



D-E-I STATEMENT

Options for Youth

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From our founding, Options for Youth has embraced the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. **Our mission is to expand opportunities for adolescents in underserved neighborhoods through programs that build upon the strengths and maximize the potential of each young person and help to break the cycle of poverty in their lives and communities.** We support vulnerable adolescents throughout Chicago and help them create positive options for their futures.

Options for Youth’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is demonstrated in the makeup of OFY direct service delivery staff (home visitors and mentors), administrative leadership for the organization, and make-up of the OFY Board. We place high importance on inclusivity in both hiring of employees and recruitment of program participants.

From our beginning, a non-negotiable has been that staff need to reflect the communities they serve. While educational background is important, we have always prioritized cultural and linguistic competency in the hiring of program staff. We believe this has been key to our consistent, exemplary accomplishments.

1. DEI Definitions

Diversity — Diversity refers to all the many ways in which people differ, encompassing varying characteristics that make one individual or group different from another, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religion/spirituality, age, (dis)ability, and military/veteran status. It is important to understand how aspects of a person's identity combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege, paying special attention to underserved and underrepresented groups in our communities and to uneven dynamics of social power.

Diversity encompasses the range of similarities and differences each individual brings to the workplace, including diversity of thought, which is shaped by culture, background, experiences, and other elements.

Equity — Equity refers to the ways we intentionally ensure all individuals can thrive. We recognize that the members of our communities have unique and different circumstances and may need different support at different times. Equity is different from equality in that equality implies treating everyone as if their experiences are exactly the same. Being equitable means acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities — historic and current — that advantage some and disadvantage others. Equal treatment results in equity only if everyone starts with equal access to opportunities (e.g., not requiring a student to select books based on their costs, but implementing a book grant that covers all required books).

Inclusion — Inclusion encompasses the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can participate fully and is welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. Inclusive efforts demonstrate our commitment to celebrating differences among and diversity of our communities. An institution can be both diverse and non-inclusive at the same time, thus a sustained practice of creating inclusive environments is necessary for success. Inclusion is a set of behaviors (e.g., welcoming new employees, paying attention and extending an invitation, seeking, and respecting other perspectives, etc.) that promote equal access to opportunities and resources for individuals who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.

2. DEI Vision

Our staff is talented, diverse, and committed to fostering a safe, fair, and inclusive workplace.

3. DEI Mission

To foster a culture that exemplifies teamwork, embraces innovation, and values diversity, equity, and inclusion to achieve mission excellence.

4. DEI Values

The following values shape how we carry out our mission and guide how we are expected to treat one another.

- We take the broadest possible view of diversity, including seen and unseen qualities.
- We acknowledge life experiences that make individuals unique.
- We encourage all staff to use their unique perspectives to help advance our mission.
- We require fair treatment, accessibility, and opportunity for advancement for all employees.
- We expect our workplace to be an inclusive environment built on mutual trust, respect, and dignity.
- We incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in our daily work.
- We commit to building a workplace where all employees feel safe bringing their authentic selves to work.
- We pledge to identify and eliminate barriers to equal opportunity in the workplace.
- We will foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in all of our programs.

5. Organizational Culture

Organizational leadership at all levels should promote the vision and need for DEI by taking actions to increase diversity and equity in the workforce and maintain an inclusive workplace.

5.1 *Culture of Excellence*. Ensure every employee has the opportunity to develop and excel in his or her career and recognize and reward high performers.

- Implement a performance review process for supervisors and managers that focuses on employee career development and the cultivation of an inclusive, constructive work environment that is committed to equal opportunity and is built upon transparent communication, mutual trust, and respect.
- Conduct analysis to identify root causes of barriers to equal employment opportunities, regularly review programs for systemic barriers, and take action to remedy the policies, procedures, or practices that created the barriers.
- Develop and implement a plan to provide all managers access to services to receive employee feedback and coaching for inclusion at work.

5.2 *Data Excellence*. Build a results-oriented DEI strategy based on actionable data.

- Identify key performance indicators that measure success, and report to the Governance Committee of the OFY Board.
- Track and analyze job applications and career development opportunities to evaluate and improve inclusion.

5.3 *Best Practices*. Select and implement DEI best practices that would be most effective.

- Complete annual review of salaries and program budgets to assess potential pay inequities and implement approved changes.
- Develop diverse job-interview guidance and require hiring managers to certify that it was followed for all selections.
- Require hiring managers to include at least one interview question to assess management candidates on their ability to foster DEI.
- Benchmark the private sector for best practices in preventing and addressing discrimination and retaliation.

6. Staff Development

Recruit, hire, and develop a high-performing staff that reflects the communities we serve.

6.1 *Personnel*. Ensure that hiring practices consistently provide equal opportunity and strive to close representation gaps at all levels.

- a) Develop and implement a plan to promote increased diversity, to be reviewed annually.
- b) Provide events, workshops, and programming that serve as resources to promote equitable access and opportunities.
- c) Identify opportunities to strengthen engagement with diverse groups, including community-based organizations and civil rights organizations.

6.2 *Career Development*. Maintain a framework for actively promoting career development and advancement opportunities for employees.

6.3 *Employee Engagement*. Increase opportunities for employees to be engaged in achieving DEI goals.

7. Communication

Develop compelling messages, including opportunities for dialogue, that encourage all employees to see the importance of DEI to their personal success and the success of the organization.

7.1 *Transparency*. Provide clear, consistent, and regular messaging of the DEI vision and actions taken.

7.2 *Branding*. Create meaningful context to turn DEI data into compelling narratives that make messaging more impactful and demonstrate the necessity for continued efforts in DEI.

- a) Update websites and social media with compelling messages that illustrate our commitment to DEI in our workforce, our activities, and our programs.
- b) Communicate the effectiveness of our DEI efforts in annual reports.
- c) Develop and implement a social media and marketing campaign to engage a broad and diverse talent pool.

7.3 *Reinforcement*. Integrate DEI into communications.

8. Long-Term Goals

Grow the DEI model to improve the consistency of desired outcomes by strengthening policies and procedures, utilizing technology, and enhancing training.

8.1 *Inclusive Environment*. Foster a work environment without barriers to opportunity, where all employees feel welcomed, valued, respected, and engaged, and can effectively participate and bring their unique talents, skills, and perspectives.

- a) Develop and implement a program to identify organizational deficiencies.
- b) Update telework, work-in-place, and remote work policies to better support inclusion to meet employee needs.
- c) Identify reasons for attrition, and address barriers to equal employment opportunities.

- d) Require investigation of harassment complaints to commence within 10 work days, and corrective action to be taken within 60 days, of receipt of any complaint.

8.2 *Training Plan*. Promote workshops and learning sessions designed to increase cultural competencies and skills in promoting equal opportunity.

- a) Provide empathy-based training for all managers and employees.
- b) Provide toolkits and other educational and learning opportunities regarding hiring for persons with disabilities.
- c) Conduct mock interviews for both administrators and employees with disabilities to increase comfort with, and the effectiveness of, the hiring process.

9. Restorative Justice

Many of the Options for Youth programs are centered around a goal of restorative justice—giving communities harmed by past policy the resources to make themselves whole. Restorative justice encourages outcomes that promote responsibility, reparation, and healing for all. Restorative justice is often associated with the following five principles, as identified by the State of Illinois:

- 1) Focus on the harms and consequent needs of those harmed first of all, but also on those of the community and of those causing harm.
- 2) Address the obligations that result from those harms (the obligations of the offending persons, as well as those of the community and society).
- 3) Use inclusive, collaborative processes.
- 4) Involve those with a legitimate stake in the situation, including those victimized, those offending, community members, and society.
- 5) Seek to repair the harm and put right the wrongs to the extent possible.

