



2023

Department of the Air Force

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan

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FOREWARD

We are dedicated to serving our Nation by maintaining our status as the world's best Air Force and Space Force, responsible for flying, fighting, and winning in the air, and protecting and defending our interests in space. As with any competitive team, our success depends on recruiting and retaining the best talent. For the Department of the Air Force (DAF), this includes our service members and civilian employees, their families, and those we contract with for services and products. The DAF's diversity and inclusion efforts are informed by science, business best practices, congressional mandates, data-focused policy reviews and assessments, and the lived experiences of Airmen and Guardians working together every day.

Our mission requires the DAF be representative of the diverse Nation we serve. To maintain the pipeline of All-Volunteer Force, we must leverage the diversity of the United States – including racial and gender, but also regional, cultural, socioeconomic, and philosophical diversity. Our diversity distinguishes our force and provides us with unique advantages on today's battlefield and the battlefield of the future.

To address complex national security challenges, we must continue to build strong teams where all employees feel valued by the DAF. Our members must feel a sense of belonging in a safe and supportive environment where fair treatment and unhindered opportunities for personal and professional growth are the standard. Innovation thrives when all employees feel included and valued by their organizations. Inclusive teams create environments where teammates not only take more responsibility and contribute exponentially, but they dare to think more creatively and are enabled to apply moral courage to lead decisively.

Our team members deserve dignity, respect, and to serve in an environment where they can grow and thrive while staying focused on our mission and responsibility to the Nation. The DAF does not condone or tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation, reprisal, or threats to another Airman or Guardian under any circumstance.

We are committed to creating an environment that embraces diversity and inclusion and consistently pursues fair, just, and equal opportunities for every member. This requires all Airmen and Guardians to intentionally challenge behaviors, biases, and barriers impacting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Air Force and Space Force leaders at all levels must accept and reflect this commitment every day within every interaction. As we have done for over 75 years, we are confident that our Total Force personnel – Active Duty, Air National Guard, Reserve, Civil Service, and Air Force Auxiliary – will lead the way.



FRANK KENDALL
Secretary of the Air Force

INTRODUCTION

ONE TEAM, ONE FIGHT!

Our people are the foundation to why we are the world's best Air and Space Force. To make our warfighting force as effective as possible, leaders must support all members of their teams to succeed by identifying and removing barriers facing them. We, as a Department, must be an integrated team that leverages the diverse perspectives of our Total Force. Only by doing so will we solve some of the Nation's most complex challenges to promote liberty abroad and maintain freedom here at home.

Diversity is one of America's greatest assets and a critical advantage we have over near peer competitors. The simultaneous rapid transformation of today's warfighting environment and evolving U.S. demographics both drive the need for innovative approaches to attract, recruit, develop, and retain top talent or we risk losing high-quality Airmen and Guardians, our credibility, and our ability to secure our future.

To realize the advantages and capabilities of our diverse Total Force, we must empower our people to change the paradigm to improve the culture and climate through diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

MISSION

For the Department of the Air Force to succeed now and in the future, we must value and invest in attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining a diverse Total Force, ensuring a culture of inclusion to leverage the diversity of the Nation for strategic advantage in the Air Force, Space Force, Joint and Coalition operations¹

VISION

To enable the Department of Air Force to achieve warfighting excellence by advancing and embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility principles; driving a culture that leverages the unique strengths of our nation's people to meet current and future global security challenges

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

This plan will establish an enduring strategic framework across the DAF to cultivate an intentional diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility mindset in all endeavors. This conscious mindset will improve mission effectiveness, enhance positive impacts on our members, and shift the culture of the Department in a vital and mission-critical direction. Through deliberate efforts and a purposeful approach, this plan will embed the strategic framework into the Department's operations to include recruiting, outreach, accessions, retention, force development, promotions, and organizational climate.

¹ AFI 36-7001, *Diversity and Inclusion*, is in the revision process. Updated DAFI will reflect the Mission as identified within this Strategic Plan

DAF DEIA STRATEGY MAP

DAF DEIA IMPERATIVES



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



Figure 1: DAF DEIA Strategy Map

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

To reinforce the principle that our people are the key to achieving the DAF's mission, this diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility strategic plan outlines four imperatives for supporting our people as our most valuable resource. Enterprise-wide implementation of these imperatives strengthens diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility while outwardly acknowledging this as a growth opportunity for the DAF. Together, the overarching intent is to bolster our ability to provide "combat-credible military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our Nation."²



ALIGN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY TO MISSION

Aligning diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility to the mission requires implementing DEIA initiatives rooted in law, policy, and strategic direction. These outcome-based initiatives will enable traceability and will drive accountability with organizational performance in areas such as recruiting, outreach, accessions, retention, force development, promotions, and organizational climate.³ Strategic alignment and an outcome-based approach enable the ability to measure progress of implementing initiatives over time against overarching laws and policies.

