



Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs

New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2023-2027

October 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Background	3
A. Executive Order No. 187.....	3
B. General Information Bulletin (GIB 19-02)	3
II. NYS Justice Center Organizational Profile	5
A. Vision.....	5
B. Mission	5
C. Our Values and Guiding Principles	5
III. Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	7
A. Diversity.....	7
B. Equity.....	7
C. Inclusion	7
IV. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategic Plan	8
A. Current DEI Initiatives	8
B. Building on Progress.....	11
V. Conclusion	19

I. BACKGROUND

A. EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 187

On August 23, 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed Executive Order 187 (EO#187), ***“Ensuring Diversity and Inclusion and Combating Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace”***, committing to a culture of respect that values and promotes diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity, free of unlawful discrimination on the basis of protected class status or any impermissible basis, in all functions performed, and services offered, by New York State employees.

The Executive Order outlines a commitment to protecting and promoting diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity in the State’s workforce in accordance with the requirements of the New York State Human Rights Law, Title VII of the Federal Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and all applicable requirements of New York state and federal law.

EO#187 requires all agencies and departments over which the Governor has Executive Authority, to develop a written diversity and inclusion plan, and to submit an annual report on diversity and inclusion. This includes “the agency’s employment actions with respect to minorities, women, disabled persons, LGBT individuals, and veterans”.

B. CIVIL SERVICE GENERAL INFORMATION BULLETIN NO. 19-02: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGIC PLAN AND FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Since the implementation of EO#187, the Department of Civil Service’s (DCS) Office of Diversity and Inclusion Management (ODIM) has disseminated resources to help prepare state agencies for the development of a written diversity and inclusion plan.

On January 4, 2019, ODIM distributed General Information Bulletin No.19-02, which contained the *Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* and the *Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Framework and Implementation Plan* – both documents are designed to inform decision-making in diversity and inclusion.

The **Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan** identified four comprehensive Statewide objectives:

1. Develop strategic leaders
2. Recruit and retain talent
3. Foster inclusive culture
4. Deliver effective programs and services

The **Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Framework and Implementation Plan** identified eight areas critical to success at the enterprise and agency levels:

1. Informed and committed leadership
2. Clearly articulated roles and responsibilities
3. Continuous policy review and development
4. Dedicated resources
5. Collective accountability
6. Education and Training
7. Program plan integration
8. Performance measures

State agencies will utilize these overarching principles and objectives to develop their respective diversity and inclusion implementation plans. The plans will both identify and elaborate on the specific actions that agencies will take to improve their connections with employees, residents, and the many diverse communities of the State.

II. NYS JUSTICE CENTER ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

The New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center) was established in 2013 by the Protection of People with Special Needs Act. The agency was created to restore public trust in the institutions and individuals charged with caring for vulnerable populations by protecting the health, safety, and dignity of all people with special needs.

The Justice Center has jurisdiction over more than 1,000,000 individuals receiving services across six State Oversight Agencies. The agency operates a toll-free hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week for receiving reports of allegations of abuse and neglect. The Justice Center is authorized to investigate these reports and pursue administrative sanctions against staff found responsible for misconduct. The agency's Special Prosecutor/Inspector General works with local district attorneys who prosecute criminal offense allegations. The Justice Center also issues recommendations for corrective actions.

In addition, the agency provides support services for individuals and guardians as well as issues abuse prevention materials statewide. The Justice Center Advisory Council aids the agency in developing policies, programs, and regulations.

A. Our Vision

People with special needs shall be protected from abuse, neglect and mistreatment. This will be accomplished by assuring that the state maintains the nation's highest standards of health, safety and dignity; and by supporting the dedicated people who provide services.

B. Our Mission

The Justice Center is committed to supporting and protecting the health, safety, and dignity of all people with special needs and disabilities through advocacy of their civil rights, prevention of mistreatment, and investigation of all allegations of abuse and neglect so that appropriate actions are taken.

C. Our Values and Guiding Principles

- Integrity: The Justice Center believes that all people with special needs deserve to be treated with respect and that people's rights should be protected.
- Quality: The Justice Center is committed to providing superior services and to ensuring that people with special needs receive quality care.
- Accountability: The Justice Center understands that accountability to the people we serve and the public is paramount.

- Education: The Justice Center believes that outreach, training, and the promotion of best practices are critical to affect systems change.
- Collaboration: Safe-guarding people with special needs is a shared responsibility, and the Justice Center is successful because it works with agencies, providers, people who provide direct services, and people with special needs to prevent abuse and neglect.

III. COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION

At the NYS Justice Center, our work of supporting and protecting individuals with special needs is inseparable from our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is central to our mission as an agency that each member of our diverse community feels valued and represented no matter their identities, cultures, experiences, backgrounds, and characteristics. This is crucial to our organization's continued success, and most importantly, what our staff members, volunteers and community deserve.

A. DIVERSITY

Dimensions of diversity can include but are not limited to gender, gender identity, gender expression, ethnicity, race, age, sexual orientation, religion, language and accent, ability and disability, veteran status, education, work style, and personality type. We commit to increasing diversity, accepting, and respecting the variety of similarities and differences among all people.

B. EQUITY

Equity ensures that support and access to resources needed to be successful are available to all. We commit to identifying and overcoming systemic barriers that have prevented the full participation of historically and currently disadvantaged populations.

C. INCLUSION

Inclusion refers to a cultural and environmental feeling of belonging. Inclusion can be assessed as the extent to which employees feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated, and valued for who they are and for their contributions towards organizational goals. We commit to a Justice Center that welcomes differences and promotes a sense of belonging.

IV. NYS JUSTICE CENTER'S DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION STRATEGIC PLAN

A. CURRENT DEI INITIATIVES

Prior to the creation of this strategic plan, Executive Director Denise Miranda's vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion work across the NYS Justice Center and beyond resulted in collaboration with agency leadership to successfully implement a number of initiatives. These initiatives align with the Statewide Objectives for diversity and inclusion and will be utilized as the foundation for developing our agency's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategic plan.

➤ **Diversity Training**

As of 2018, the Justice Center has implemented a mandatory diversity training for all new and existing employees. Contractors who work for the agency have also been invited to participate.

This training is designed to increase the participants' cultural awareness, knowledge, and improve essential communication skills. Critical components of the training include dismantling ethnic, social, and political barriers to work towards a common goal. Every division of the agency has completed the diversity training, while offering it on a rolling basis for all new hires.

➤ **Anti-Racism Survey**

In the summer of 2020, the Justice Center released an anti-racism survey to obtain employee feedback on their experiences working within the agency. This anonymous survey also included an opportunity for staff to share feedback and provide suggestions for ensuring an inclusive and respectful workplace.

Approximately 95% of the individuals who responded to the survey indicated that the Justice Center has communicated a clear message of zero tolerance for racism, discrimination, and harassment. Results showed that 95% of individuals were also aware of how to report a concern about racist or discriminatory action.

Notable amongst employee feedback was a request for ongoing diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism training. Additionally, more than 50% of the respondents indicated an interest in participating in an anti-racism work group.

➤ **Anti-Racism Workgroup**

In response to events happening across the nation and feedback from the agency wide anti-racism survey, an Anti-Racism Workgroup was formed. The group has several goals including: understanding the agency's collective awareness on racial equity and how it impacts Justice Center work, identifying strategies to align agency behavior and practices with a culture that values the talents, skills, experiences, expertise, and commitment of every Justice Center employee, and identifying where more investment is needed in staff training to increase cultural competence.

- **Leadership DEI Training and Strategy Sessions**

In the Fall of 2021, the Justice Center’s leadership took part in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training and strategy sessions to refocus on DEI efforts across the agency. During the sessions, agency leaders took steps to articulate their individual and collective perspectives, values, and cultures, examining the ways power and privilege impact their approach and effectiveness, while also evaluating how dynamics of DEI affect their overall business strategies.
- **DEI Unit Plans**

In conjunction with the DEI training and strategy sessions, leadership was tasked with developing division specific diversity and inclusion plans. Plans were based on the respective operations, services, and deliverables across units and identified concrete goals for increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Establishment of Anti-Discrimination and Equal Employment Opportunity Policy**

This policy illustrates the Justice Center’s commitment to ensuring equal opportunity for all employees and applicants in addition to ensuring an atmosphere free of discrimination and harassment.
- **Development of Employee Trainings for Complaint Procedures**

These trainings have been developed to provide employees with the current framework for the Governor’s Office of Employee Relations and Human Resources led complaint processes.
- **Creation of Equal Opportunity Specialist role**

The Equal Opportunity Specialist serves as the main contact for the agency’s diversity and inclusion efforts, including the development of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategic plan. The Justice Center has filled this position.
- **Hiring NYS Fellows and Student Assistants**

The Justice Center has increased diversity in its hiring using the Student Assistant Portal, the Empire State Fellows Program, and the Excelsior Service Fellowship Program. Following completion of these programs, several Fellows have been appointed to full time roles within the agency.
- **Hiring Persons and Veterans with Disabilities**

Utilizing the Governor’s Programs to Hire Persons and Veterans with Disabilities (55-b and 55-c), the Justice Center has hired and appointed several employees to permanent positions.
- **Establishment of a Business Analytics Unit**

In early 2022, this unit was created to provide analysis, tools, and education while cultivating a culture where data analysis is embedded within all operation and performance-based decisions. Justice Center leadership has identified

analysis of workforce retention, recruitment, and attrition data among other priority areas for this unit.

