

EOC offers free inclusion policymaking services



IT IS IMPORTANT to take proper steps to prevent discrimination within the workplace. The general workplace atmosphere and culture could be adversely affected. The employees may feel uncomfortable and demotivated. Additionally, failure to do so may lead to the organisation breaching the Equal Opportunity Act if a complaint is lodged against it.

One very important mechanism to prevent discrimination within the workplace is through the creation and implementation of proper policies and procedures which act as a roadmap to provide guidance and clarity on how an organisation should operate and ensure compliance with laws and regulations, while providing the necessary assistance for decision-making, efficiency and effectiveness within the organisation.

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) provides free public outreach programmes which aim to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in various categories. The need for proper policies within the organisation is communicated through these programmes, as well as the need for relevant communication and training in relation to these policies, as there is no point in having a policy that staff is unaware of.

The EOC works with organisations to create inclusive policies and also offers guidance and recommendations for amendments to existing policies.

It is important to note that even though policies are created, proper implementation and follow-up are required to en-

sure they are understood and practised throughout the organisation and that there is a zero-tolerance culture within the organisation when it comes to discrimination and equality.

As such, mechanisms need to be in place for feedback, review and updating of policies in operation to measure effectiveness and recognise the need for any improvement.

An inclusivity training session in relation to a particular policy can also be conducted by the EOC free of charge to ensure that staff are not just aware of the policy but understand it. The session would also act as a form of training on the topic and that staff are capable of implementing it throughout the organisation.

Some initiatives that could be implemented in the organisation's policy include a defined written workplace policy. The policy should be done after consultation with employees to be more effective. An effective equal opportunity policy should set out in clear and simple terms what is and is not acceptable workplace behaviour so as to minimise confusion and uncertainty among staff and managers.

The policy should be shared at staff meetings or at formal training sessions.

Employers can indicate to employees that they can contribute towards an equal opportunity environment for all. The establishment of a joint committee of management and employees, for example, to review policies.

An effective equal opportunity policy allows an organisation to gain the benefit of having a diverse staff, which allows the organisation to gain insight from different perspectives and backgrounds that are all valuable to the success of the organisation. There will be increased productivity, creativity and appreciation of differences as the importance of this is clearly understood.

Finally, effective policies prevent confusion and serious implications such as bullying, sexual harassment, as well as direct and indirect discrimination within the workplace. Employees feel a sense of freedom that they can raise issues and suggestions knowing they will be acknowledged and addressed, which will boost staff morale and lead to greater job retention by creating a safe place for employees.

It must be noted that every organisation is different and a policy for one organisation may not necessarily work for another, hence the need for constant dialogue between employers and employees to make the workplace inclusive for all people and to recognise that it is indeed a necessity.

To request the EOC's assistance to create or review a contract, send an e-mail to communications@eoc.gov.tt or visit our website www.equalopportunity.gov.tt for more information.