DRIVE LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO RESULTS

Leadership engagement and accountability emphasize a leader's responsibility to create conditions where Airmen and Guardians can thrive while ensuring the forward movement of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Inherent in this mandate is the need to model inclusive leadership behaviors in the workplace and encourage engagement at all levels. We must lead by example to reduce or remove interpersonal barriers. We do this by facilitating personal relationships to break down bias and prejudice. We must lead by establishing a standard of respect and appreciation for individuals different from ourselves to build a common cause and positive relationships. Positive organizational culture is a leadership responsibility. Leaders must take ownership through multiple mechanisms, including seeking feedback through open and closed forums and data analytics. Only by doing so can we ensure we are leveraging the diverse skills, capabilities, and talents of our Airmen and Guardians to enhance our lethality to win in conflicts with our adversaries.



Additionally, leaders must take appropriate actions to investigate and resolve allegations and stop any proven unlawful behavior. Leaders must continuously review and update policies and processes for responding to discrimination and harassment as well as provide support for our personnel, in and out of uniform, who have experienced discrimination, harassment, intimidation, domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, threats, and reprisal. Leadership is integral to influencing an inclusive climate where all team members are valued for what they bring to the workplace.

Leadership accountability is an essential change agent that enhances the culture within organizations and teams. Leaders at all levels of the DAF must demonstrate accountability and set the standard for others to emulate.

² Department of Defense (DoD) Preserving Our Competitive Advantage, Personnel and Readiness Strategy for 2030, October 2020.

³ DoD Instruction.1020.05, DoD Diversity and Inclusion Management Program, 9 September 2020.



Champion a
Culture
of
Inclusion

IMPERATIVE

CHAMPION A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

Champion a culture of inclusion highlights the importance of building an environment in which our personnel feel valued, included, and acknowledged. This will require persistent, intentional engagement and focus at all levels of leadership to be cognizant of behaviors that inadvertently or unknowingly promote exclusivity. We increase cognitive diversity in our strategic planning and mission execution by developing cultural fusion among our Airmen and Guardians. In today's complex operating environment, debate and disagreement are cognitively demanding, but teams that enable constructive friction typically deliver superior results. Leaders at all levels must become skilled at identifying behaviors that counter the diverse and inclusive environment we are charged to maintain. All Airmen and Guardians must have zero tolerance for unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation, reprisal, or threats to another Airman or Guardian on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information.

To remain an "employer of choice" requires leaders to maintain focus on the pulse of the organizational culture and climate. Our success in recruiting and retaining top talent, and maintaining a competitive advantage for operational mission success, depends on getting the most from every person on the team by cultivating an inclusive culture.

INSTITUTIONALIZE DEIA PRINCIPLES

Persistent adherence to DEIA principles represents an enduring commitment to accomplish the mission and to keep people at the forefront. Meeting the needs of our people is a responsibility that allows us to achieve our mission requirements – Mission First, People Always. Underpinning this imperative is the knowledge that when DEIA principles are the foundation for an organization – innovation, progress, and enhanced mission success follow. Aligning these DEIA principles to our Airmen's Core Values and our Guardian's Ideals is essential to laying the foundation for how we integrate our moral, ethical, and cultural foundation as a Department.



Institutionalize
DEIA
Principles

IMPERATIVE

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



GOAL 1: DEMONSTRATE ADHERENCE TO ALL DEIA STRATEGIC GUIDANCE

The DAF, consistent with law, implements the strategic guidance from the Department of Defense (DoD) and other parts of the Executive Branch of the government. In addition to compliance, we have an obligation to inform leadership of progress. To accomplish this, we must align our policies, processes, practices, and systems to collect, distribute, communicate, assess, and monitor adherence to DEIA principles and initiatives. To guarantee the success of DEIA, we will develop the capabilities needed to establish and communicate goals and objectives, evaluate outcomes, and measure progress.

Objective 1.1: Provide dedicated DEIA resources at all levels of command

Objective 1.2: Assess, modify, and update policies, processes, and practices to align with laws, regulations, and guidance

Objective 1.3: Leverage data analytics to assess and support compliance with DEIA strategic guidance

GOAL 2: INCREASE LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Military and civilian leaders at all levels should be champions of DEIA and not just implementers of mandatory policy. Inclusive leaders must proactively engage and solicit ideas to inspire involvement from their subordinates and those around them. Inherent to leadership is a responsibility to make judgment calls ensuring all relevant factors are considered while requiring equal opportunity and promoting the equitable treatment of all people internal to the organization and those seeking to join or partner with the organization. Leaders at all levels must take appropriate action to address discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and retaliation.



Objective 2.1: Establish DEIA messaging to directly support senior leadership's DEIA vision

Objective 2.2: Establish DEIA assessment, implementation, and accountability tools for leaders at all levels

Objective 2.3: Educate leaders on resources available to promote and implement DEIA policies and best practices

Objective 2.4: Proactively collect and interpret data demonstrating performance towards DEIA goals and objectives



GOAL 3: PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE, CULTURAL APPRECIATION, TRAINING, AND AWARENESS

It is imperative for leaders at all levels to know their people to reduce bias and inculcate inclusion and equity across the organization. This level of personal engagement leads to an appreciation of unique talents, knowledge in the organization, and the value Airmen and Guardians add to the enterprise at large. Leaders are responsible for providing access to developmental opportunities for all Airmen and Guardians to reach their full potential.

Objective 3.1: Provide leaders with formal, comprehensive mentoring capabilities and resources

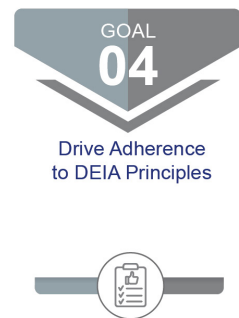
Objective 3.2: Raise awareness on cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, and bias

Objective 3.3: Update education and training resources to be culturally relevant, informed, and free of biases

Objective 3.4: Enhance resources and improve access for religious, medical, and disability reasonable accommodations

GOAL 4: DRIVE ADHERENCE TO DEIA PRINCIPLES

True commitment to DEIA means evaluating recent and future initiatives against the organizational framework and focusing on continuous process improvement. The DAF will prioritize regular reviews of policies, processes, procedures, and practices to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Education and training programs must reflect the changes that result from these reviews. The DAF will commit to funding for DEIA infrastructure and programs. The Department will measure its organizational effectiveness in advancing DEIA by utilizing a maturity model to evaluate and advance initiatives, goals, and organizational outcomes.



Objective 4.1: Increase and enhance routine external engagement efforts to attract underrepresented groups early and often

Objective 4.2: Build external relationships and networks to increase and sustain a diverse workforce

Objective 4.3: Assess the impact of DEIA successes or failures on promotion and career development within the Department of the Air Force

Objective 4.4: Codify procedures to use analytics regarding DEIA to support decision-making at all levels

DAF DEIA MATURITY MODEL

In alignment with the White House and the DoD DEIA Maturity Model Frameworks, the DAF developed a tailored DEIA Maturity Model. The aspirational paradigm measures organizational effectiveness in advancing DEIA outcomes along a scaled continuum from foundational capacity to leading and sustaining best practices (see Figure 2).

The DAF DEIA Maturity Model was released in November 2022 with a self-assessment component to assess the current state of DEIA maturity. Information gathered from this Maturity Model self-assessment will be leveraged to identify areas of improvement and best practices at a holistic DAF enterprise level down to the lowest organizational level.

The DAF DEIA Maturity Model self-assessments will not be accountability reports that reflect organizational performance but rather serve as a record of current state DEIA efforts and capabilities.

