



# Baking Inclusivity into Startups

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# Part 1

Why inclusivity matters

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## The Business Case

Statistics show that businesses with higher levels of diversity and inclusion tend to perform better overall. This makes them very attractive for investors, customers and staff.

Likelihood of above-average financial returns due to gender diversity and ethnic diversity, respectively.

**25% and 35%**

Work teams which have high levels of inclusion outperform others by

**8:1**

% of employees reported that they would consider leaving an organisation for a more inclusive one.

**72%**



# Making inclusivity real for your startup

Inclusion is not a tick-box exercise - it is a constant work in progress.

However, there are building blocks you can put in place as a leader that will embed inclusion in every part of your business operation. The checklist you'll find in this deck is not exhaustive, but intended to help you get the basics right when it comes to inclusive business practice.

Start early! Building inclusivity into your company's DNA from the outset is a far easier job than waiting until it become a 'priority'. Once homogeneity sets in, it can be hard to unpick.

And if you are already maturing as a company - don't panic! The checklist in this deck will help you quickly assess where the most obvious gaps and action-points lie. Good luck!

Want to read more? Check out this article from [Forbes - Why Startups Need to Value Diversity More](#)



## Who This Guide Is For

This guide is intended for founders and leadership teams of startups. In the spirit of inclusion, no prescribed definition of 'startup' is used here - as the principles and practices recommended can be applied to a startup at any stage on their growth journey.

It is also a resource for HR/People leaders and managers, and for anyone interested to know how companies can embed inclusion from the outset.



# What is inclusion and why does it matter to your startup?

Inclusion is the practice of including people in a way that is fair for all, values everyone's differences, and empowers and enables each person to be themselves and achieve their full potential. Startups need to embed inclusion to create inclusive workplaces where everyone can thrive, and inclusive products and services that empower all.

Diversity, equity and inclusion aren't just moral imperatives, but strategic necessities for startups aiming for long term success and to build a trusted brand.



# Doing the right thing = better results

Being serious and proactive about diversity and inclusion is not just a business imperative. It's about doing the right thing with your company, for the good of your teams, customers and wider society. If you are a leader who serious about your company's purpose, then you are serious about inclusion. It's as simple as that.

## Do the right thing

- Be a part of a global movement for positive social change for equality and justice.
- Create a happy, healthy workplace where everyone can thrive.
- Create products and services that empower more people.

## Get Better Results

- Win the war on talent.
- Drive up engagement and productivity.
- Harness great ideas and fresh perspectives to drive innovation and growth.

# Mythbusting

| Myth   | Truth  |
|--|--|
| Diversity is all about hiring quotas.          | Diversity is about creating an environment where diverse hiring is intrinsic because it benefits everyone.         |
| It's a pipeline problem, only white men apply. | There are lots of ways to broaden your pipeline from how you write job adverts to where you advertise.             |
| We'd have to compromise on quality.            | Diversity raises the bar, it doesn't lower it.   |
| A standard education background is the best.   | Limiting the talent pool means you miss out on valuable skills and experience.                                     |
| We'll think about diversity when we're bigger. | The bigger you get the harder instilling diversity and inclusion will be, and you'll miss out on the benefits now. |
| It's too expensive.                            | Small changes to process can make an impact. It can also save you money in recruitment and talent retention.       |



# 72%

of employees would consider leaving an organisation for a more inclusive one

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# Part 2

A practical guide

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- Step 5. Create Inclusive Products
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## Step 1: Bake inclusivity into your Mission and Values

- Clearly articulate why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) matters to your organisation's success.
- Integrate DEI principles into your Mission statement, emphasising its importance to achieving company goals.
- Develop company Values that explicitly promote DEI and outline specific behaviors that support inclusivity. See NatWest's [Purpose and Values](#) webpage as an example.
- Establish measurable goals for DEI initiatives and hold individuals accountable for their contributions.
- Give people clear roles and responsibilities



