

Recommendations of Buncombe County Diversity and Inclusion Committee: March 2013

Purpose: To determine if the current policies and practices supported and promoted a work environment that was free from discrimination and harassment and equitable for all employees.

Summary of Committee Work: Over a 3 month period, the committee carefully reviewed the current employment practices and County organizational culture.

Employment Practices:

Our current employment practices and policies support an unbiased selection process, equal pay for equal work, and a merit-based promotion process. In addition, there is a formal step-wise disciplinary process that allows for due process and a dismissal process that must be based on “just cause” for those employees no longer in a probationary status. Further, employees have access to a step-wise formal Grievance Procedure and a “no retaliation” policy for making complaints.

Organizational Culture:

We are a large organization with many different departments. In reviewing our workforce and efforts that have been made to promote diversity and inclusion, the committee felt like this work was an ongoing process and that ongoing efforts must be directed at supervisors as they are the “keepers of the culture.” Toward that end, the committee felt that the efforts of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee should continue as an advisory group and that resources should continue to be directed toward ongoing supports and training targeted at new and veteran supervisors as well as ongoing efforts with staff across all county departments. This work, started over two years ago in Health and Human Services and done in partnership with The Center for Diversity Education, has already been broadened to include all County departments.

Equity:

There are discrepancies among employees based on access to benefits for domestic partners such as:

- Health Insurance
- Life Insurance
- FMLA
- Use of Leave

For example, for an employee who has been in a long-term relationship with another person, they are not able to take FMLA should the employee’s partner become ill (e.g., diagnosed with cancer) and need care.

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Recommendations:

1. After a careful review of the protected classes, the committee felt that the County's emphasis should be on assuring a work environment that is free of discrimination and harassment for all people under all circumstances. To further support this practice, the committee recommends adopting "The Respectful Workplace Policy." This policy addresses the work environment we want to foster and provides a way for employees to address any problems that they might have and outlines the consequences for employees who violate the policy.
2. The committee recommends offering domestic partner benefits for employees. This includes, but is not limited to: health and dental insurance, FMLA, use of leave, and life insurance. This action will create equity for our employees. The committee recommends that these partnerships be defined through a formal process.
3. The committee recommends ongoing training and development around inclusion and diversity for all staff.
4. The committee recommends annual supervisory assessments that assess issues around a supervisor's ability to create a safe, supportive, productive and inclusive work environment.