

# Improving Diversity & Inclusion in Intellectual Property Development and Management

## A Guide for Organizations in Five Parts

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[Read the full guide](#)

1. Building the Culture
2. IP Education
3. Establishing the Right Metrics
- 4. Promising IP Diversity Strategies**
5. An Approach to Making Rapid Improvement

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## Promising IP Diversity Strategies

There isn't one strategy that is best for every organization because each has its own structure and culture. Below is an introduction to different approaches being used by organizations around the world to successfully influence and change employee behavior. It is the behavior change by individuals that ultimately leads to a broader culture change in the organization. Review the following strategies to see which ones might work in your organization. You'll see there is some overlap between the various strategies. The following section, Rapid Improvement Steps, provides a framework for putting the strategies into action.

### IP Awareness Sessions

Provide short training sessions that provide background on IP creation and IP management processes at your organization, and the importance of not only participating in the process but also being recognized for it from a career advancement perspective. The sessions should explain how inventions and other valuable information are protected and managed using IP rights such as patents. These sessions can be led by champions or carried out in association with one or more affinity groups. If appropriate, they can be customized using scenarios and stories targeted to women and people from other historically underrepresented groups.

### Mentor Program

A mentor program is a structured program in which an advisor, or mentor, provides guidance to a mentee, sharing valuable experience, skills, and knowledge. Building a mentoring program in the workplace facilitates one-on-one educational opportunities that can help employees advance in their careers and facilitate an inclusive corporate culture.

Being a mentor is not a major time commitment but, ideally, it is something that is recognized as part of the mentor's job responsibility. The amount of time required will vary from week to week. Try to scope the role so that it doesn't exceed one hour per week on average. Of course, in part, the amount of time depends on how much their mentor role overlaps with their job. Typically, a mentor is assigned to between 1-3 mentees so they can develop a close working relationship with each.

An effective mentor program has four legs, like a chair: senior leader or sponsor, mentor program leader, mentors, mentees. An IP diversity mentor can share information about IP creation and management processes with mentees. He or she can also accompany inventors from underrepresented groups as they navigate these processes in relation to a promising idea or invention. Mentors should receive appropriate training, have publicly expressed support from the organization's leadership, and receive incentives for taking on this role. Also, mentoring should be performed during normal working hours.

## Cross-organization Mentor Program

Cross-organization mentoring takes the mentor program and expands it beyond the walls of one organization. Cross-organization mentoring can be appropriate in non-competitive situations. For example, one organization could contact other organizations in their area to form a mentoring program for women in the R&D department. A tech transfer office could set up a virtual mentoring program that connects senior inventors in their network with younger female inventors in other regions.

## Champion Programs

Champion programs are a proven way to broaden the reach of ethics and compliance programs and embed a specific topic, like IP diversity, into the culture. Also, known as ambassadors or advocates, champions are a cost-effective way to cascade training and communications throughout your company. These programs identify a champion within relevant business functions or geographic locations to drive implementation and messaging for the IP diversity program. They act as a point of contact for employee questions about where to find policies, resources, or programs. The champion is someone employees can go to with concerns or with positive feedback. Unlike a mentor, a champion is not expected to establish a one-on-one relationship with anyone. Similar to mentor programs, it is important for the champion program to have senior manager support and incentives, and for their champion-related activities to be carried out during normal working hours.

Some organizations decide to identify possible candidates and then see if they want to become a champion. Some organizations go through an open application process and let people apply to be champions. There is no right way. What is best for your organization may be based on the scope of your champion program and the number of potentially qualified candidates.

## Affinity Groups

Affinity groups are often used in larger organizations as a way to pull together people with similar backgrounds. Consider establishing a “Diversity in IP” group. It is important to allow time during the workday for the group to meet, whether in person or virtually, and to give it a purpose. Appoint a group leader who is responsible for scheduling the meetings and preparing the agenda. Give the group a purpose by focusing on topics like:

- Perception of current IP diversity within the organization
- Possible hurdles to achieving IP diversity and equity
- What is working in the IP diversity program
- Ideas for enhancing the program

## Invention Disclosure Day

Set aside part of a day every month or quarter dedicated to completing invention disclosure forms. By doing this during the workday, it doesn't put people that have more responsibilities at home at a disadvantage. For example, men may have more flexibility to stay late or work on weekends to complete the invention disclosure form, whereas women may have more personal responsibilities that may make it more difficult to complete them outside of normal working hours. Make sure to adjust the workload for attendees so that invention disclosure day does not cause them to fall behind on other responsibilities. As part of invention disclosure day, you can explain the other steps in the organization's process for identifying, protecting, and managing IP through commercialization. It's important that invention disclosure days not replace essential conversations, early and often, with the IP team about promising ideas, in light of the need to file patents in a timely manner.

## Inclusive Brainstorming Sessions

Invite 8–12 people from various IP development, IP management, and commercialization teams to attend a cross-functional brainstorming session. The people should be an equal mix of senior IP leaders and women and people from other underrepresented groups. Use alternating seating to mix the group. Identify a specific problem for the group to focus on. It could be a problem with one of the current R&D projects or a new business problem that needs a solution. To start the session, have each person write down their idea for a possible solution or a direction to explore, then pass their idea to the person next to them, who adds their ideas. Continue passing the papers until each person has participated in every possible solution. Finally, present all of the solutions to the group. These types of sessions can help to create a feeling of inclusion and highlight the advantages of diverse perspectives. They must be organized at a time when all people can attend (during normal working hours), and they should only take place if a variety of voices are confirmed to participate. And all ideas shared should be properly accredited.

## Recruitment & Retention Programs

The ability of an organization to attract and retain talent is a growing focus, especially in certain fields and roles. Proactively build a program that attracts talent from diverse backgrounds. Pay particular attention to the language you use in recruitment materials, and to showing a viable and attractive career path to potential hires. The IP diversity program can be a powerful tool in recruiting, retaining, and rewarding diverse talent. Equally important is to make sure that the promises made in recruiting about equity and inclusiveness are a reality in the workplace. Use the metrics to show progress in IP diversity and use stories to make it come to life.



## Onward and Upward. Together.

Improving IP diversity is a journey. Review the full [IP Diversity Guide](#) for ideas – or work through the sections one at a time. Get in touch with the sponsoring organizations for more information and support. What is important is to get moving on this important journey.

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