



## UNDERSTANDING EQUALITY: THE PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

### Your Guide to Defining Equity and Related Terms

*With the growth of the globalization process and the hard realities of competition in the marketplace, today's America is a place where the inclusion of people with different gender and ethnic backgrounds cannot be ignored. Louisiana is no exception. Many organizations are implementing diversity initiatives. Despite the enormous popularity of these initiatives, it has become increasingly clear that some workers may be confused by the concept of managing diversity. Employees sometimes confuse managing diversity with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), affirmative action programs, and/or the Civil Rights Act. Some people use these terms interchangeably. Let's explore these terms.*

#### **EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY and the CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964**

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is an act to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, and for other purposes. Equal Employment Opportunity means that all individuals must be treated equally in all employment activities (hiring, training, or promotion). Each person is to be evaluated on his or her ability to do the job, and must not be subjected to discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or Vietnam-era veteran. To ensure the implementation of affirmative action and to enforce the Civil Rights Act, the Federal government created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

#### **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

Affirmative action is the deliberate undertaking of positive steps to design and implement procedures that ensure that an employer provides equal employment opportunity to all. Recruitment and selection of employees are two of the major components of any affirmative action plan. Affirmative action programs are an outgrowth of EEO laws. It is government-initiated and mandated in certain circumstances. Affirmative action programs contain goals and timetables designed to bring the level of representation for minority groups and women into parity with relevant and available labor force indices. Affirmative action regulations also do not require preferential treatment, nor do they mandate or even suggest the hiring or promotion of persons who are not qualified. While affirmative action programs are mandated and are a reaction to under-representation, managing diversity initiatives are voluntary and proactive in nature.

#### **DIVERSITY**

Managing diversity seeks to address issues related to managing people via internal communication, interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, quality, productivity, and efficiency. Some of the issues addressed by properly managing diversity may be indirectly related to EEO and affirmative action concerns. The main focus of managing diversity is to find productivity gains through respecting, valuing, and using the differences people bring to the workplace. The idea is to find a way to let everyone do what he or she does best in order to gain a competitive edge. While affirmative action seeks an end result, managing diversity is a long-term change process that seeks to identify and actually change the organizational culture of an agency.