

Foreword

Over the last 20 years, we have seen that having high expectations, confronting one's own biases, and productively working with students and community members of all backgrounds are critical to effective teaching. The Diversity, Community, and Achievement (DCA) offerings at institute and this accompanying text are designed to foster insights, reflection, and productive dialogue, so that you can more effectively lead your students to ambitious academic goals.

Often times, as corps members read through the text and engage in these conversations at institute and in regions, questions arise about Teach For America's overall approach and commitment to creating a diverse organization and a community that values diversity. This foreword provides an overview of our approach to diversity—how it both underlies the different components of our program and plays into the decisions we make. During the institute and beyond, you will have the opportunity learn more about our approach, to ask questions, and provide feedback.

Teach For America's Commitment to Diversity

Teach For America strives to enlist the energy and commitment of individuals who have the characteristics and skills necessary to advance our cause. These leaders will be diverse in ethnicity, race, and economic background. Their places on the political spectrum and their religious beliefs will be similarly varied, and we seek individuals of all genders and sexual orientations and regardless of physical disabilities.

Maximizing the diversity of our corps and organization is important in engaging all those who can contribute to our effort and also in ensuring our access to and participation in the circles of influence in our tremendously diverse society. Moreover, we seek to be diverse because we aspire to serve as a model of the fairness and equality of opportunity we envision for our nation.

At the same time that we value each individual who commits to our cause, we also place a particular focus on attracting and fostering the leadership of individuals who share the racial and/or low-income backgrounds of the students underserved by public schools, many of whom are African-American, Latino, or Hispanic children living in low-income communities. We emphasize racial, ethnic, and economic diversity to enhance our impact.

Impact on students: Based on our experiences, we know students benefit from all talented, committed teachers, regardless of their race/ethnicity. We have seen that when such teachers are themselves from historically under-represented racial backgrounds or low-income families, they can have a particular impact and be particularly persuasive with students regarding the potential for success in education and in life. As such, we are committed to ensuring that there is significant representation of African-American, Latino or Hispanics, and individuals from low-income backgrounds in the corps.

Long-term impact: Alumni who share the racial and/or economic backgrounds of our students can also be particularly influential in the long-term push for societal change, because of their rich perspective and credibility, and because their leadership in and of itself demonstrates the value of that change.

Collective strength: While it is the responsibility of each person within Teach For America to make decisions with sensitivity to the needs and desires of our students and communities, we have seen that individuals who are themselves from under-represented racial backgrounds or low-income family backgrounds can often ground the discussions and advance the thinking of our corps, alumni groups, and organization in important ways.

Foreword

Fostering Diversity Across Teach For America's Program Continuum

Recruitment - Our recruitment team works aggressively to increase the diversity of our corps. Each regional recruitment team has ambitious, measurable goals for recruiting people of color and people from low-income backgrounds. Organizationally, we measure our success in recruitment largely by our ability to increase the size, quality, and diversity of our corps, annually increasing the share of the corps composed of corps members of color and/or corps members from low-income backgrounds even as the entire corps expands. The recruitment team thus allocates a majority of staff time and resources to recruiting corps members of color and corps members from low-income backgrounds. To meet these goals, we recruit at over 400 public and private colleges, including Historically Black Colleges & Universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and we work closely with the leaders of dozens of national organizations, ranging from the National Society of Hispanic Engineers to Alpha Kappa Alpha Inc., to identify and recruit prospective corps members. Every undergraduate recruitment team across the country employs strategies such as:

- Presenting to campus-based student organizations and governing bodies (e.g., Black Student Unions, Latino Student Unions, multicultural Greek letter organizations) and seeking referrals from influential faculty and staff in order to increase awareness and identify top prospective applicants.
- Personally cultivating students of color on campuses and connecting top prospects to corps members and alumni with shared backgrounds.
- Organizing special events such as regional visits with classroom observations and community forum panels geared toward prospective top candidates of color from around the nation.

Recruiters who focus on broader efforts to recruit beyond specific campuses employ additional strategies including:

- Supplementing our campus-based efforts through relationships with national organizations and scholarships and through national marketing and public relations efforts.
- Prioritizing young professionals or graduate students of color for personal outreach and cultivation.

Selection and Assignment - We know from our experience and research that people of all backgrounds can succeed in significantly increasing their students' academic achievement, and that race, ethnicity and economic background alone do not make an individual successful in our program.

