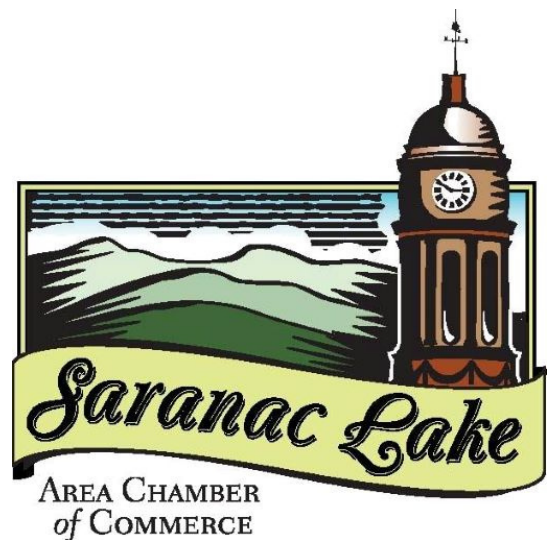


Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging Strategic Plan 2023-2026





Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce:
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)
Strategic Plan 2023-2026

Introduction

This Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Strategic Plan 2023–2026 reflects the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce’s strategic focus on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion which is a shared responsibility of the Board of Directors and staff. The implementation of the plan involves all levels of the organization and requires the active involvement of board members, staff, and volunteers.

In a predominantly white, cis-gender, heterosexual community it is increasingly important for us to foster a sense of welcoming and belonging, especially in our business community in order to diversify the workforce and customer base, generating more sustainability within each.

Background

The Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce (SLACC) initiated a planning process in late summer of 2020 to assess and improve the organization's approach to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as it relates to the organization’s values, policies and practices, and programs. An internal working group was formed to help shepherd the organization through this process and consisted of chamber staff, board of directors, and member volunteers. As part of the organization's 2021-2023 strategic plan, the chamber affirmed a set of values to guide the organization’s work that includes integrity, action, transformation, equity, and community. The chamber also improved its board recruitment methods to intentionally solicit and consider applicants from historically marginalized groups. Finally, the chamber partnered with the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) and conducted a self-evaluation to assess the organization on a number of areas related to race, equity, organizational culture, diversity, and applying an anti-racism lens. The internal working group assessed the responses of the organizational assessment and created a [summary of findings](#) (Appendix A) and provided an updated [glossary of terms](#).

In September 2021 the SLACC Board voted for the DEIB working group to become the DEIB committee. The DEIB committee meets on a regular monthly basis with additional meetings as needed and is currently made up of the paid staff (the executive director and the membership and engagement coordinator), two SLACC board members, and 3 committee volunteers.

SLACC board members each completed individual self assessments using the Harvard Implicit Bias online tests. There were 8 assessments: Asian, Race, Age, Transgender, Religion, Sexuality, Arab/Muslim, and Disability Based on the results of the individual (confidential) assessments it was determined that we would benefit from Implicit Bias Training. Facilitated by ADI, Implicit Bias Training was offered to all SLACC board members and committee volunteers in September 2022 with about 60% in attendance.

The committee then compared the census data of Franklin, Essex, Clinton and Hamilton counties with the board's self-reported demographic information. The goal was to visualize how the board represents the community that we serve. The following points are explanations of the [infographics](#) on the [Demographics Report Summary](#) (Appendix B).

Meanwhile work and creation of a Welcoming and Belonging Micro Credential Program was initiated. This program offers extensive hands-on training for businesses to create a sense of belonging for employees and customers. This will lead to an increased sense of acceptance and inclusion, increasing the affinity employees and customers have towards the business. The outcome of belonging is fostered through the culture of a business as it is developed through its policies, procedures, and actions.

In the fall of 2022 the committee created the vision, mission, and values statement specific to the DEIB work. These statements are listed below.

