Managing Diversity in the Local Government Workplace: More Than Complying With the Law
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The faces of workplaces in local governments across the country are changing. In my home state of New Hampshire,1 our largest city, Manchester is now home to an array of residents, with students in its school system having a multitude of languages other than English as their native tongue. Our state is no longer, if it ever truly was, white and Republican.

While it is true that we in the Granite State perhaps do not have the extent of diversity present in some other locations, we, too, as we look to the future:

“understand that we live in an environment increasingly characterized by turbulence as opposed to stability; diversity as opposed to homogeneity. The randomness of change is altering the workplace, radically transforming the way that organizations interact with their environment. Across the public and private sectors, diversity has grown. Colleagues working together are increasingly less alike with respect to gender, cultural background and age. They are different in their perspectives, lifestyles, attitudes, values, behaviors, fields of specialization and thought patterns.”2

This IMLA CLE seminar already has examined numerous public workplace legal issues raised by diversity, including EEO compliance, sexual harassment, religious freedom, and disabilities. The slide presentation accompanying this handout3 takes what at first glance may seem to be a somewhat light-hearted look at accommodating diversity in the local government workplace. On reflection, though, the comments and views expressed in that presentation may serve as food for thought on the serious twin issues of (1) legal compliance and (2) managing diversity to achieve successful outcomes.


The Report starts with a summary of management actions and practices that experts consulted for the study cite as being effective in managing diversity:

- **Top leadership commitment** – a vision of diversity demonstrated and communicated throughout an organization by top-level management.

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1 New Hampshire is often characterized by opponents of its “First in the Nation Primary Status” as not being representative of the diversity extant in the rest of the country.
3 Derived from a presentation at the IMLA 2006 Mid-Year seminar by and used, gratefully, with permission of Attorney Marlene Pontrelli.
• **Diversity as part of an organization’s strategic plan** – a diversity strategy and plan that are developed and aligned with the organization’s strategic plan.

• **Diversity linked to performance** – the understanding that a more diverse and inclusive work environment can yield greater productivity and help improve individual and organizational performance.

• **Measurement** – a set of quantitative and qualitative measures of the impact of various aspects of an overall diversity program.

• **Accountability** – the means to ensure that leaders are responsible for diversity by linking their performance assessment and compensation to the progress of diversity initiatives.

• **Succession planning** – an ongoing, strategic process for identifying and developing a diverse pool of talent for an organization’s potential future leaders.

• **Recruitment** – the process of attracting a supply of qualified, diverse applicants for employment.

• **Employee involvement** – the contribution of employees in driving diversity throughout an organization.

• **Diversity training** – organizational efforts to inform and educate management and staff about diversity.

The foregoing discussion points are not intended as one-size-fits-all solutions to concerns and issues that arise in today’s workplace. Taking time to consider how leaders and managers (legal advisors, too) are viewed by a diverse audience, and how their speech, actions, and conduct are perceived, may make them (and us) more effective managers, persuaders, and counselors.