GUIDE TO

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is essential to fostering a positive campus environment. Regardless of your role—faculty, staff, student leader, or otherwise—it can be practiced in both formal positions and everyday interactions. Rooted in self-awareness, open communication, adaptability, and empowerment, inclusive leadership helps build a culture of belonging, growth, and respect. This guide offers campus leaders practical strategies to create and sustain inclusive, engaged, and equitable teams.

Fostering a culture where every voice matters

- **Prioritize building individual relationships with your team.** It's important for team members to know that you're there to support and guide them. Strong relationships foster trust and psychological safety, and that begins with intentionally learning what each team member does so you can better understand how to support their work.

- **Involve employees in both high- and low-stakes decision-making.** Whether the topic is promotion and tenure or day-to-day operations, inviting team members to contribute fosters a more supportive and inclusive environment. When input isn't feasible, strive for transparency so team members understand the reasoning behind decisions— especially those that impact the entire group.

- **Regularly seek feedback on your leadership and use it to grow.** Talk with employees about how the workplace could work better for them and how you can show up as a more inclusive leader. Listen openly, then take realistic, actionable steps based on what you hear.

Cultivating unity while valuing uniqueness

- **Invest time and energy in both formal and informal community-building.** Fostering collegiality means creating space for meaningful connections across the team. Formally, this can include team-building activities, mentorship programs, or regular cross-department meetings. Informally, it can involve encouraging casual conversations, social events, or shared-interest groups like book clubs or after-work gatherings.

- **Seek diverse perspectives while fostering a sense of belonging.** Ensure that all team members feel their unique identities and experiences are respected and reflected in decision-making and dialogue. At the same time, prioritize community-building efforts that promote connection and belonging across the team.

- **Recognize individual contributions openly and specifically.** Show team members that they're valued—not just for their work, but for who they are. Express appreciation at the individual level, clearly acknowledging both personal qualities and professional contributions.

Centering accessibility, flexibility, and belonging

- **Consider accessibility in both practices and physical spaces.** Listen to your team's needs and respond thoughtfully. This might mean scheduling meetings outside of common caregiving times or ensuring that physical spaces are fully accessible. Regularly review the accessibility of your office and processes, and seek feedback to guide improvements.

- **Collaborate with employees to create conditions for their success.** Whenever possible, shape the work environment to support diverse needs. This can include offering flexible workspaces, being aware of cultural biases around professional attire, and scheduling meetings at times that accommodate parents and caregivers.

- **Support time off and recognition of a wider range of holidays.** Acknowledge that not all employees observe the same holidays. Ensure team members understand how to use leave for holidays not officially recognized and offer accommodations when needed. Stay open to learning and fostering awareness around cultural and religious observances.

- **Use accessible and inclusive signage and materials.** This includes using audio and visual tools to improve accessibility and being intentional about when to offer materials in multiple languages based on audience needs.

- **Distribute informal duties and committee work equitably.** Tasks like mentoring, handling concerns, or organizing events often fall disproportionately on women and other historically marginalized team members. As an inclusive leader, proactively share these responsibilities fairly, consider current workloads, and offer flexibility where possible.

- **Lead from where you are. