

Request for Proposals: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consulting Services

Proposals due at 10am on Monday, November 13, 2017
Submit to Leah Goldstein Moses (leah@theimprovegroup.com)

The **Improve** Group

Purpose of RFP

The Improve Group is seeking a consultant who will help us advance our ongoing work in diversity, equity and inclusion.

About The Improve Group

[The Improve Group](#) is a Public Benefit Corporation with a mission to help mission-driven organizations make the most of information, navigate complexity, and ensure their investments of time and money lead to meaningful, sustained impact. Founded in 2000, we have leveraged our commitment to our values, business acumen, and the talents of our exceptionally creative staff to build our business while supporting the work of organizations building a just, equitable, and thriving world. We value:

- Thoughtfulness
- Excellence
- Collaboration and inclusiveness
- Innovation and creativity
- Joy
- Building a better world

Our services include consulting, capacity building, and systems development to help organizations evaluate their efforts and plan for the future.

We see our diversity, equity, and inclusion work as a journey—one that we've started, but one with a long way to go. The work has gained momentum in recent years. Some of the aspects of our journey so far include:

- With the help of our staff, we refined our mission, vision, and values to include greater emphasis on equity and inclusion in 2014.
- Late that year, we redesigned our internship program to focus on engaging more people from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in our field (people of color, people with disabilities, and people who are LGBTQ)
- At the same time, we began efforts to attract more diverse candidates to our job postings, such as rethinking our requirements to include a wider variety of experience and training, attending more job fairs, and doing more community presentations about evaluation.
- We launched 2015 with a question — “What is The Improve Group’s role in building a diverse field of evaluation?”— that we infused in staff meetings, Advisory Board meetings, and events, out of which came a few strategies:
 - Attracting more diverse candidates to our job postings, by rethinking our requirements to include a wider variety of experience and training; attending more job fairs; and doing more community presentations about evaluation
 - Transforming our practice to use community responsiveness and more fully engaging community stakeholders in our work
- In 2016, our team developed a new strategic plan with a primary goal of building a powerful, engaged, joyful team. We see diversity, equity, and inclusion as crucial to that.
- In late 2016, we developed an affirmative action plan that we are now using.

- Throughout the past few years, we have offered onsite training and paid for staff to participate in external training on issues like cultural competence, implicit bias, culturally-responsive evaluation, diversity and inclusion, etc.
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Our need

Thanks to these efforts, our staff is much more diverse than it was five years ago. In addition, many on our team are very passionate about equity and have been deeply affected by current events, from police brutality to rolling back of hard-won protections to a resurgent white supremacist movement. At several intervals throughout the year — at staff meetings, focused events and informally — our conversation has focused on how we continue our path to building a working environment at The Improve Group that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

In late September 2017, our entire team collaborated to articulate what we hope to do next, the qualities we are looking for in a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant to help move our organization further on this path, and the topics we hope to cover. The raw notes from this conversation are attached as an appendix, and are summarized below.

Hopes

We know we have a lot of ground to cover. We are approaching this with humility and vulnerability, recognizing that there is a lot to learn, and we aren't entirely sure where to start. We hope that our consultant can draw on their experiences in other small companies to help guide us through a process includes:

- Opportunities for improving at the:
 - Company level, by refining our systems, policies, and practices
 - Group level, by getting to know each other, building trust and comfort, and enhancing our communication/interactions
 - Individual level, by building knowledge and skills related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Interaction characterized by:
 - Group and individual interaction
 - A balance of safety—where people can be vulnerable—and discomfort—where we can identify areas for growth
 - Valuing individual experiences.
- An expectation that this work is a shared responsibility for all
- Plans for carrying this work forward into the long-term, with change-management processes and indicators for success.

Important qualities

We hope that the consultant we work with possesses a lot of qualities. We realize that any one consultant may not have all of these qualities, and may suggest strategies for engaging other experts in this work. The qualities that will give us a lot of confidence in the work include:

- Organizational knowledge
 - Experience working with small businesses
 - Understands that we have internal work (systems and policies and practices), as well as external work where we serve clients, and by extension, the broad public
 - Insightful about how change happens, helping us to be learning- and growth-focused.
- Experience in this work

- Understands the Minnesota context
- Knowledgeable about the historical context, systematic oppression, and their lasting impact
- Has knowledge of inequity
- Has experiences in working toward equity for marginalized groups and racial justice.
- Ability to facilitate thoughtfully
 - Engaging our entire staff in the process and ensuring that the work is collaborative and participatory
 - Is a people person that is accessible, not academic
 - Has real-life experiences that can be brought into the work
 - Can help us at each of the levels above—organizational, group, and individual

Topics to address

Our staff identified many topics to cover. We recognize that we need to find a way to address the full range of topics, from interweaving them to prioritizing and sequencing them. We are hopeful our consultant can help us determine the best approach and valuable resources. The topics generally fell into these categories:

- *Knowledge* about issues like historical context, systems of oppression, bias, white privilege, gender, culture, disability rights, and intersectionality
- *Skills* for raising difficult issues and finding opportunities to engage with each other
- *Strategies and actions* for building relationships, minimizing bias, and reducing microaggressions
- *Systems* for increasing inclusion, and making our power structures and hierarchy more equitable

Timeframe

We hope to engage a consultant and begin our work together in December 2017. We anticipate the work to continue through much of 2018, and welcome suggestions from consultants about a realistic timeframe.

Budget

We have a budget of \$10,000 for our work with a consultant. We welcome suggestions from consultants about what they would prioritize within this budget.

To apply

To apply for this work, please send a proposal to Leah Goldstein Moses (leah@theimprovegroup.com) by 10:00am on Monday, November 13, 2017. Questions about this RFP can also be sent to Leah by email by 5:00pm Monday, November 6, 2017.

