**Input to OHCHR Questionnaire on ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective.**

**BACKGROUND**

[Project Include](http://projectinclude.org/) is a group effort to accelerate diversity and inclusion in the technology industry. Our mission is to give everyone a fair chance to succeed in tech. That means bringing all underrepresented groups forward—including gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexual orientation, and more. We know it is the right thing to do morally, and it is the right thing to do for the company, too. Studies the financial benefits of diversity [1], while other research has detailed the many ways that diversity can improve company performance [2].

Our nonprofit works with CEOs and management of early to mid-stage tech startups, where we believe significant change is possible and can have a broad impact over time. The problem faced by leaders of these organizations is that they often care about these issues but are overwhelmed by choices; we offer our perspectives, recommendations, material and tools to help them build a concrete strategy with specific actions tailored to their startups.

We know that improving inclusion across all aspects of a company and measuring outcomes creates better teams, builds better companies and drives better results.

**CHALLENGES**

Many technology companies are trying to implement diversity improvement strategies, but the reality is that most are taking limited actions—and that many of the things they are doing could actually cause more harm than good [3]. Problematic areas include one-off training (which can push away responsibility for companies to look at long-term solutions), focusing attention on the “pipeline” of people joining an industry (which makes it easier to ignore inclusion issues closer to home), or using divisive language suggesting that greater diversity means “lowering the bar” or describing the current technology industry as a “meritocracy.”

Research shows how bias results in discrimination in educating, hiring, promoting, paying, and funding underrepresented people of color in tech [4]; internally reported data from technology companies shows the extreme lack of diversity of employees and management [5]. And despite all this information, we have yet to see significant improvement in diversity numbers. In fact, not only is there no evidence that the culture of the technology industry is becoming more inclusive or diverse over the last five years—the opposite has happened [6].

The reality is that change is hard, especially around a multidimensional issue like diversity. It is easy for people to become defensive and emotional, to shift the blame to others, and to feel fundamentally unheard or misunderstood. It is hard to move away from processes and ways of doing things that technology companies have relied on for decades.

Recently, our group has become concerned about the impact of belt-tightening at technology companies. Budget cuts can shrink diversity initiatives, while layoffs and attrition can disproportionately affect women and underrepresented people of color. Achieving diversity is harder when companies aren’t hiring. We want the girls, people of color and other underrepresented groups that we are encouraging to pursue STEM educations and future technology jobs to have real opportunities to succeed.

**QUESTIONS**

We prompt our participants to ask themselves hard questions.

For those who are struggling to discuss inclusion programs without conflict, we ask: Can you use your discomfort talking about diversity—and the lack of diversity—to feel empathy to people who are underrepresented and the discomfort they experience? Can you stop talking about your discomfort and listen?

For CEOs and managers, we ask: Can you examine the diversity of your founders, leaders, senior staff; of people who control resources, budgets and decisions; of individual teams; and of your hiring pipeline. On a specific level, we ask: Would a star engineer making sexist jokes or comments get fired? Does lack of experience building and managing diverse teams keep someone from getting promoted? Do men and women take the full amount of parental leave allowed by company policy? Who is responsible for diversity at the company?

We also ask for board members and investors to hold themselves and others accountable. How many years in a row would you accept that improving diversity is ‘hard and we’re working on it’? Why are you comfortable with a gender-only focus on diversity, pay parity, and mentorship? Do you think racial and gender diversity on company boards makes a difference?

**APPROACHES**

We have developed some guidelines that should be used in all business decisions. Implementing these guidelines requires hard work across an entire company; reversing a culture is difficult, nuanced and time consuming. There is no silver bullet, but we have seen success with a three-part focus that helps decision-makers navigate a path forward.

1. INCLUSION  
   Companies should improve opportunities for all employees across the board, including those in underrepresented groups, such as gender, race, class, age, religion, disability, education and sexual orientation.
2. COMPREHENSIVENESS  
   One-off attempts to “fix” your company won’t work, and in fact will often do more harm than good. Effective solutions have to cover all aspects of a company, including its culture, its operations and its team. It’s more than just hiring people, it’s making them feel like they belong.
3. ACCOUNTABILITY  
   Change does not happen unless companies and leadership hold themselves accountable, by tracking results, watching progress over time, and comparing their efforts against their peers.

Against this, we apply a series of long-term tests, including:

* What is the percentage of underrepresented employees of color compared to the country’s labor market demographics?
* Does the employee base includes people of all ages, parents, disabled people, veterans, LGBQTA people, and immigrants?
* Does the company treat part-time, remote workers and independent contractors fairly?
* Are underrepresented groups (including those in multiple groups who tend to be penalized twice) at parity in pay and in representation in leadership roles?

**RESULTS**

Since launching in 2016, more than 1,000 people have signed up to help, two dozen venture capitalists have asked to join our efforts, and more than 100 startup CEOs have requested the chance to participate in Project Include. We’ve had support from dozens of countries and have already provided intensive training to our first group of founders, with a new cohort preparing to join.

**RESOURCES**

Culture:

[Buffer’s salary transparency program](https://open.buffer.com/introducing-open-salaries-at-buffer-including-our-transparent-formula-and-all-individual-salaries/)

[Salary transparency experiment at Google](http://www.recode.net/2015/8/27/11618068/recode-decode-erica-baker-talks-about-her-grand-google-salary)

[Clef’s employee guide to equity](https://github.com/clef/handbook/blob/master/Hiring%20Documents/Guide%20to%20Your%20Equity.md)

[Django project’s Code of Conduct](https://www.djangoproject.com/conduct/reporting/)

[How stereotypes affect women employees](https://faculty.washington.edu/scheryan/research.htm)

Mentorship and training:

[Mentorship doesn’t help female leaders](http://fortune.com/2016/02/24/mentoring-female-leaders/)

[Mentors make startups more successful](https://techcrunch.com/2015/03/22/mentors-are-the-secret-weapons-of-successful-startups/)

[Optimizing mentoring programs for women of color](http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Optimizing_Mentoring_Programs_for_Women_of_Color.pdf)

[Situational Leadership](https://situational.com/)

[Leadership across generations](https://www.franklincovey.com/Solutions.html)

[Training for change](http://www.trainingforchange.org/)

Conflict reporting and resolution:

[MIT ombuds](http://ombud.mit.edu/)

[Callisto: Reporting assault on campus](https://www.projectcallisto.org/)

[Github’s announcement respecting parties on conflict](https://github.com/blog/1800-update-on-julie-horvath-s-departure)

Measurement:

[Culture Amp + Paradigm](http://blog.cultureamp.com/culture-amp-and-paradigm-partnership/)

[Level Playing Field Institute: Hidden bias](http://www.lpfi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/tilted_playing_field_lpfi_9_29_11.pdf)

[NASA diversity and includsion survey](https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/files/SSC-2014-DI-Survey-Report.pdf)

Endnotes:

1. <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>
2. <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/diversity-matters>
3. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2016/07/01/to-improve-diversity-dont-make-people-go-to-diversity-training-really-2/?utm\_term=.fb0a3f042ab9
4. <http://www.uchastings.edu/news/articles/2015/01/double-jeopardy-report.pdf>
5. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-11-17/microsoft-to-tie-executive-bonuses-to-company-diversity-goals>
6. https://medium.com/tech-diversity-files/thought-on-diversity-part-2-why-diversity-is-difficult-3dfd552fa1f7#.7j7lgj4tf