➤ **Exit Interviews**

The Justice Center has established a formal process for conducting exit interviews. Employee feedback is utilized to track attrition and retention data, and provide opportunity to identify trends in workplace culture, day-to-day processes, management solutions, and employee morale.

➤ **Employee Engagement Initiatives**

- Cultural Celebration events
- Quarterly Justice Center Ovation
- Collaboration for Successful Outcomes Award
- Justice Center Code of Conduct Award
- Justice Center Champion Award

➤ **Specialized Assignments and Leadership Training**

The Justice Center has standardized processes for the selection of agency employees to participate in specialized assignments and leadership training. Current initiatives include the Sexual Abuse Response Team (SART) and Mortality Case Coordination (MCC).

➤ **Establishment of a designated lactation area and prayer room for agency employees**

Taken together, these DEI initiatives aim to foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive agency and expand upon our collective values and guiding principles. The next section will outline the specific Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) goals, strategies, and actions that accompany each of the eight critical success factors outlined in ODIM's Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan. As a reflection of our collective commitment and responsibility, DEI plans previously created by agency leadership across program areas are directly tied to the critical success factors outlined in this plan. The New York State Justice Center is committed to creating an environment based on policies and practices that are just and foster a true sense of inclusion and belonging. It is our goal to serve as an example of this within New York State government.

B. BUILDING ON PROGRESS

Critical Success Factor 1: Informed and committed leadership

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Leadership demonstrates commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion values, is organizationally aware and serves as a model for the agency.</p>	<p>1. Executive Leadership conveys the importance of diversity and inclusion in messaging and behaviors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place diversity and inclusion on leadership meeting agendas as a standing item. • Ensure access to training opportunities. • Share diversity and inclusion resources. • Model diversity and inclusion behaviors.
	<p>2. Collect input from employees on diversity and inclusion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and conduct DEI employee survey. • Work with the anti-racism workgroup to establish DEI recommendations. • Create opportunities for employees to provide continuous feedback. • Ongoing analysis of employee exit survey responses.

Critical Success Factor 2: Clearly Articulated Roles and Responsibilities

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Leadership provides strategic guidance and support for diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations.</p>	<p>1. Include diversity and inclusion objectives in leadership tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place diversity and inclusion on unit meeting agendas as a standing item. • Include DEI agency resources as standing orientation item for new employees.
	<p>2. Ensure supervisors have timely access to diversity and inclusion learning materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and dissemination of DEI newsletter. • Development and advertisement of agency DEI intranet page. • Review and enhance current DEI training opportunities.
	<p>3. Identify and resolve issues and behaviors that hinder diversity, respect, and inclusion while implementing practices that support growth and development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing review of DEI and exit survey data. • Ongoing review of disciplinary tracking data and complaints. • Ensure all staff members have received complaint process trainings and related resources. • Development of DEI and cultural awareness events.

Critical Success Factor 3: Continuous Policy Review and Development

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Ensuring agency compliance with legislative and Executive directives.</p>	<p>1. Review of existing policies to ensure the removal of barriers to access.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Collaborate with agency counsel to ensure all policies comply with Executive Order 187 and future directives. •Collaborate with agency leadership to ensure policies and procedures align with legislation and Executive directives. •Utilize agency intranet and public websites to disseminate new and updated policies.
	<p>2. Establish equitable recruitment practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Review and enhance current recruitment practices. •Identify opportunities to expand candidate outreach.
	<p>3. Review and enhance current hiring practices to ensure equity and consistency throughout agency appointment processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Work in collaboration with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion Management, Governor’s office, and other state agencies to identify best practices for hiring.
	<p>4. Review and enhance current practices for specialized assignments and participation in leadership training opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Research and identify best practices for specialized assignment and training selection.

