

Summer Associates, Real Impact: Building DEIA into Early Career Programs

By Lisa D. Moore, MBA, SHRM-CP



As summer unfolds, so do internship programs across the country. For many firms, summer associates bring fresh perspectives, new energy, and a glimpse into the future of the profession. But beyond onboarding logistics and learning plans, it's essential to ask: Are we creating an inclusive and equitable experience for all interns?

Internships are often the first point of professional contact for early-career talent. When DEIA is built into these programs from the start, it sends a powerful message—you belong here, and your growth matters.

Here are a few ways to embed DEIA principles into summer internship programs:

- **Widen the Talent Pipeline:** Partner with diverse schools, student organizations, and community programs to ensure underrepresented students have access to opportunities.
- **Inclusive Onboarding:** Use language that is welcoming and accessible. Avoid assumptions about prior experience or cultural familiarity with workplace norms.
- **Mentorship Matters:** Connect interns with mentors or peer buddies who can support both professional growth and a sense of inclusion.
- **Expose, Don't Just Assign:** Let interns attend meetings, observe leadership, and explore different parts of the organization—particularly areas they may not otherwise access.
- **Create Psychological Safety:** Encourage questions, normalize learning curves, and ensure supervisors are trained to be inclusive and respectful.

Summer associate programs may only last a couple of months - but their impact can last a lifetime. When we approach these programs with intention and inclusiveness, we're not just building resumes—we're building future leaders.