## Step 2: Set the tone from the top

- Lead by example: Ensure all leaders demonstrate their commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion and act as inclusive role models. In their behaviours, actions and decisions
- Proactively provide training, coaching, or other resources to develop inclusive leaders with empathy, curiosity, cultural competence who adopts inclusive practices such as inclusive meetings and decision making.
- Hire a diverse senior leadership team. You can't be what you can't see.
- Hold leaders accountable for aligning their actions with company values and promoting inclusivity.
- Recognize and commend inclusive behavior among leaders and team members.
- Address inappropriate behavior promptly to prevent it from becoming normalized within the organization.
- Check out the [Inclusive Leadership Series](#) from Diversily



## Step 3: Hire inclusively

- Review job adverts for inclusive language using tools like the 'Gender Decoder' to ensure neutrality.
- Explore diverse recruitment channels beyond personal networks to attract a wider range of candidates.
- Consider how each candidate can contribute to your organisational culture, valuing diverse perspectives. Look for culture 'add', not just culture 'fit'.
- Standardise the selection process with practices like blind CV screening, competency-based interviews, and diverse interview panels.
- Establish a clear strategy and policy for remote, hybrid, or work-from-home arrangements, considering flexibility for caregivers. Prioritise offering flexible working options to accommodate diverse needs and enhance inclusivity.



# How to get hiring right

## Advertising

- Look outside of your own circle when hiring.
- Work on your employer brand early and be clear about what message you want to send to potential recruits.
- Pick recruitment platforms with the widest reach.
- Write a clear and detailed job description at the beginning of the process. Make sure you are clear on what the essential strengths and experiences are.
- Use a 'gender decoder' to make your advert as accessible as possible.
- Be open to different routes to a role, look into vocational as well as educational.

## Interviews

- Redact names and education from CVs before they are put for a first review.
- Hire for the company not just the role, look at values and strengths.
- Put together a diverse interview panel.
- Remote interviews: This can help people who do not have the resources to travel to multiple interviews or have caring responsibilities.
- Give questions in advance: You get a prepared candidate and see all at their best.
- Scoring system: Ask all candidates the same question and score them out of 5 for each one.
- Treat everyone with courtesy and transparency.
- Be clear to the hiring team and each candidate on the process and what good looks like.



## Step 4: Empower inclusive teams

- Cultivate psychological safety within teams by encouraging open dialogue, sharing of mistakes and valuing diverse perspectives. [Listen to Amy Edmonson](#), Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard, speak about psychological safety (3 mins)
- Make transparency in communication the norm, actively listening to all voices and embracing feedback with honesty.
- Build inclusive practices into team mechanics, thinking through communication channels and modes of participation in team meetings.
- Put in place an anonymous mechanism in for concerns and suggestions to be raised about the company culture or how specific teams work together.
- Make flexible working a welcome practice, rather than something frowned upon.



## Step 5: Create inclusive products

- Adapt innovation practices to counter bias and embed inclusion throughout the product development process.
- Ensure diverse participation at all stages of the product lifecycle, from research and design to marketing and distribution.
- Design inclusive customer experiences that empower all users, not just the dominant majority, making them feel personally catered to.
- Develop inclusive content that speaks to everyone in your target market, using inclusive language and imagery.
- Follow WCAG ([Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)) guidance.
- Further resources can be found at the [Inclusive Innovation Playbook](#)



# Inclusivity Scorecard

**Current score**  
1 = not doing at all  
5 = fully achieved

**Activity**  
What action will you take to improve it?  
*Tip: start small and iterate*

**Timebox**  
How long will you run your activity before you review results?

**Metrics & success**  
What will you track and how will you know if you're successful?

Mission & values

Setting the tone from the top

Hire inclusively

Empower inclusive teams

Create inclusive products



# Authors

Marissa Ellis, She/Her

Founder, [Diversily](#)



Glenn Carroll, She/Her

Program Management  
Leader

Libby Davis, She/Her

Operations Manager,  
Matter

**Matter.** lunos

James Lucas, He/Him

Founder, [Lunos](#)