Your proposal should describe:

- The approach you take to helping organizations advance their diversity, equity, and inclusion practices
- Recommendations for the phases or steps you would take, given our hopes and desired topics, along with a suggested timeframe
- The qualities you bring to this work
- Anything else we should know about you to help us understand what we can expect when working with you
- Your budget, as well as anything we should know about your billing and/or contracting procedures.

APPENDIX

We are engaging our staff throughout this process. Below are notes from our staff engagement about our work with a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant.

What qualities do we hope for?

- Process – someone who can do
 - Audit
 - Assessment
- Experience working with our size staff
- People person
- Accessible, not academic language
- Real-life experiences
- Ability to create safe space for courageous conversations
- Experience working with organizations through this change
 - Can walk us through
 - Demonstrated success
 - Can be a long-term partner
 - Nonprofit sector knowledge
- Understands our professional context
 - Type of clients
 - The Improve Group (IG) mission
- Historical knowledge and how it effects people/communities today
 - Can add that context into the work
- Constructive – learning- and growth-focused
- Experience in racial justice training/consulting and around other traditionally excluded groups
- Capacity building
 - Help with internal structures to support
- Can help us formulate indicators and evaluate this work
- Can communicate with us in a variety of ways
 - Mindful of adult learning
- Experienced helping organizations set benchmarks on racial equality
- Change management and organizational development
- Person of color or working in partnership or American Indian/identifies with marginalized community
- Team needed? A lot of qualities desired
- Aware of Minnesota culture
- Knowledgeable about different ways of communicating
- Has self-awareness
- Knows history of systemic oppression of people of color and what this means in the work place
- Understands and can teach us about key concepts like white supremacy, microaggression, systemic racism, etc.
- Can teach us specific skills like calling in/out
- Can share body skills —somatic techniques— so can get vulnerable and honest with each other
- Coaches with different knowledge and experiences to offer
- Real experiences being a person of color who can talk racial justice and coach with experience helping organizations see where they're at in terms of racial equality.

What should the process be like?

- Opportunity to get to know each other and build trust
- Couple of different options to participate, with different levels of anonymity
- Application to IG work (broaden thinking to be more culturally fluid)
- Learning norms to address issues, like calling in/out
- Both group and individual reflection opportunities
- Some parts are mandatory for all
- Support for each other; permission to participate or not
- Look at gaps in IG policy, evaluation policies
- OK to be vulnerable; process encourages this
- Individual experiences shine—not blurred in group conversation
- One-on-one interactions
- Variety of ways and formats for learning and development
- Should leave process feeling uncomfortable—that’s where change starts
- Be aware of what next step or work should be
- Places/space to bring to light things that have happened
- Shared agreement—here is what/how we approach things/people
- IG values facts to share externally or when opportunity arises
- Communication process—continuity for new hires, etc., through onboarding/handbook
- Burden should be shared— coworkers of color shouldn’t be asked to add the work
- How do we self-identify
- Communicate group and carry forward
- Trauma informed
- Participatory, co-created design of this process internally in IG
- Accountability measures for all
- Staff not only participate in training but whole process
- Committee with people at different levels in company to move work forward over time
- Informal reflection opportunities, discussions on literature, current events, concepts, etc. such as brown bags
- A place/space to reflect on these can be heavy to shoulder alone
- Support trainings happening with optional workshops, informal brown bags on literature on white supremacy and people of color in the work place
- Tied to IG evaluation—self-evaluation and strategic plan
- Since racism isn’t optional for some I don’t think some workshops should be — EVERYONE NEEDS IT.

What topics should we cover?

- Relatable conversation so everyone can relate and participate
- Making assumptions of language clear
- How to work with people who don't share same language
- Internal biases
- Subtopic-some cultures don't use pronouns
- Gender expression identity training
- Historical context- learn from other experiences not learning about.
 - US/MN
 - Broader system view on how racism plays out in everyday life
 - How class plays out
- "This is how I experience bias"
- Unconscious exclusion
- Definitions-understand what people are saying
- How to tell effective stories – relationship-building
- Racial justice
- Intersectionality
- Cultural humility
- Privilege-this type of conversation is very privileged
- Differing abilities, perceived limitations
- Relationship and relationship-building process; relate to it being mindful of relationship
- Skills for calling in/out
- Shared understanding about how respectful teachable moments happen
- Being comfortable with being uncomfortable
- Being proactively comfortable with difficult issues
- Acknowledge take personal responsibility for own racial behavior
- Skilled around asking questions to have a better understanding
- Barriers to inclusivity
- Acknowledgement of power structure and hierarchy at IG
- Racial justice - start to speak about difficult topic, brave to start somewhere, leading to other topics
- Gender identity training
- Not using male/female pronouns, appropriate pronouns for reporting
- Measurements to track improvements
- Framework for understanding self context
- Framework for working across perceived differences
- Process to offer support to staff to bring up difficult issues – available systems
- Microaggressions
- Educational elitism
 - Lens of how people see things and then address conversation
 - Vocabulary appeals to academic tone
 - Show interaction
- Mental health
- Build a culture to have a safe space to be vulnerable; acknowledge mistakes and learn from them
- Shared culture of learning
- Historical context of our field
- Wall as a discourse
- Perpetuate issue

- How to use evaluation role to communicate
- Make assumptions nonverbal – don't understand who is heard how are they heard
- Internal HR policies practices - how do we grow together to make it equitable
- Dress code
- Identify white privilege in IG
 - Organizational structure
 - Communities we work in
 - Coworkers
- Really evaluate if IG really stands for inclusion
 - By practice or does it make business for us