

THE TIME'S UP GUIDE TO

Equity and Inclusion During Crisis

PUBLISHED MAY 2020



Table of Contents

3	Introduction: In This Together
4	Caring for Your People
6	Insight: How to Measure the Pay Gap at Your Company
7	Equalizing Your Workplace
10	Insight: How to Bolster Your Anti-Harassment Policies in this Crisis — and Beyond
11	Insight: Key Features of Paid Leave Policies to Enact Now — and Keep Permanently
12	Demonstrating Your Leadership
14	Insight: How to Leverage Your D&I Leaders
16	Conclusion: Equity, for Resiliency's Sake

Introduction: In This Together

The coronavirus pandemic has cast an irrefutable spotlight on social and workplace inequity – and places an urgent demand on employers to lead responsibly and with compassion. Prior to the pandemic, the [business case for diversity was overwhelming](#) and now is not the time to lose any ground. Staying invested in building a diverse and inclusive work environment will ensure you retain the best talent, avoid the high cost of turnover, and exhibit the values that clients, customers, and consumers want to see from businesses in these difficult times.

One way businesses can demonstrate the leadership this moment requires is through a continued investment in their people and renewed commitments to safety, equity, diversity, and inclusion. After all, no decision about new revenue, cut costs, or health accommodations exists without implications for these critical values – and our most critical asset: our people.

TIME'S UP is committed to helping leaders respond to this moment, while maintaining and building on the progress businesses have made toward diversity, equity, and inclusion in recent years. That commitment starts with this initial *TIME'S UP Guide to Equity and Inclusion in Crisis*, which includes urgent and practical steps executive leadership and managers can take right now to care for their people, equalize their workplace, and lead with purpose. We acknowledge that the conditions we work in are changing more rapidly than ever and intend to iterate on this guide as the world of work evolves.

We hope the urgent and practical guidance we offer here helps you meet the demands of this moment and inspires you to imagine structural solutions to shape your workplace down the road. This is uncharted territory, so none of us has all the answers. But we do have each other. Let's get started.

One way to demonstrate leadership in this moment is through a continued investment in your people and renewed commitments to safety, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Caring for Your People

Factor in diversity when making furlough, lay off, and return-to-work decisions

Maybe you were making great progress in diversifying your workforce before the pandemic or maybe this was a commitment you were working on. Either way, a diverse workforce is critical to your business. As you confront difficult decisions around layoffs, furloughs, or who to bring back to work, you can prioritize diversity by:

- ▶ **Paying attention to the impact** those decisions may have on the diversity of your workforce, and including this factor in your decision-making;
- ▶ **Thinking about who is in the room** when you're making critical decisions; and
- ▶ **Organizing a task force** that includes a cross-section of employees at all levels to advocate for and represent the people you employ.

As you consider who to bring back or lay off, consider how to make your workforce more diverse. Examine “neutral” criteria like tenure as a basis for deciding who to furlough or lay off to make sure it does not have an unintended, disproportionate effect. It is often the case that new hires are disproportionately women or people of color — especially if you were intentionally diversifying your workforce pre-pandemic — so using a “neutral” criteria like tenure could unintentionally eradicate your diversity gains.

If you have paused new hires, or are moving more slowly to fill positions, take the time to look for and build a diverse pool of candidates. And if you are in an industry that is growing and hiring, stay vigilant about protocols that promote the consideration of women and people of color, even when you need to staff up quickly.

COVID-19 has forced millions of qualified people out of work, so don't assume that an applicant who is unemployed doesn't have what it takes to get the job done. Instead, look at their recent employment history to assess their credentials. With so many qualified job seekers right now, this is an essential consideration when recruiting and hiring.

Implement other cost-cutting measures before laying people off

Before you lay people off, consider reducing executive pay, enacting a hiring freeze, pausing bonuses, and pursuing other cost-cutting measures that could save jobs. This would enable you to retain your diverse workforce and capitalize on their skills, knowledge of your business, and productivity to get through this crisis. Or you can turn to job sharing arrangements that retain employees while lowering costs. If you do enact pay cuts, start with the highest earners and do what you can to avoid reducing pay for

your lower-paid employees who likely have fewer financial resources to fall back on. Your people will appreciate you going the extra mile for them, and will respond in kind.

Reimagine roles in order to retain your people

Major multinational corporations in retail, finance, tech, and telecommunications are taking action on reskilling — not with small pilots but rather, with comprehensive plans to retrain large segments of their workforces. These programs signal that the “future of work” is no longer on the distant horizon.

Even if you are not making those large shifts, your business priorities may still evolve to meet this moment, and you may find that employees’ current roles and responsibilities must shift, too. Rather than furlough or lay off your people, you can retain them and reimagine their roles so they match your current business needs by:

- ▶ **Training your employees** on new skills and offering them opportunities that you might not otherwise;
- ▶ **Stretching more junior employees** and giving them the chance to grow in their roles and showcase different skills; and
- ▶ **Analyzing the salary of those remaining** in their jobs and taking on more work, making sure their compensation is still fair and not discriminatory.

As you make these shifts, constantly evaluate how these decisions may disproportionately impact the diversity of your workforce. Is one work unit fully occupied, while another is languishing? Are there individuals who are being left out as work is reallocated?

Your people will appreciate you going the extra mile for them, and will respond in kind.

Rethink the timing of your performance management process

Even in good times, performance reviews can be stressful and anxiety-producing. Recognize the pressures on your people right now and delay performance reviews if you can.

When you are ready to conduct performance reviews:

- ▶ **Consider how the work employees are doing may differ from their “usual” assignments.** Take this into account in your reviews.
- ▶ **Be aware of how the unprecedented work environment may have limited your employees’ ability to perform or deliver results** when considering pay increases or promotions. Women, caregivers, and other vulnerable employees can be particularly disadvantaged by unintended consequences or assumptions about their work performance. For example, employees with kids at home may be viewed as less committed to their work right now, when the reality is that they’re spending more hours online than ever before.

- ▶ **Conduct a pay equity assessment**
 - and make sure any adjustments in pay do not disadvantage women, people of color, or other employees who are historically underpaid.

Keep an eye on diversity when hiring contractors and vendors

Now is the time when your company's purchasing power can help strengthen the diversity of your contractors and vendors. You can show your commitment to diversity by expanding purchasing or investment in small, minority, or women-owned businesses, or by prioritizing investment in communities hard-hit by the pandemic. Consumers, customers, and clients are looking for businesses that are stepping up during this challenging time, so it could give you a competitive advantage.

INSIGHT

How to Measure the Pay Gap at Your Company

Ensuring that your people are paid equitably is as important today as ever. When analyzing pay at your company across lines of difference – gender, race, ability, and more – it's important to analyze the median pay, not look simply at “equal pay for equal work.”

For a median gender pay gap analysis, for example, you would look at the median pay of women working full time versus men working full time. Median pay is an unadjusted raw measure used by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to assess not only equal pay but equal opportunity by factoring in how many women serve in high-ranking roles.

Equalizing Your Workplace

Abide by social distancing guidelines – but don't isolate staff

Most companies will resume operations under new conditions, with social distancing recommendations on site and limitations on the size of gatherings. As you implement these safety measures, make sure that they don't unintentionally roll back your work culture or exclude women, people of color, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, older workers, and other vulnerable employees from career advancement. Consider how your actions may have a disproportionate effect on some of your people by:

- ▶ **Being aware of which employees are moved out of “better” spaces** — further from amenities, less visible to clients, off the senior management floor, or away from key leadership and collaborators, if you must reconfigure your workplace to meet social distancing guidance.
- ▶ **Committing to include a diverse group**, and making sure women and other vulnerable employees are not unintentionally excluded if meetings or events are limited in size.

Seize opportunities to promote inclusive workspaces

Empty, or nearly empty, workplaces can provide the opportunity to promote diversity and inclusion in the long-run. Take advantage of this moment to make renovations, such as accommodations to enhance accessibility for disabled employees, converting gendered bathrooms into inclusive spaces, designating private spaces for nursing mothers, and displaying signage that is more welcoming and inclusive.

Offer flexible work schedules and working conditions to meet your people's needs

Working from home during this crisis has given many companies direct experience in how their business can still function with their people out of the office. Allowing that arrangement to continue as workplaces reopen can help you retain your employees and make them more productive. If your employees continued to work from home, or you leveraged flexible scheduling in recent months, don't abandon these tools. Alternative work arrangements can make it easier for employees to balance the sustained demands of home and work during this pandemic, and can even increase productivity as your people are able to focus on completing tasks at a time that works best for them.

Keep in mind that some employees may not feel comfortable coming back to work right away due to health concerns for themselves or their family. Allowing employees to work

remotely – if possible – is one way a company can show concern for its workforce, while also avoiding questions about private health information. If possible, consider giving your people the option to return to the office – send out a survey to learn who wants to come back to the office and when, so you can plan in a way that meets your company's and your employees' needs.

Flexible scheduling allows people who cannot work from home the ability to adjust their schedules so they can tend to caretaking at home or other demands during and beyond this crisis. Flexible scheduling can work for large and small companies and benefit salaried and hourly workers alike. If you lead a large company, set up systems that allow your people to select shifts. If you lead a small business, work with your people to come up with creative ways to adjust their work schedules to meet everyone's needs, such as allowing your team to work with each other to cover shifts. Finally, bear in mind that whatever scheduling system you use, you should provide your people with notice and predictability in their work schedule – with the demands people are juggling at home, planning around a predictable work schedule is more important than ever.

Supply your teams with the tools they need to work at home effectively

Working from home is not created equal for everyone. Pay attention to any inequities in resources or technology that may make working from home more challenging for some of your people. Perhaps they do not have high speed internet access or have to share one computer in the house with another working partner or children completing schoolwork from home. Because your people may not volunteer these challenges on their own, employers should take the initiative to raise these issues up front with the entire workforce and work together with employees to identify solutions.

*Working from home
is **not created equal**
for everyone.*

Manage microaggressions in virtual and in-person contexts

When hosting virtual meetings, emailing, messaging, conducting one-to-one check-ins, or engaging with your people in real life, watch out for microaggressions. A [microaggression](#) “is a subtle way of showing one's bias and discriminating tendencies. Any statement, joke, or inappropriate inquiry alluding to someone's gender, race, or even age, can be a sign of a microaggression, especially if it's said in the context of one's weakness.” These are the frequent, often overlooked, behaviors that cause so many people, particularly those who are most vulnerable in this moment, to feel excluded.

Microaggressions can happen anywhere, and remote work is no exception. In remote meetings, and those in real life, microaggressions can include talking over or cutting off women, junior level team members, and people of color; not giving time to introverted thinkers, or soliciting input from some team members more than others.

To combat microaggressions, think expansively about who should be invited to virtual meetings and pay attention to who may not be speaking – or who’s getting interrupted or talked over during those conversations. You can correct those behaviors in the moment by calling on people who have been ignored or going back to points that they raised earlier.

Microaggressions can also take place between individuals, with inappropriate jokes or comments. Remote communications channels (emails, text, chat) may make it easier for aggressors to take license and harder for leaders to spot, so extra effort may be needed.

You can help root out microaggressions from your workplace by:

- ▶ **Educating yourself** about the many ways microaggressions show up in the workplace, acknowledging they exist, and recognizing how they can harm your people and erode your company culture;
- ▶ **Holding conversations** to bring awareness to the issue and create safe spaces where people can share their experiences openly; and
- ▶ **Adopting a zero tolerance policy** for this behavior. If you notice microaggressions happening in your workplace, immediately address them.

Acknowledge the added responsibilities that caregivers have at home and co-create custom solutions to support their success

The pandemic has highlighted a struggle that many employees, especially working women, have confronted for years – the “second shift” of unpaid work that awaits them at home, where there may be children, ailing relatives, or older parents who need care and support. The challenges caregivers face will be exacerbated in the coming months as workplaces open – even as schools, summer camps, and day care centers remain closed.

Recognize caregivers’ additional responsibilities and work with employees to help them balance those demands. This can take the form of alternative work arrangements, but can also be informal arrangements that allow a worker to go home early or come in late on occasion.

Don’t make assumptions about people’s availability. For example, you may hold a 6 p.m. meeting online to support employees who remain remote, without considering how that decision prevents parents from preparing their children’s dinner on time. Conversely, don’t assume that an employee cannot make a late evening meeting because they have children at home. Allow your people to freely express their challenges without fear of disapproval or prejudice, and work with them on custom solutions.

