

DAY ONE PROJECT

An Inclusion, Diversity & Equity in
American Life (IDEAL) Commission

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February 2021

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Summary

Collaboration among federal, state, local, and other stakeholders is essential if real progress is to be made in healing racial divisions in our country. The federal government invests billions in programs aimed at improving equality and diminishing substantial barriers to progress by racial and ethnic minorities. There is scant evidence, however, about which programs are most effective at achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Creating a temporary commission consisting of officials from relevant agencies can fill this gap. It can begin the process of building a body of evidence about what works and reinvesting in more effective practices. The commission would be responsible for inventorying programs designed to improve diversity, equity, or inclusion; assessing the body of evidence about them; and clarifying common goals. The Inclusion, Diversity & Equity in American Life (IDEAL) Commission would make an important contribution to finding more effective remedies to some of our country's most lasting, difficult wounds. In fact, it would reinforce the Biden-Harris Administration's recent executive order, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," which stated unequivocally that "[a]ffirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity is the responsibility of the whole of our Government." A close working relationship between the commission proposed here and the Equitable Data Working Group established by the executive order would be essential.

Challenge and Opportunity

The federal government currently employs myriad programs to accomplish various diversity, equity and inclusion goals. The Department of Labor's *Office of Disability Employment Policy* promotes policies and coordinates with employers to increase workplace success for people with disabilities. The Department of Health and Human Services' *Health Resources and Services Administration* offers funding to encourage the participation of underrepresented minorities in the medical, dentistry, and nursing professions. The *Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion in the Military* is developing recommendations to foster equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusion among all ranks of the military. Of course, many government programs are not focused exclusively on addressing inequity. Many include such goals as part of their larger missions, and measure and report their progress in addressing diversity and inclusion in different ways. Most involve many stakeholders that cross federal, state, local, and private sector boundaries. But it is difficult to ascertain which of the government's many programs in this arena are doing the most good. A problem this large deserves a deliberate effort to inventory what works and improve what doesn't. A whole-of-government approach is necessary to accelerate the adoption of proven practices that advance equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity.

Plan of Action

The Biden-Harris Administration should establish an Inclusion, Diversity & Equity in American Life Commission consisting of representatives from relevant agencies. Overarching goals of the Commission would include:

- Improve the government's overall effectiveness in strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Strengthen coordination of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs across government.
- Deepen understanding of the most effective diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.
- Identify gaps in understanding about what works in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Leadership of the Commission is an important factor that will determine its success. A very senior White House official such as Domestic Policy Council head Susan Rice, joined by a senior OMB official such as the Deputy for Management, would be a potent team to ensure that the efforts of the Commission are taken seriously. Once named, Commission members should craft a plan to accomplish the following tasks:

- Identify all federal programs with a diversity, equity, or inclusion focus;
- Evaluate the available evidence of effectiveness of those programs;
- Determine areas of overlap or duplication among those programs;
- Identify target populations served by such programs; and
- Recommend processes to efficiently integrate and coordinate those programs.

Additional milestones that would advance the body's work include:

- Delineating the goals of the programs;
- Determining the extent to which the programs have undergone independent, external evaluation based on sound scientific principles;
- Ascertaining the extent to which the programs have quantitative evidence of achieving their stated goals;
- Establishing standards for measuring and evaluating these programs, including common measures as appropriate; and
- Formulating recommendations for administrative or legislative action that, if carried out, would more efficiently integrate and coordinate federal spending on diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

Potential, specific areas of overlap and duplication the commission might address include:

- Grant or other programs aimed at improving policing practices across the police forces of the federal government and across the country.
- Regulatory policies aimed at strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in the financial sector.
- Programs designed to increase academic achievement or career advancement among people of color or others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.

A final Commission report would document the inventory, available evidence, goals, and recommendations regarding the government's diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda. Though the work of the Commission could potentially be performed using existing resources, it is estimated a budget of about \$250,000 would allow the Commission to procure research and administrative support services, as well as reimburse staff and member expenses.

Conclusion

Finding what works among programs aimed at addressing racial inequity is a critical step in transforming the federal government's investment in this arena from a disconnected set of unproven initiatives to a cohesive, effective program for lasting change. The work of the IDEAL Commission can establish the foundation for a broad set of efforts that demonstrate that the country is moving forward with an agenda based on evidence. Healing will take time. Knowing what works can help us go faster.

Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of concrete recommendations would you expect from the Commission?

In addition to recommending better ways to measure inventoried programs, the Commission may recommend expanding programs found to be particularly effective. The Commission might also recommend consolidating programs so resources can be focused in more effective ways. The Commission might also find gaps among inventoried programs and therefore recommend additional programs or activities be considered.

How long should the work of the Commission take to complete?

It should be possible for the Commission's work to be completed within 12 to 18 months.

What kinds of indicators of effectiveness can we expect to be recommended by the Commission?

Inventoried programs should be held accountable for achieving important inclusion, diversity & equity goals. If the programs don't already measure their achievement of outcomes, Commission recommendations for measures of effectiveness would depend on the missions of different programs. Job training programs, for instance, should measure the extent to which target populations get and keep jobs. Education programs should measure the extent to which target populations are addressing achievement gaps.

Are there similar past efforts after which this idea is modelled?

The Academic Competitiveness Council was charged by statute with reviewing the effectiveness of existing federally funded Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs, and for improving the state of STEM education in the United States.

What obstacles might the Commission encounter?

The government does not currently have an accurate, up-to-date inventory of relevant programs. Agencies participating in the Commission's work would be required to produce one, which could prove burdensome. Furthermore, the variation in depth of understanding among agencies regarding what constitutes rigorous evaluation methodologies is a significant barrier. It will need to be overcome if the Commission is to ascertain the extent to which inventoried programs have been assessed for their effectiveness.

Why should it the federal government take action on this issue as opposed to state or local governments?

It is the government's obligation to ensure that it is investing taxpayer dollars in the most effective way. Since the federal government is already administering programs aimed at addressing inclusion, diversity and equity, it is the natural entity to lead an effort to improve them.



About the Author

As National Managing Principal, Public Policy, Robert Shea serves as Grant Thornton's primary liaison with members of Congress. He is also a principal in Grant Thornton Public Sector LLC. Robert has been working to improve government performance for 25 years — including 10 years at Grant Thornton and 15 years in the federal government. Most notably, he served for six years as the associate director for the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). While at OMB, he led an initiative to measure government programs using its Program Assessment Rating Tool. The effort received an Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University. At OMB, he oversaw programs to implement large-scale personnel reform at the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security; and he launched a federal government-wide effort to measure and reduce improper payments. Prior to his time at OMB, Shea served as senior management counsel for the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, and, before that, as the legislative director for Congressman Pete Sessions. In addition, he has served as a professional staff member for the House Committee on Government Reform.

Shea is a leading proponent of evidence-based policymaking: He is a fellow and former chairman of the National Academy of Public Administration and he served on the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking. Shea received a bachelor's degree from Connecticut College and a law degree from the South Texas College of Law. He has won a range of awards, including twice receiving a Fed100 award. He has also won the Andy Barr award and the Elmer B. Staats Award for Public Accountability.



About the Day One Project

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