(1) Focus on harms and consequent need is addressed at the root level of OFY adolescent programs, which are designed to reduce and eliminate harms caused by poverty and violence in the lives of young men and women growing up in Chicago’s most underserved neighborhoods. Upon completion of OFY multi-year programs, participants exhibit improved academics and educational goals, enhanced empathy and acceptance of positive masculinity and gender equity, which in turn, support healthy relationships with partners and peers.

(2) Social-emotional obligations created by harmful physical and psychological violence are addressed in the ongoing conversation between our mentors and participants. The participants learn they can talk with the mentors whenever they need, especially when someone is in crisis.

(3) OFY programs revolve around collaborative processes. All young people in our programs have myriad needs which cannot be met by any single organization. Therefore, OFY maintains strong relationships with a large network of community organizations, providing services such as mental health care, medical care, emergency housing, juvenile justice, and food security.

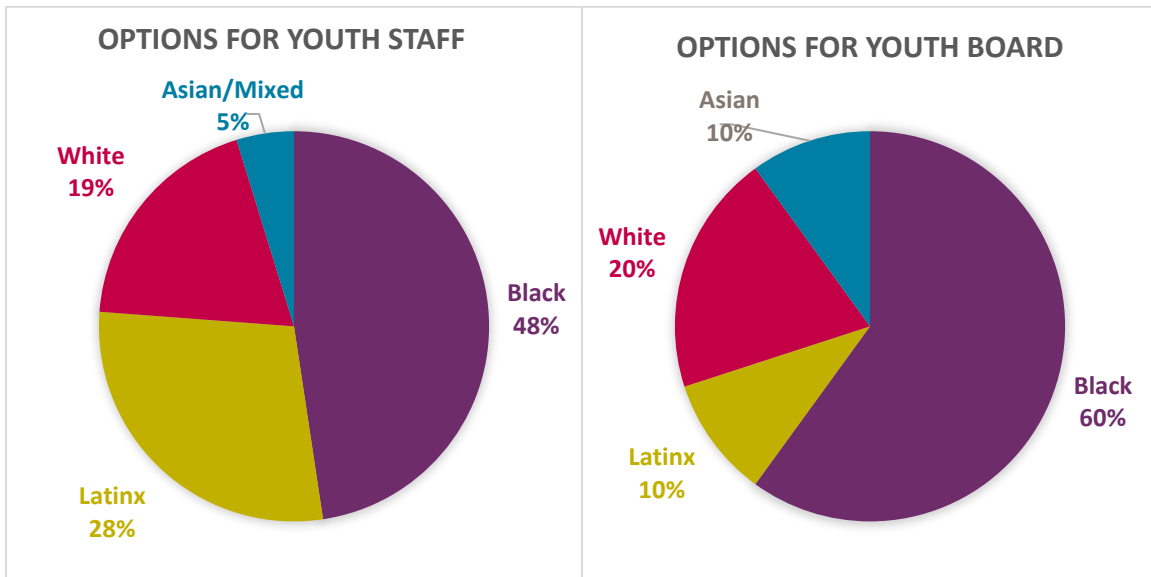
(4) Young people are one of the few resources in the communities we serve. Ensuring these young people remain in and graduate from high school while gaining social and emotional skills allows them to become productive and responsible members of their community.

(5) By insuring high school graduation, healthful lifestyles, and critical examination of social norms in their communities, the participants in OFY programs are better positioned to break the cycles of poverty and violence in their young lives.

10. Conclusion

We solicit feedback and reflection from everyone within the organization, as well as from program participants who can guide improvements in program efforts. Feedback from OFY staff is provided through monthly staff meetings. Participant feedback is regularly solicited, both written and oral, and often provides valuable insight into how program activities can be made more effective.

Together, we work to build an inclusive organization that encourages, supports, and celebrates the diversity of our staff and our program participants. Diversity and inclusion inspire our innovation and connect us to the communities we serve.



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