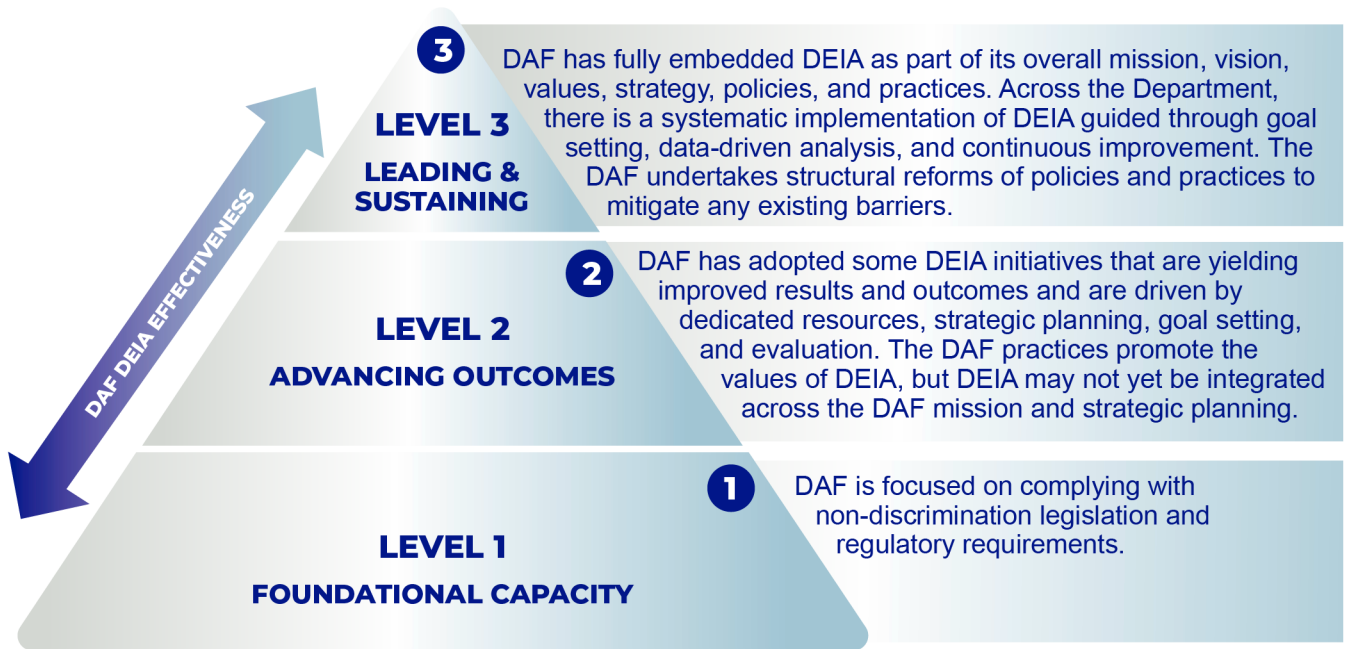



Figure 2: DAF DEIA Maturity Model Levels of Effectiveness

The DAF DEIA Maturity Model Framework (Figure 3) leverages five categories and nineteen sub-categories to assess DEIA maturity. The framework allows an organization to assess its current state of maturity based on the three levels of effectiveness as depicted in Figure 2.




DAF DEIA MATURITY MODEL FRAMEWORK				
CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	LEVEL 1 FOUNDATIONAL CAPACITY	LEVEL 2 ADVANCING OUTCOMES	LEVEL 3 LEADING AND SUSTAINING
DEIA Approach And Program Structure	Diversity Framework			
	Organizational Structure			
	DEIA Integration			
	Program Management			
Data-Driven Workplace	Data-Driven Approach			
DEIA Policies Practices and Procedures	Policy Development			
	Recruitment			
	Accessions / Hiring			
	Promotion			
	Force Development			
	Pay and Compensation			
	DEIA Training			
SES & GO Leadership Involvement	Engagement			
	Accountability			
Culture of Inclusion	Strategy			
	Employee Experience			
	Accessibility			
	Inclusive Workplace Culture			
	Retention			

Figure 3: DAF DEIA Maturity Model

BARRIER ANALYSIS WORKING GROUP

The Department of the Air Force Barrier Analysis Working Group (DAFBAWG) consists of seven distinct teams comprised of volunteer employees and service members who bring diverse perspectives to the DAF. DAFBAWG teams are responsible for identifying and analyzing potential barriers in recruiting and retaining DAF personnel. These teams are charged to analyze root-causes to potential barriers in civilian and military workplace policies, procedures, and practices. The DAFBAWG teams then develop informed plans to mitigate or eliminate barriers to support a strategic and competitive Total Force that values and leverages what each member brings to the mission to ensure our competitive advantage.



BARRIER ANALYSIS WORKING GROUP	
BEST	Black and African American Employment Strategy Team
DAT	Disability Action Team
HEAT	Hispanic Empowerment & Advancement Team
INET	Indigenous Nations Equality Team
LIT	LGBTQ Initiatives Team
PACT	Pacific Islander/Asian American Community Team
WIT	Women's Initiatives Team

DEIA DATA ANALYTICS REPORTING

To ensure adherence to DEIA principles, the DAF will leverage data analytics collected throughout the Airman and Guardian life cycle. Data collected through authoritative data sources are pipelined into a self-service analytics dashboard – the DAF Workforce Analytics Dashboard.

The DAF Workforce Analytics Dashboard details current state and historical demographic information of the entire DAF. This user-friendly interface allows for highly customizable queries of the intersectionality between race, ethnicity, and sex across a multitude of specific focus areas, such as career field and installation. End-users can view the demographic health of their organization as well as export data visualizations to support and enhance briefs, reports, and studies.