Watch out for workplace harassment and protect your people when it happens

As employees return to work with higher stress levels, anxiety, fears, and uncertainty, be aware that incidents of sexual harassment, discrimination, and/or bullying could increase. What’s more, the fear of retaliation that prevents people from reporting these incidents, even in good times, is all the more real with unemployment at record highs. As workforces shrink, companies may have fewer people in place to prevent or address workplace harassment, but confronting harassment head on is as important as ever.

There's also evidence that COVID-19 is putting people at risk in their own homes, with the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) reporting that about half of all calls they received in April 2020 mentioned abusive and controlling behavior due to the COVID-19 crisis. Employers can help these vulnerable employees by providing survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking with information about emergency resources, access to the employee assistance program (EAP) service, and the ability to use their sick leave as “[safe days](#)” to get the services and assistance they need. Assure employees that if they or someone they know are living in an unsafe or violent home environment, they are not alone. Remind them that there are resources available to them, such as the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)—(800) 799-7233, which is open 24/7 and both confidential and free. Seek out those resources yourself, so you can learn [how to support a colleague](#) who is being abused by an intimate partner.

Offer permanent paid sick days and paid family and medical leave

This crisis has illustrated the importance of building in paid sick days and paid family and medical leave for all workers as a regular part of your business plan. In this period of great economic difficulty, businesses may believe that they cannot afford to build

INSIGHT

How to Bolster Your Anti-Harassment Policies in this Crisis – and Beyond

- ▶ **Maintain strong reporting systems** through multiple channels to ensure that survivors have clear ways to report sexual harassment, even under virtual or short-staffed conditions, and are protected from retaliation.
- ▶ **Have a policy that encourages bystanders to speak up** for their fellow employees, without fear of retaliation.
- ▶ **Address complaints in a timely manner** and investigate them through remote processes, if necessary. Create clear protocols for phone and video interviews and hold frequent status updates with your investigative teams to stay on top of the cases they are handling. Keep complainants informed throughout the process.
- ▶ **Extend corporate sexual harassment policies to all your people** — including independent contractors and unpaid interns — to ensure that everyone you employ works in an environment free from harassment and discrimination.
- ▶ **Provide effective sexual harassment training**, tailored to your business, to all your people. Make sure it addresses the risks of sexual harassment in remote, virtual, or understaffed working conditions. Consider refreshing or recirculating information about sexual harassment in the context of this moment.

family-friendly policies into their operating budgets. In fact, the opposite is true: These policies are critical for companies as we weather this public health crisis – and must be made permanent to keep your people safe and supported over the long term. Paid leave [improves worker retention](#) and increases worker productivity, and companies that implement it report that the rewards outweigh the costs. By investing in your workforce, you can retain your trained and committed employees and emerge stronger and ready to move forward as our economy comes back.

Additionally, provide bereavement leave and be flexible about timing. The pandemic has interfered with the ability for families to gather and grieve the loss of loved ones, whether their death was caused by COVID-19 or not. Your people may need time off to grieve a loved one who died months ago, and it's important to allow them time to do so.

INSIGHT

Key Features of Paid Leave Policies to Enact Now – and Keep Permanently

Everyone, at all times, but especially in the midst of this unprecedented public health crisis, needs paid leave, no matter their job or the size of their employer. The features and benefits of paid sick days and paid family and medical leave programs can vary and be molded to your business, but the reasons to take leave should include:

- ▶ **Paid sick days** should allow your people to take paid time off to visit the doctor, recover from an illness, or care for a sick child or family member, or a family member with disability-related needs.
- ▶ **Paid family and medical leave** should allow your people to take paid time off to care for their own or family member's serious health conditions, for chosen family, newborns or newly adopted or fostered children, or for injured military service members.

In addition, while features will vary, all your people should qualify for your paid sick days and paid leave programs – including part-time workers. This pandemic has demonstrated how critical paid sick days and paid leave are both for workers and for employers, and for the safety of our community as a whole, so this may be a time to also consider how you can extend these policies to the freelancers and independent contractors who are part of your business.