Our selection criteria are based on a set of characteristics that differentiates the most effective teachers in our program, as indicated by the degree to which they make measurable advances in their students' academic achievement. The criteria are:

- Demonstrated past leadership and achievement: achieving ambitious, measurable results in academic, professional, extracurricular, or volunteer settings
- Perseverance and sustained focus in the face of challenges
- Strong critical thinking skills: making accurate linkages between cause and effect and generating relevant solutions to problems
- Superior organizational ability: planning well, meeting deadlines, and working efficiently
- Respect for individuals' diverse experiences and effectively working with people from a variety of backgrounds

Ethnic and Economic Diversity in the 2010 Corps

Total People of Color	32%
African-American	11.0%
Latino or Hispanic	7.0%
Asian-American	6.0%
Native American	0.3%
Multi-ethnic	5.0%
Other (Non-white)	2.0%
Pell Grant recipients	28%

- Superior interpersonal skills to motivate and lead others
- Thorough understanding of and desire to work relentlessly in pursuit of our vision

We are often asked whether, when measuring past achievement, we take a narrow (e.g., GPA only) or broad view. We take a broad view. We look for patterns of achieving ambitious results within varied experiences – academic, extra-curricular and work-related. Within extracurricular and work roles, we seek to understand specifically what an applicant achieved in the role as opposed to judging the achievement by the role’s title alone. Within academics, we regard GPA as an indicator of achievement but consider it within the context of other achievements when determining an applicant’s total achievement measure. When measuring academic achievement, we also take into account whether an applicant worked to finance part of their college education and yearly averages.

Our application readers and interviewers synthesize and evaluate evidence holistically, using all parts of the application, phone interview and final interview to determine scores in each of our selection competencies.

Final selection decisions are made on the basis of an applicant’s likelihood to have a life-changing impact on students, primarily through effecting meaningful academic gains in his/her future classroom, as determined by their scores on our selection criteria and the past impact of those scores in predicting corps members’ success. We seek to ensure that the right decisions are made at every stage of our selection process and administer a series of thorough checks toward this end. A senior selection committee reviews a significant share of interviewer recommendations before final decisions are made to ensure consistent application of our selection model and the best final outcome for the applicant and potential students he/she would be teaching. Although this committee makes it a priority to review the evidence and interviewer recommendation for applicants who are African American, Latino or Hispanic, and/or come from low-income family backgrounds, we ensure the same admission standards for all applicants by reviewing them holistically and giving applicants the opportunities to exhibit their strengths throughout the admissions process.

Once selected, corps members are placed in their regions based on a number of factors, including district needs, corps members’ preferences, and corps members’ academic backgrounds. As such, the diversity of corps members in each region (and therefore each summer institute) may differ. Though we have considered playing a more active role in balancing diversity across regions, we do not consider race or ethnicity in determining assignments because doing so would be unfair to the individuals who receive less preferred regions.

In an effort to ensure that accepted applicants of all economic situations are able to join our corps, we offer over \$7.7 million in transitional grants and no-interest loans to help corps members make it to their first paychecks. Packages range from \$1,000 to \$6,000 and are based on a corps member’s demonstrated need and the cost of transitioning to the corps member’s assigned region.

Pre-Service Training - Over the years, Teach For America has researched and sought external expertise to develop approaches to diversity-related training, and we continually seek to evolve our approaches based upon feedback and new learnings. While we believe that we have made progress over time, we will continue to evolve our approach. Below is a brief overview of our current approach to the diversity, community, and achievement (DCA) component of our training:

- Before institute, you will read portions of this DCA text, a critical analysis of the connection between issues of diversity and the achievement gap, as well as reflections from Teach For America alumni.
- During regional orientation and/or induction you will learn information about the specific community in which you’ll be living and working for the next two years.

Foreword

- At the institute, you will participate in weekly discussions led by a trained facilitator in which you will analyze your own backgrounds, identities, and expectations about your students and communities. You will engage with your colleagues in reflective conversations about how issues of diversity impact teacher effectiveness and student achievement. You will also spend time reflecting on the dynamics of difference and sameness between yourself and your students, and the impact of those dynamics on the ways in which you will invest students and their influencers, the ways in which you interact with colleagues and administrators, and ultimately, the ways in which you will lead your students to academic achievement.

These activities are designed to provide a useful context for you to begin or continue this important reflection. However, this type of learning and work is a lifelong process. The discussions and reflections that take place during your summer training should continue throughout your two-year commitment and beyond.

In Conclusion

It is our goal that all corps members will benefit from our efforts around diversity, community, and achievement. At the same time, we strive to constantly reflect on and assess our efforts to create a more diverse organization and movement and to ensure we are creating an environment that embraces diversity and challenges bias. While we have made significant progress over the years, we know there is much more we can and must accomplish in this realm. Your feedback—from recruitment ideas to feedback on our DCA curriculum and beyond—will be very valuable, as it helps shape the way we think and the initiatives we take on.