MOVING FORWARD

This strategic plan drives a stronger competitive advantage, enhanced readiness, and increased effectiveness by improving how we leverage the people that comprise the DAF and their talents. Traversing this path will often require a conscious pause, inquiry, and awareness of the innovative power presented by a more diverse Total Force. The DAF DEIA Strategic Plan is intended to be an adaptable document that best reflects the needs of the workforce and serves as a guide to all Airmen and Guardians as we work towards advancing DEIA efforts. We remain focused on cultivating conditions under which the Total Force thrives, strengthening our most valuable resource – our people – as we continue to sustain the most lethal Air and Space Forces for today and tomorrow.

APPENDIX A: TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Accessibility – the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. Accessibility includes the provision of accommodations and modifications to promote equal access to employment and participation in activities for people with disabilities, the reduction or elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities, a commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities can independently access every outward-facing and internal activity or electronic space, and the pursuit of best practices such as universal design.⁴

Barrier – an agency policy, principle, practice, or condition that limits or tends to limit employment opportunities for members of any race or national origin group, sex (gender identity), sexual orientation, religion, or for an individual (or individuals) based on disability status.

Barrier Analysis – an investigation of anomalies found in workplace policies, procedures, and practices that limit or tend to limit employment opportunities for members of any race or national origin, sex (gender identity), sexual orientation, religion, or based on an individual’s disability status. Barrier analysis identifies the root causes of those anomalies, and if appropriate, takes actions to eliminate them.

Barrier Analysis Working Group – the Department of the Air Force Barrier Analysis Working Group (DAFBAWG) consists of seven teams comprised of volunteers and service members who bring a grassroots perspective to analyze anomalies found in civilian and military workplace policies, procedures, and practices to then identify their root causes, including determining if those root causes are potential barriers to equal opportunity, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and devising plans to eliminate them.

Climate – the shared perceptions of the people in a group or organization. Organizational climate is a set of internal characteristics that distinguishes one organization from another and influences the behavior of its members.

Cognitive Diversity – the inclusion of people who have different ways of thinking, different viewpoints, or different information processing styles.

Culture – the immediate environment and how people feel about the organization and the beliefs, values, and assumptions that provide the identity and set the standards of behavior.

⁴ White House. (2021). Government-wide Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, p. 21.

Cultural Fusion – the intentional, open blending of different cultural backgrounds that combine unique beliefs, thoughts, and feelings to maximize quality and cognitive diversity.

Diversity – the combination of backgrounds, attributes, and cultures in our Total Force that are consistent with our values and reflective of the nation we serve, which together bolster innovation, drive operational excellence, and enhance readiness.⁵

Equal Opportunity – the right of all Airmen and Guardians, military or civilian, to be free from discrimination in all aspects of their employment.⁶

Equity – the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.⁷

Inclusion – a set of behaviors (culture) that encourages service members and civilian employees to feel valued for unique qualities and to experience a sense of belonging. Inclusive diversity is the process of valuing and integrating each individual's perspectives, ideas, and contributions into the way an organization functions and makes decisions, enabling diverse workforce members to contribute to their full potential in collaborative pursuit of organizational objectives.^{8,9}

Mentoring – a collaborative professional relationship between the mentor and mentee where the mentor helps the mentee work toward the fulfillment of clearly defined goals.¹⁰

Total Force – all Airmen and Guardians (Regular Air Force, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Regular Space Force, and Department of the Air Force civilians).¹¹

Underrepresented – individuals or groups (e.g., Hispanic, Black, Asian, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, etc.) that are represented in the workforce of a particular organization, career field, relative to their expected representation based on the relevant (i.e., qualified) civilian labor force.¹²

⁵ AFI 36-7001, *Diversity and Inclusion*, is in the revision process. Updated DAFI will reflect the definition as identified within this Strategic Plan

⁶ Department of the Air Force Instruction (DAFI) 36-2710. *Equal Opportunity Program*, 18 June 2020.

⁷ White House. (2021). *Government-wide Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*, p. 21.

⁸ DoD. (2020). DoD Instruction 1020.05, DoD Diversity and Inclusion Management Program, p. 24.

⁹ AFI 36-7001, *Diversity and Inclusion*, is in the revision process. Updated DAFI will reflect the definition as identified within this Strategic Plan

¹⁰ Air Force Handbook (AFH) 36-2643. *Air Force Mentoring Program*, 17 May 2019.

¹¹ Department of the Air Force Policy Directive (DAFPD) 36-26. *Total Force Development and Management*, 15 April 2022.

¹² Department of the Air Force Instruction (DAFI) 36-2710. *Equal Opportunity Program*, 18 June 2020.

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