

WHAT TO DO IF YOU EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO DEI AT WORK



Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based on protected characteristics such as race and sex. Different treatment based on race, sex, or another protected characteristic can be unlawful discrimination, no matter which employees are harmed. Title VII's protections apply equally to all racial, ethnic, and national origin groups, as well as both sexes.

Before you can sue in federal court, you first must file a charge of discrimination with the EEOC. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) investigates charges of discrimination and can file a lawsuit under Title VII against businesses and other private sector employers. The Department of Justice can file a lawsuit under Title VII against state and local government employers based on an EEOC charge, following an EEOC investigation.

What can DEI-related discrimination look like?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is a broad term that is not defined in the statute. Under Title VII, DEI policies, programs, or practices may be unlawful if they involve an employer or other covered entity taking an employment action motivated—in whole or in part—by an employee's race, sex, or another protected characteristic. In addition to unlawfully using quotas or otherwise “balancing” a workforce by race, sex, or other protected traits, DEI-related discrimination in your workplace might include the following:

Disparate Treatment

DEI-related discrimination can include an employer taking an employment action motivated (in whole or in part) by race, sex, or another protected characteristic. Title VII bars discrimination against applicants or employees in the terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, including:

- Hiring
- Firing
- Promotion
- Demotion
- Compensation
- Fringe benefits
- Exclusion from training
- Exclusion from mentoring or sponsorship programs
- Exclusion from fellowships
- Selection for interviews (including placement on candidate slates)

Harassment

Title VII prohibits workplace harassment, which may occur when an employee is subjected to unwelcome remarks or conduct based on race, sex, or other protected characteristics. Harassment is illegal when it results in an adverse change to a term, condition, or privilege of employment, or it is so frequent or severe that a reasonable person would consider it intimidating, hostile, or abusive. Depending on the facts, DEI training may give rise to a colorable hostile work environment claim.

Who can be affected by DEI-related discrimination?

Title VII protects employees, potential and actual applicants, interns, and training program participants.

What should I do if I encounter discrimination related to DEI at work?

If you suspect you have experienced DEI-related discrimination, contact the EEOC promptly because there are strict time limits for filing a charge. The EEOC office nearest to you can be reached by phone at 1-800-669-4000 or by ASL videophone at 1-844-234-5122.

Limiting, Segregating, and Classifying

Title VII also prohibits employers from limiting, segregating, or classifying employees based on race, sex, or other protected characteristics in a way that affects their status or deprives them of employment opportunities. Prohibited conduct may include:

- Limiting membership in workplace groups, such as Employee Resource Groups (ERG) or other employee affinity groups, to certain protected groups
- Separating employees into groups based on race, sex, or another protected characteristic when administering DEI or other trainings, or other privileges of employment, even if the separate groups receive the same programming content or amount of employer resources

Retaliation

Title VII prohibits retaliation by an employer because an individual has engaged in protected activity under the statute, such as objecting to or opposing employment discrimination related to DEI, participating in employer or EEOC investigations, or filing an EEOC charge. Reasonable opposition to a DEI training may constitute protected activity if the employee provides a fact-specific basis for his or her belief that the training violates Title VII.