Demonstrating Your Leadership

Lead with empathy, transparency, and understanding

While stay-at-home orders and shuttered workplaces have been shared experiences during this crisis, individuals have faced the effects of the pandemic in many different ways. Some have been fortunate enough to escape illness, but struggled to homeschool their children and care for elderly parents while keeping up with work. Others have been directly affected by illness or the loss of loved ones. And some communities have been hit particularly hard: Black and brown communities are collectively reeling from the disproportionate loss of hours, jobs — and lives. Do not overlook how painful these acute experiences are for your people, especially those whose personal lives have been shaped most significantly by the pandemic.

Empathetic leadership is especially called for now, and for the foreseeable future. Leaders must recognize that COVID-19 impacts each of their employees differently — but significantly. Here are some steps you can take to lead with empathy:

- ▶ **Understand that every employee is grappling with distinct challenges** during this pandemic, rather than make assumptions about what your people are going through.
- ▶ **Recognize that the needs of your people will evolve** as the crisis evolves and commit to meeting their needs as best you can.
- ▶ **Be transparent** about the business decisions you must make and why.
- ▶ **Show solidarity** to your people, especially those on the front lines.
- ▶ **Acknowledge and seek to understand** the ways employees up and down the wage scale are experiencing this crisis.
- ▶ **Make mental health support widely available** to all staff, and make sure any employee assistance program (EAP) or other providers your company uses have clinical expertise and training in dealing with a diverse set of clients.
- ▶ **Ensure that your managers are informed**, trained, and aware of the issues that the staff they supervise may be facing, and give your managers the support they need to show up for your staff.

Communicate constantly and transparently about all aspects of your business, including company benefits and policies

At times of great change and uncertainty, good communication is key. Communicate frequently, utilizing all the modes and channels available to you, and with as much transparency as possible. In the absence of information, employees may not understand the decisions management is making, or the scope of their rights and responsibilities.

- ▶ **Ensure that your company policies are transparent and easily accessible to all your people** – as well as any adjustments made to meet the demands of this moment. Make it clear in all your communications that employees can take advantage of these programs and resources without fear of repercussion or retaliation.
- ▶ **Host company-wide meetings and virtual town halls** to level the information and communication playing field so all employees return to the office or continue to work remotely on equal footing.
- ▶ **When you build these new communication channels, keep the ones that are working permanent** – and expand on them. Being intentional in your ongoing communications is key to building inclusive and equitable workplaces.

At times of great change and uncertainty, good communication is key.

Remember that not all staff may come back to the workplace with the same information

If your workforce has been working from home, or some were working while others were laid off, recognize that your employees may come back to the office with different experiences and knowledge about how your business operated during the quarantine period. Those who were not included in remote meetings may not be aware of the discussions and business decisions that were made during them. And casual discussions that help information flow throughout a shared office have not been taking place. Young employees who might have been added to a meeting as a boss walked by their desk have missed out on opportunities to listen and learn.

These differences in experiences and information can lead to some people feeling “in the know” when in-person work resumes, and others feeling left out. What’s worse: some of your people may be missing key pieces of information they need to succeed in their jobs.

Look out for these disparities in your workplace and increase your communication with everyone in response. If someone is struggling with an assignment, make sure they have the full background. Don’t assume that they absorbed the information conveyed in a virtual meeting – it may be that they weren’t invited to it in the first place.

Reinvest in your diversity and inclusion efforts

Your commitment to diversity and inclusion, and to affinity or Employee Resource Groups (or ERGs), have never been more important. Your diversity and inclusion leaders have the expertise and the vision to guide you through these uncertain times, to facilitate important input from your people, and to imagine new and innovative approaches to these new working conditions. At the same time, your diversity and inclusion leadership may be operating short-handed, so think about how to make sure this crucial skill set and knowledge base is maintained. This includes making time and space, either virtually or in real life, to hear from your diversity leaders, or for ERGs to gather, support one another, and raise issues, such as the loss of mentorship and other opportunities.

As you restructure work, consider what opportunities employees might lose out on in these new circumstances. For example, it will be harder for your people to connect over coffee, shadow a colleague, or build rapport with a sponsor or mentor. Social distancing and other pandemic protocols may prevent people from gaining meaningful access to senior leaders and one another. Account for those lost opportunities by retaining your diversity roles, ensuring funding for ERGs, diversity programs and initiatives, and protecting diverse talent pipelines. Keep diversity and inclusion integral to your economic recovery strategy.