Critical Success Factor 4: Dedicated Resources

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Resources are committed and allocated to sustain organizational change in the short and long term.</p>	<p>1. Support Equal Opportunity Specialist role in the implementation of DEI strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing development of internal and external resources. • Identify and collaborate with DEI vendors in the implementation of training and learning opportunities.
	<p>2. Collaborate with internal and external partners to establish and leverage DEI resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in collaboration with other state agency DEI coordinators to identify and share best practices. • Work with the Civil Service’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion Management and Governor’s Diversity and Inclusion Office on building awareness of DEI policies and practice. • Establish relationships with external partners to build capacity in the areas of recruitment, training, and leadership.

Critical Success Factor 5: Collective Accountability

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Implementation of collective accountability.</p>	<p>1. Update agency reports to illustrate current and newly established Diversity, Equity and Inclusion principles and objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Update agency Strategic and Transparency Plans. •Include DEI section in agency's Annual Report.
	<p>2. Analyze agency demographic data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Utilization of data tracking systems such as Workforce Analytics and the New York State Electronic Personnel System to examine annual workforce trends. •Report annual progress to Civil Service's Office of Diversity and Inclusion Management and collaborate on changes as needed.
	<p>3. Review of agency's annual performance goals as they pertain to diversity, equity, and inclusion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identify DEI objectives for inclusion in agency's key performance indicators. •Track annual DEI survey results to assess agency progress.

Critical Success Factor 6: Education, Training, and Development

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Implementation of education, training, and development programs to communicate expectations, discourage misunderstanding, and build awareness.</p>	<p>1. Employees and leadership are provided access to relevant training sessions and education to identify areas where diversity and inclusion play a role in effective job performance and delivery of quality service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Development and promotion of training and education opportunities. •Development of DEI intranet page to provide information and resources on relevant topic areas.
	<p>2. Create opportunity for employees to share experiences, build awareness, and implement best practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Collaboration with the anti-racism workgroup to implement and expand DEI outreach internally and externally. •Access to DEI resources and training via agency intranet page and newsletters. •Solicit feedback and suggestions for training and resources.
	<p>3. Foster an environment that promotes personal and professional growth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Collaborate with the Office of Diversity Inclusion and Management and other state agencies to identify successful employee development initiatives. •Establish and advertise wellness resources and events for agency employees. •Collaborate with internal and external partners, including the Employees Assistance Program to establish work/life balance programs.

Critical Success Factor 7: Program Plan Integration

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Integrating diversity and inclusion principles with program planning and business objectives.</p>	<p>1. Reflect diversity and inclusion principles across agency communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Utilize agency intranet and public websites to share diversity, equity, and inclusion statements, related programs, and initiatives.
	<p>2. Develop diversity focused outreach with an emphasis on underrepresented groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identify and collaborate with community-based partners (e.g., educational institutions, diversity/culturally focused community organizations). •Collaborate with other state agencies on best practices and identification of DEI networks. •Increase agency engagement via social media platforms and marketing materials.
	<p>3. Identify and create best practices and tools for increased representation and elimination of service access barriers across agency operations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Participation in diversity-based conferences and meetings with Civil Service, the Governor’s office, and other state agencies. •Collaboration with other state agency DEI practitioners via subcommittees and workgroups.

Critical Success Factor 8: Performance Measures

Diversity Goal	Strategy	Action Step
<p>Develop an evaluation of performance measures to support change and enhance commitment to ongoing improvement and succession planning.</p>	<p>1. Analyze agency demographic data to examine recruitment, retention, and attrition trends.</p>	<p>•Development of data collection tool to track and analyze workforce demographic data as it pertains to underrepresentation within the workforce.</p>
	<p>2. Update agency’s annual performance goals to include diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives.</p>	<p>•Reflect DEI objectives in analysis of agency’s key performance indicators.</p>
	<p>3. Share strengths and areas of improvement with leadership to inform progress and planning.</p>	<p>•Develop and share assessment reports.</p>

V. CONCLUSION

The New York State Justice Center’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategic plan lays the groundwork for cultivating culture change throughout our agency and beyond. Our commitment focuses on enhancing and sustaining a diverse and inclusive environment, while equipping our agency members with the tools and support necessary to uphold our objectives. The successful implementation of this plan will be rooted in the involvement and commitment of all staff members across our agency.

The combination of our current and newly proposed strategies details steps for enhancing diversity and inclusion in the areas of leadership engagement and development, dedicated resources, policies and practices, collective accountability, training, communication, and analytics. Operating within state government, we recognize that our goals and strategies are subject to revision over time. Our action items will continuously be assessed and updated to reflect regulatory requirements as necessary.