To create this strategic plan the committee and additional SLACC board members met numerous times between August 2022 to December 2022 to discuss and brainstorm 3 main problem questions:

1. How might we provide exposure to diverse perspectives and culture that supports DEIB in our business communities?
2. How do we emphasize the importance of supporting the Chamber's DEIB efforts?
3. How do we communicate the importance of DEIB to local businesses' longevity?

Through discussion of these problem questions, we created ideas, strategies, and actions that helped model our strategic plan.

Vision Statement

The Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce (The Chamber) is committed to fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and diverse business community. Moreover, we are dedicated to creating opportunities to support diverse communities and build bridges of solidarity across identities.

Mission Statement

At the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, our mission is to incorporate the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), as integral to the chamber's business practices. We do so by curating opportunities for bringing communities together around shared values, commonalities, and business interests. By leveraging the energies, capabilities, and passion of our staff, volunteers, and membership towards creating a sense of belonging to everything that we do and to all those we serve. In doing so, we are able to promote strategies and provide resources for current and prospective businesses to advance innovation and economic growth with a focus on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion for all.

Values Statement

At the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, our DEIB principles are uniquely aligned with the strategic vision, mission, and core values of the organization. Our values are governed by five tenets that are crucial to the culture of welcoming and belonging to which we strive: Integrity, Transformation, Equity, Commitment and Action.

Goals, Strategies, Deliverables, and Metrics

Strategy 1: To provide staff, board members, volunteers, members, stakeholders, and supporters with **educational resources and training** opportunities with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging to foster a welcoming community.

Strategic Actions:

- Create a DIY-DEIB toolkit for business members. The toolkit will include basic strategies that local businesses and community members can pursue to take steps within their organizations to incorporate DEIB principles and practices.
- Connect business members and community members to resources offered by organizations such as the Adirondack Diversity Initiative, Adirondack North Country Gender Alliance, Tri-Lakes Center for Independent Living, etc.
 - Sharing resources and updates once a month via the Chamber Chat (weekly email newsletter)
 - Share a social media post once a month
 - Facilitate/Offer a minimum of four workshops with these organizations and experts including but not limited to
 - An annual LGBTQIA+ Training for all community members
 - An implicit bias training to staff, board members, & volunteers on an annual basis

- Host at least one Chamber Coffee Hour or Business After Hours each year highlighting or advocating for businesses owned by historically marginalized people. Provide the opportunity to share their stories.

Measurable Outcomes:

- 10% of membership utilizes the DEIB tool kit and provides positive feedback.
- Businesses use these tools to train and review with their staff/employees.
- 20 people attend a training session
- 20 people attend a coffee hour or business after hours
- Online engagement - social media posts reach average of 1000

Goal/Impact:

Providing Educational Resources and Training will achieve the Saranac Lake Chamber's DEIB goal of ensuring that leaders and businesses in our region are aware of and able to access relevant skill-building activities. These activities intentionally welcome diverse customers, create inclusive employee pipelines and promote the safety of individuals living in and visiting our community.

Strategy 2: Facilitate four (over three year plan) **DEIB related events** that encourage participation from the BIPOC community and/or provide exposure of multicultural practices, traditions to the Saranac Lake community.

Strategic Actions:

- Develop a cultural calendar (highlight events, holidays, etc.) to use for internal practices and share multi cultural events with our audience.
- Look at current events that the chamber is already doing and add DEIB related topics.
- Offer a lecture or lecture series to coincide with our community conversations on DEIB-related topics (i.e. racism, sexism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, access, prejudice, discrimination, bias, naming, accessibility etc.).
- Offer chamber members promotion/marketing for DEIB events via Chamber Chat, social media, and in Welcome Center
- Ensure that DEIB values are worked into the fabric of all Chamber events and programs

Measurable Outcomes:

- Growth in attendance over three year span

Goal/Impact:

We seek to enrich the fabric of the community by providing exposure to other cultures. This is especially critical for the upcoming generations, who will influence the decision making for all economic and intellectual growth to come.