Set a tone of strong and visible leadership from the top

Setting the tone and culture you want for your business always starts at the top. This is especially true now, when your people will be looking to you for direction during uncertain times. Be visible to your workforce – if you have essential employees packing boxes or providing emergency services, go

INSIGHT

How to Leverage Your D&I Leaders

When one mass media and entertainment company created a COVID-19 taskforce in response to the crisis, they took extra steps to ensure the group would provide diverse perspectives about their people, programs, and policy. In addition to inviting senior leaders, they intentionally brought in diversity and inclusion leaders, heads of ERGs, and representatives from all levels. This newly designed task force resulted in greater feelings of inclusion, with employees reporting that they felt their needs were being heard and considered by the executive team.

to the warehouse or the front lines so your people know you stand with them. Model the workplace practices you expect your employees to follow. For example, if you are encouraging people to work from home, make sure you and other leaders across the company are, too. Openly discuss both the business and personal challenges that you are working to overcome. And remember to communicate often about the values that are key to your business, including diversity and inclusion.

Measure the effects on workforce diversity as you make critical business decisions

As operations resume, companies must continuously track the ways this crisis is affecting their people and measure the impact that critical business decisions are having on the overall diversity of their workforce. Your clients, customers, and investors will want to know this information, as well as prospective employees.

In the immediate term, make sure to track the impact of staffing decisions on your workforce diversity, inclusion, and equity metrics so you can assess how your choices impact your company's make-up. Collecting data in the near term will help you determine if you are falling behind on your workforce diversity goals or staying on track – and enable you to devise a plan to meet or exceed them over the longterm.

The metrics each company keeps tabs on will differ but be sure to measure:

- ▶ **The demographics of your entire workforce** – as you make reductions or furloughs, promote or consolidate, and as you hire;
- ▶ **The salaries and total compensation of all your people**, so you can conduct a gender and racial pay gap analysis; and
- ▶ **How and to whom you distribute key assignments**, opportunities, and workload as you reallocate work.

Companies that track the impact of this crisis on their people and take steps to improve the economic stability of their employees are likely to see improved productivity and greater customer satisfaction. Tracking and strengthening workforce diversity is essential to your long-term success, so figure out how to measure it now to ensure you have the systems set up for the future.

Now is the time to double down on your values

How you live up to your values now will have future implications on hiring the best talent, attracting discerning customers, and building your business's resilience over the long haul. Before the pandemic, company leaders were already realizing how their workplace culture and values impacted their bottom line, as more and more workers and consumers make decisions on where to work and purchase goods and services based on how businesses live up to their stated values of community and inclusion.

We are seeing this continue during the pandemic, as the public is paying attention to – and being vocal about – business practices, ranging from the treatment of essential workers to accepting federal small business loan assistance. Demonstrating a commitment to your values when times are tough will be noticed and rewarded by consumers who will return more quickly – and with greater loyalty.

Conclusion: Equity, for Resiliency's Sake

Data is already revealing how inequities in employment are hurting women the hardest during this crisis, and how this recession is disproportionately devastating to women, particularly women of color and low-paid women. [One in five U.S. workers](#) do not have a job right now. Of the 20.5 million people who lost their jobs in April, [more than half were women](#). Women of color are [overrepresented](#) in industries that have been hardest hit by this economic crisis — even as [one in three](#) jobs held by women has been deemed essential.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

TIME'S UP insists upon a world where work is safe, fair, and dignified for all — something that is only possible with the leadership and partnership of you, the business community. Prior to COVID-19, companies were making historic progress and publicly committing to serve all stakeholders, not just shareholders. This work must continue with fresh resolve today.

The companies that get the commitment to their people — their most vulnerable people — right are going to be the ones that survive in the long run, emerging stronger from this moment than ever before. The recommendations covered in this guide are intended to offer initial guidance in the short term, but fostering and maintaining a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture in spite of the COVID crisis will take a sustained effort over time.

We welcome all business leaders to join our community as we spearhead innovations in how we work — and develop a more resilient system for the future. Learn more by visiting us at timesupfoundation.org, and [please contact us with your feedback](#).



© 2020 TIME'S UPTM Foundation. The TIME'S UP trademark is the protected property of TIME'S UP Now.

www.timesupfoundation.org