction are easy to administer and spending this time listening to your employees will allow you to understand and reinforce why employees want to work for you.
- 5. Build specific, measurable performance commitments** - Create and track your goals. Hold yourself and your leadership team accountable to these goals. Examples of such goals might be to hire a specific percentage of minority employees, or to create a leadership team with a specific percentage of diverse employees.
- 6. Inclusion is not a "one-size fits all" approach** - Instead of hiring employees and expecting them to fit into the organization, help the organization work for them, fitting their needs. Employees respond well to being treated well and will want to continue working for someone who appreciates them.

Once you've established a DE&I program, you can add to it as you grow. The following are ways to continue supporting your diverse employees as you scale up.

- 1. Reward managers for developing and retaining diverse employees** - DE&I needs to be measured and rewarded like the priority that it is. Building DE&I into all aspects of your business will make the efforts more impactful and sustainable.
- 2. Establish a mentoring program for underrepresented employees** - According to research, mentoring is one of the most effective diversity initiatives available to boost representation of minorities at manager levels. Provide diverse employees a chance to grow within your organization.
- 3. Create employee resource groups** - Also known as affinity groups, these groups are traditionally formed around a common social identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity, or life stage, and are led by the employees. The formation of such groups can be a valuable resource to your company by bringing together different perspectives, experiences, and ideas for employees at all levels, and providing feedback to management about employee experiences and recommendations.
- 4. Celebrate diverse holidays** - Knowing your employees includes knowing their cultural identities and celebrations. Celebrate non-Christian holidays, if your employees do, and make sure all your gatherings are inclusive - paying special attention to any religious or cultural practices that might include dietary restrictions or preferences, meeting days and times.
- 5. Host learning opportunities and workshops for personal growth** - Offer cultural awareness training to cultivate a more productive and inclusive environment. You could also offer English as a second language (ESL) courses for non-native speakers, and foreign language courses for English-only speaking employees to bridge any language barriers.

As mentioned earlier, the culture of your workplace is vitally important to the retention of your employees.

NALP's blog, The Edge, has posts and interviews showcasing recommendations from other business owners. Some recent articles are linked below for you:

[How I Do It: Creating an Employee Waitlist - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

[Team Building: Creating a Good Place to Work - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

[Team Building: Offering Education Opportunities to Staff - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

## Retaining Women

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Although there are many challenges facing women in any male-dominated career field, business owners and managers in the landscape industry are in the unique position to be able to lessen the burden of these barriers for retaining female employees. The NALPF (National Landscape Professionals Foundation) 2021 Workforce Demographic Study found that, although the US Civilian Labor Force is made up of 47% female employees, reporting landscape businesses are only 8% female – with female staff primarily working as office staff (61%).

We've already discussed barriers to entry for women in the landscape industry, but there are also barriers to retention that business owners and hiring managers should be aware of and act upon to retain more female employees. Common challenges for women working in the landscape industry will be similar to the challenges of women working in any male-dominated industry – and many of them can be easily overcome with some forethought and consideration.

- Women primarily carry the responsibility of childcare and scheduling for their families. Although this is not the case for every woman, school drop-off and pick-up, children's' sick days, and doctor appointments often fall on the mother. Offering flexible work schedules, part-time options, or split shifts will increase retention.
- When focusing on hiring and retaining women, pregnancy accommodations and parental leave will need to be considered.
- Regular bathroom access can be overlooked by an all-male crew. Allowing for time to stop at a gas station, or public restroom throughout the day is essential for female staff.
- Sexual harassment and an unwelcoming work culture will provoke your female workers to leave quickly. Acceptable workplace culture is set from the top. Make sure your female employees feel welcome and are treated fairly and indiscriminately by all employees.
- Appropriately sized uniforms, equipment, and tools should all be available to female staff – for safety and comfort.
- Lift requirements can be absolutely essential in keeping your staff safe, but be sure to evaluate if every position needs the same lift requirements, and if those requirements are keeping women from working with your company,

Moving past some of the challenges women face, let's talk about how you can go above and beyond to retain your female talent.

