



Got a Capitol DEI Committee? Oregon Does.

In 2016, well before the revelations that energized the #MeToo movement, staff and members in Oregon began discussing ways to make the Capitol a more diverse, equitable and inclusive place. The conversation grew out of a recognition, House Speaker Tina Kotek says, that more constituency groups than ever—particularly communities of color—were coming to the building to represent and advocate for the broader population.

Two years later, the discussion has led to action: the creation of the Capitol Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and a new full-time staff position with the title accessibility and inclusion administrator. The committee already is planning and developing an agenda that will guide it through 2019. And the new staff position, which will be part of the human resources office, was recently posted.

In keeping with the goal of improving the Capitol’s workplace culture holistically, the committee includes legislators and staff, Kotek says. The group recently developed definitions of what it means by the terms diversity, equity and inclusion.

On diversity, its definition includes familiar references to race, ethnicity and gender but also addresses “power relationships in which the dominant cultural group is viewed as one up and the subordinate cultural group is viewed as one down.” Equity, the committee writes, “involves striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.”

An inclusive climate, the committee says, “embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.” But it cautions that “a diverse group isn’t always inclusive.” It says that,

“Increasingly, recognition of unconscious or ‘implicit bias’ helps organizations to be deliberate about addressing issues of inclusivity.”

The new administrator position may be unique among the state legislatures. Oregon’s legislature has long been a leader in human resource management, and this initiative fits with its pattern of innovation in human resource practice.

According to the job posting, the new administrator will develop the “inclusion and equity program’s long-range plans, goals, objectives and milestones,” and “engaging the organization in a dialogue that promotes understanding, respect and inclusion in the work environment.”

Perhaps most important, “This new position is part of a comprehensive effort to make the Oregon Capitol a model workplace,” Kotek says.