

What is DEI?

Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs can take many forms, but they generally describe efforts to increase access to and remove barriers from things like higher education and jobs for those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and genders.

The origins of DEI efforts in the federal government can be traced back to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in which—among other things—discrimination in employment based on race, religion, sex, color, and origin was outlawed.

President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246 the next year, which barred discrimination in federal employment and required the government to “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin.”

In 2021, Biden continued Johnson’s legacy with an Executive Order of his own, titled “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce,” which worked to promote “equal opportunity” and define each term. Diversity focuses on representation, equity focuses on fairness and impartiality, and inclusion relates to a sense of belonging and value no matter an employee’s background.

How is Trump targeting DEI?

Trump directed that all federal DEI staff be placed on leave and that federal DEI programs should be shut down. It directs federal agencies to submit written plans for executing a “reduction-in force” by the end of the month. But, this is not as simple or clear as it seems.

The Office of Personnel Management released a memo to all heads of departments and agencies on how to actually go about executing Trump’s order. The memo does not exactly define what DEI offices are and states that they “are aware of efforts by some in government to disguise these programs by using coded or imprecise language.” It asks for employees to report these “efforts... to obscure” connections to DEI or “similar ideologies” to the Office of Personnel Management. NBC reported this week that these orders on DEI have created a culture of fear among workers in the federal government—the largest employer in the nation.