- Talk to your female employees – find out what they want and need to continue working for you, find out how you can help them work to their fullest potential, ask if they would recommend working for you to their female friends, and if not, why? Make sure your employees feel comfortable giving honest feedback. This may be done through anonymous surveys, or employee comment cards.
- Provide networking and support for your female staff - this can be done internally through a female mentorship program, or with external groups like [NALP's Women in Landscape Network](#).
- Provide well-defined, challenging career paths – Laying out clear career progression and action steps for promotion will allow women to see themselves working for you in the future. This is a great article about [Canopy's hiring and retaining women employee efforts](#).
- Make sure your female staff have someone they feel comfortable bringing personal problems to within your management team – this can include things like needing accommodations during menstrual cycles or pregnancy, pregnancy loss, or domestic abuse or violence. Female employees will often feel more comfortable discussing all of these issues, and more, with a woman, and having that support within your leadership team will make a big difference for your staff.

## Benefits

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We're currently operating in a candidate-driven job market - even more so since the pandemic - meaning there are more candidates than jobs, so the jobseeker has more choices. This means employers and business owners must be willing to offer the best compensation and benefits packages they can afford in order to competitively attract and retain employees.

Employee benefits include any non-wage compensation you offer employees in addition to their pay. Things like medical insurance, life insurance, and paid time off (PTO) all fit into this category. Although many benefits packages are costly to the employer, they can be a driving force for employee loyalty and retention. Thirty-six percent of employees say improving their benefits package is one thing their employer could do to keep them in their jobs, and fifty-five percent of employees report being at least somewhat likely to take a lower paying job if it has better benefits.

Full-time employees and some part-time employees get access to these perks, but temporary and seasonal employees are often left out. Common benefits offered to full-time employees include:

- Health, dental, vision, and life insurance
- Paid time off (PTO)
- Paid holidays, or holiday wages
- Disability insurance
- Retirement savings
- Family and medical leave (FMLA)

Employers are having to get innovative with their benefit offerings to stand out in the competitive job market. Some less commonly offered benefits are listed below. Get creative with what you're offering and be sure to survey your employees about what would actually be beneficial to them.

- Provide meals, beverages, and snacks
- Flexible work schedules
- On-the-job training to prepare for promotion or permanent positions
- Performance incentives
- Voluntary insurance benefits - group options for a discount
- Tuition assistance or reimbursement or college debt assistance
- Scholarship program for employees or their dependents
- Profit-sharing or bonuses after a busy season
- Unlimited paid time off (PTO)
- Parental or caregiver leave
- Parent-friendly office spaces or flexible work from home options, as allowable
- Childcare or childcare discounts/credits
- Family-friendly cookouts or appreciation events
- Employee Assistance Programs
- Access to telemedicine programs

In speaking with NALP member companies, some benefits that have gotten the attention of employees and help with recruitment and retention are:

- Offering health insurance to all employees, including seasonal
- Providing Paid Time Off for all employees (varying amounts depending on seasonal status and seniority)
- Revenue-sharing
- Paid holidays (these vary among member companies)
- Purchased equipment to work from home (for applicable roles)
- Offers flexible scheduling so that parents can get off work in time to pick up kids from daycare
- Started budgeting for managers to have team-building events
- Providing gym memberships for employees

## Building a Mentor Program

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Establishing a mentor program will allow you to train and develop employees for promotion within your organization. Barriers to growth and development for minority employees can be addressed by mentor and training programs. Mentor programs benefit the organization as much as the employees. Companies that implement a DEI mentoring program will create a more inclusive culture fostering diversity and belonging where employees feel connected and heard.

Diversity mentoring programs support your minority employees in several ways, such as:

### Provide support

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- Employees that may be battling inclusivity issues can benefit from having someone to voice concerns to or brainstorm solutions with. Employees will feel more connected, and part of a team.

### Visibility and Connection

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- A mentorship connects employees together. Minority employees often feel overlooked, and a workplace mentor can help combat those feelings and increase the visibility of employees for promotion and leadership opportunities.

### Development

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- Mentees thrive by learning new skills through a mentor's knowledge and expertise and will gain a true understanding of the skills and training they'll need in order to progress within your organization.

