

Leadership and Governance Toolkit

Tool 4: Understanding the Difference between Tactical and Transformational DEI change: Knowing what will get Support in your Organization

Tactical change refers to changes organizations make to their policies, hiring practices, community engagement processes, etc. Tactical change espouses the belief that if we behave differently and if the right systems are in place, we can support members of EDGs and create a more inclusive and equitable organization. Transformational change is much more fundamental. It requires leaders to recognize that many of our institutions are built on white supremacist colonial foundations that are pervasive in everything we know and everything we do. Colonial mindsets ignore contextual realities, resulting in those in power creating beneficial opportunities and systems for majority populations. These systems can certainly help members of minority populations, but they are not designed with that goal in mind. The result is a lack of understanding of why existing structures are not able to reach other audiences effectively. For community-based organizations that often operate with very constrained resources, rather than redesigning structures, they tend to double down by escalating the investment in existing structures. These incremental changes are cheaper and more prone to buy-in from Boards and Leadership teams where the level of diversity is limited. Transformational changes threaten peoples' power positions because they require a shift in how things are done and which voices are driving change; they often require bold changes. Leaders must have frank discussions around the nature of the DEI change, leaders and key stakeholders in their organization are willing to support. They must work to convince leaders where transformational change will be required and where tactical change will suffice. Having these discussions up front sets up DEI change for success.