These events will also provide an easy entry point for local and regional businesses to sponsor and engage in this work, and an opportunity for them to see the positive impact their buy-in can have. Overall, we are looking to increase awareness of the richness that comes from weaving other celebrations, ideas, lifestyles, and approaches into the structure of our existing systems, including into our business community.

Strategy 3: Assist with executing the final product of the **Welcoming and Belonging Micro Credential Program** and encourage business participation to coincide with the goals of the program.

In partnership with the Adirondack Diversity Initiative, the business welcoming microcredential will offer business and organization leaders who are members of the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce early and sustainable access to the opportunity to engage in learning designed to increase and diversify their employee and customer base.

Strategic Actions:

- Provide feedback on the Learning Management System platform as it is created.
- Solicit participation from member businesses by direct outreach (phone, direct email, in person conversations).
- Assist the Adirondack Diversity Initiative with the promotion of the program
- Host a Chamber Coffee Hour to introduce the program and answer questions
- Host a Chamber webinar/workshop to introduce members to the program
- Share feedback and success stories of participating businesses to encourage additional member participation.

Measurable Outcomes:

25% of chamber member businesses participate in the microcredential over the three year strategic plan timeline and of those participating businesses the program impacts 50% of employees.

Goal/Impact:

The goal of the microcredential is for leaders and employees of businesses in our region to gain the skills to actively and intentionally welcome diverse customers and create inclusive employee pipelines. In return, residents and visitors to our region, especially individuals from BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and other historically marginalized communities, feel safe and welcome entering our communities and businesses.

Adopting this program at the local Saranac Lake level, will ensure that interested SLACC members can become part of a cohort of business leaders who have shared language and knowledge: benefitting the business community as a whole to ensure Saranac Lake is a safe and welcoming area for all. This program will be offered to area business owners through North Country Community College and after completion businesses will receive a badge/certificate which will be displayed in the window of each participating business.

Strategy 4: Develop and review **internal strategies** to ensure an inclusive, equitable and sustainable culture and work environment and increase diversity within the chamber community.

Strategic Actions:

- Review internal practices and work policies annually in cooperation with SLACC board members, SLACC director and staff, & ADI director or other consultant.
 - Review employee/operational handbook
 - Volunteer policies
- Provide an annual report of DEIB work to the board and stakeholders.
- Creating a system to mobilize the business community around emergent and emergency needs - making connections

Measurable Outcomes:

Have a multifaceted and multicultural board of directors, committee members, and volunteers. All board members have an understanding of the DEIB work that the chamber has done.

Goal/Impact:

Our goal is to instill a culture of continuity and longevity in our internal strategies to perpetuate an inclusive, equitable and sustainable work environment. Our community will be aware that the Chamber is a resource to communicate needs and connect historically marginalized individuals with area businesses.

Summary:

DEIB is a process, a journey, and our strategic plan shall be a document that is continually, reviewed, revised and updated as changes are made and/or accomplishments are achieved. During the implementation phase, DEIB committee members or SLACC board members may determine that some strategies need to be adjusted.

This shall be a committee monthly meeting standing agenda item, with adequate time for discussion, celebrating achievements and ensuring goals are measurable and met. The scope of this plan is three years with the intent for some goals to be met before the end of the three year plan. A plan like this takes commitment, hard work, and dedication. Our hope is that with this plan and with everyone's commitment, we can begin to move the needle forward for our community to become a place where everyone feels welcome and businesses are able to thrive.

The Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce's work with this three-year plan and the strategies outlined will bring a greater sense of belonging, safety, and awareness to all people in our community. Our members and stakeholders will have the skills and knowledge to create a safe workplace and diversified workforce. This will have a positive impact on the community's ability to bring in and sustain new businesses, new residents, and new visitors. The successful implementation of this strategic plan and the ongoing actions will establish a more welcoming environment in the Saranac Lake area for all people.