**A mentorship program should always have a goal or objective. When considering inclusive mentorships, find out what the aim is for your diverse employees.**

- Do they want more of a voice in the company?
- Are they looking for better access to leadership positions?
- Do they want to build a community at work?
- Ask what is important to them and where they see the challenges in your organization.
- After you've surveyed your employees and have an idea of what they need, you can start working on the logistics of the mentorship program.

DEI mentoring programs typically last from six to twelve months, allowing for deep, trusting relationships to form. While many programs include the option to match the mentee with a mentoring partner who shares aspects of identity or experience, best recommendations emphasize the importance of matches that can help with career objectives and professional growth. Also, take into consideration connecting people who can help find solutions to their specific challenges and support skill building for achieving career goals.

Your program will be unique to your company and your employees, but you'll need to consider the following aspects when planning:

### **Training Mentors**

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- Inclusive mentors may need some extra guidance. Make sure your mentors know your goals and expectations for the program.

### **Match Employees**

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- Getting a good mentor match can take a little effort. You'll need to determine who will be matched with whom - this can be heavily influenced by the mentee's goals.

### **Build the Mentorship Relationship**

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- It's important to help cultivate a connection between a mentor and mentee. You can do this by offering them resources to help them get started, such as discussion topics or goal-setting framework.

### **Determine Individual Goals**

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- Encourage mentors to create development plans and goals with mentees that can serve as a framework for their mentorship and establish a timeline for the goals - for example, set three-month, six-month, and twelve-month goals.

### **Check-In**

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- You'll want to know if your program is resonating with minority employees. Asking them for feedback will help you determine what is working and what is not.

NALP's blog, The Edge, has many different interviews and articles depicting recommendations when setting up employee mentoring and coaching opportunities. A couple of the most recent posts are linked below:

[Team Building: Implementing Effective Employee Coaching - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

[How I Do It: Creating a Leadership Development Program - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

## Recognition Programs

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Employee recognition programs play a vital role in attracting and retaining great employees. Recognizing employees' time and effort is an easy way to show that you appreciate them and value their work. Organizations that use recognition programs regularly have 30% lower voluntary turnover than businesses that don't, and with employee turnover at a record high, all retention efforts, including recognition programs, are more important than they've ever been.

Recognition programs could be public or private, formal or informal, include a gift, or not - or any combination of the aforementioned. Feel free to get creative with your recognition program. It is really about connecting with your employees and making sure they feel seen and supported. The best recognition program will make your employees feel valued, respected, and an important member of your team.

The following are employee recognition and appreciation ideas you could adapt to fit your company's culture.

- 1. Celebrate an employee's work anniversary or time-in-service.** This could be as simple as publicly mentioning the anniversary and thanking that employee for all their hard work, or a private thank-you note. You could include gifts, certificates, or awards based on time-in-service.
- 2. Give a public shout-out to an employee or team.** This could be on your social media or website, or at a staff meeting. A quick shout-out is a free, easy, and very effective way to recognize your employees' hard work.
- 3. Host an employee appreciation meal or event.** You could host this as often as it is feasible - monthly, bi-annually, etc. - and it could be as simple as bringing in coffee and donuts before work or having pizza delivered at lunch. If you can afford a few hours to make it an event, it could also be used as a team-building event.

By implementing an employee recognition program, you can ensure your employees' needs to feel appreciated are met. You could also see increased productivity, greater employee satisfaction, improved workplace culture, and decreased stress and absenteeism.

## Multigenerational Workforce - Needs and Expectations

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Today's workforce is made up of four distinct generations (Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z). The more you, the manager or business owner, know about each group, the better you'll be able to harness their strengths to benefit your organization.

- Baby Boomers - typically born between 1946-1964
- Gen X - typically born between 1965-1980
- Millennials - typically born between 1981-1994
- Gen Z - typically born between 1995-2009

Of course, as you can see by the birth year ranges, a lot of technological advancement and change has happened during the span of your workers' lives - and has affected communication preferences, leadership styles, workplace expectations, and work styles.

