

# Juneteenth Is a Federal Holiday: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Tips for Proactive Employers

Article By:

Christine Bestor Townsend

---

In the wake of an increased focus on racial justice in the summer of 2020, many employers began to recognize and observe Juneteenth as a way to demonstrate their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. On June 17, 2021—25 years after the first bill to recognize Juneteenth was introduced—President Biden [signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act](#), designating Juneteenth as the 11th federally recognized public holiday. While the bill does not impose any requirements on private employers, the recognition of Juneteenth as a public holiday impacts private employers, many of which adopt the federal holidays in their internally recognized holiday calendars.

Recognizing Juneteenth can be part of a company's broader DEI programs and serve to strengthen its commitment to its values. Many companies may choose (or continue) to offer the day as a paid holiday or offer holiday pay to those who work. In addition to recognizing Juneteenth as a paid holiday, employers may also use the time around the holiday to foster an inclusive environment and demonstrate their commitment to racial justice in a [variety of ways](#).

## Engage

Juneteenth can be an opportunity to engage employees from all areas of the organization. Employers may want to use Juneteenth activities to get greater buy-in from leadership on DEI initiatives and demonstrate that these initiatives and programs are not only for diverse employees. Many employees may wonder where they fit in these programs. Employers may consider providing resources to those who want to be allies or otherwise demonstrate support, but do not know how. Consider volunteer outings the week of Juneteenth that are connected to racial and social justice as opportunities to involve all employees.

## Educate

While the significance of Juneteenth is now a national topic of conversation, many employees may not be aware of the history or importance of Juneteenth. Consider utilizing guest speakers, written communications, or roundtable discussions to educate employees on the newest public holiday. For those organizations that have Black employee affinity groups, observance of Juneteenth could serve as a further opportunity to demonstrate support for the group and its members by having deeper and

more authentic education around the significance of the holiday, why it exists, and lived experiences around it.

## **Examine**

As companies decide how to recognize the holiday going forward, they may take the opportunity to examine their own internal DEI initiatives. These types of initiatives have gained more interest and traction in recent years, but companies may want to periodically examine their DEI programs to ensure they are accomplishing their goals—especially if these initiatives were rolled out in 2020. Employers may want to shift DEI programs into a proactive focus.

The recognition of Juneteenth as a company-recognized holiday can go a long way to demonstrate awareness and support for employees' varied experiences, particularly those of Black employees. However, companies should also recognize that observing Juneteenth does not substitute for conducting ongoing evaluations of hiring, promotion, evaluation, training, compensation, and other systems and processes that DEI initiatives are intended to address. Many employees, leaders, clients, customers, and other constituencies will continue to scrutinize organizational DEI efforts. DEI practitioners may want to view Juneteenth as another opportunity to highlight larger DEI efforts—or at minimum acknowledge that recognizing Juneteenth is not where the DEI efforts begin or end.

## **Celebrate**

Juneteenth is a day of celebration. It is intended as a day to celebrate fuller freedom and independence. Companies may consider how Juneteenth can be celebrated similarly to the Fourth of July holiday in its recognition of freedom and/or to the observation of Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday in its commitment to community engagement. Joining one of the many celebrations in cities throughout the United States—and seeing if your company can help sponsor a Juneteenth celebration may further enshrine this newest public holiday as an opportunity for all in the workplace to learn, to celebrate and to engage.

© 2025, Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, P.C., All Rights Reserved.

---

National Law Review, Volume XI, Number 170

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/juneteenth-federal-holiday-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-tips-proactive-employers>