Having a workforce diverse in age can benefit your organization in many ways

- Multiple perspectives – Different generations can have distinctive ways of viewing job responsibilities. Sharing perspectives within and across teams brings a broad range of knowledge and abilities to support innovation.
- Problem-solving abilities – Life experience influences how we relate to and interact with others to address challenges and conflict. As a result, teams with age diversity can offer a variety of ways to address problems.
- Learning and mentoring opportunities – The more diverse a team is, the more ways people have to interact and learn from each other's insights. This includes mutually beneficial mentoring opportunities. Those with more years of experience can advise younger employees on career development.
- Unique relationships – Meaningful relationships with co-workers can help meet employees' emotional needs and contribute to job satisfaction. A variety of age groups within the organization mirrors a family structure to offer opportunities for personal connections with those outside of one's own generation.

Although there can be many benefits to having an age-diverse workforce, it can also come with complications and varying expectations to manage. Below are ways you can manage your age-diverse workforce to encourage retention:

- Create a space for open dialogue - Make it a priority to create a team culture that encourages open dialogue that will aid in breaking down generational barriers. Preconceived judgments can be easily debunked with a simple conversation.
- Be flexible - Regardless of the generation, each employee has different professional and personal needs. Take the time to listen attentively so you can provide the tools and accommodations to produce a high-performing employee. Flexibility in your management style should also be a consideration.
- Provide detailed, steady feedback - Regular, specific, constructive feedback aimed at helping employees change behavior and solve problems should be available to all employees.
- Avoid stereotypes - As the manager, set the tone of your team and steer clear of weak arguments that lump people into categories. There are lazy, entitled, overeager people in every generation just as there are thoughtful, driven, and committed people.
- Develop ways to transfer and share knowledge - Creating teams or mentor programs based on knowledge sharing - not just years of experience - may be helpful. Some younger employees may pick up new technology or tools quicker than older employees - teaching can happen in all directions.
- Provide professional development and training opportunities - Many employees are hungry for different avenues to learn, grow and advance within their organizations. Advancement is not always defined by a vertical move; in fact, lateral moves, opportunities to lead a short-term project/initiative, rotational assignments and access to continuing education are excellent growth and retention strategies.

Research indicates that the three most important workplace topics that span the generations include professional development opportunities or lifelong learning, financial investment programs, and family caregiving at various life stages. The best way to ensure your retention efforts are wanted and work is to talk to your employees.

Some articles from NALP regarding retention:

[Four Retention Tips from Lawn Care and Landscape Professionals - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

[Team Building: Making Recognition and Incentive Programs Effective - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

[Team Building: Why Employee Recognition and Incentive Programs Matter - The Edge from the National Association of Landscape Professionals](#)

## What's Working and What's Not

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Every company faces similar challenges in today's job market when it comes to retaining employees. We spoke to NALP member companies to hear directly from them what is working and what isn't when it comes to retaining diverse workforces.

### What's Working

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- Recognition program for employees that go the extra mile. Note: This is well implemented, with clear rewards and are awarded on a regular basis.
- Spending more time training and working with a Supervisor or Manager on developing teams
- Safety Day celebrations and recognitions with rewards and a picnic
- Team breakfasts
- Revamping the hiring process and taking longer to hire for roles instead of quickly hiring who is available. (This does require planning and very lean staffing at times)
- Implementing a 4-day work week
- Team-focused production bonuses (Example: If the job is budgeted at \$150K and the team comes in at a total cost of \$130K they get 8% of the 20% difference to disperse amongst the team)
- Creating an internal Facebook page for crews to share pictures of their work

### What's Not Working

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- Offering random rewards
- Paying for certifications (This benefited some employees, but did not move the needle on retention)
- Recognition programs that management did not follow through on
- Persuading people to stay for pay increases

## Conclusion

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Like all initiatives that a company takes on, it is important to be realistic about what is the right fit for your organization, both in budget and time to implement. Create a detailed short-term and long-term plan on what to implement and when. This should be reviewed and adjusted regularly. As always, NALP is here to support you in your retention efforts, and you can continue to get updates and look at NALP resources, [here](#), to help in these areas.

## About the National Association of Landscape Professionals Foundation

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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

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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

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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

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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](mailto:foundation@landscapeprofessionals.org).

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

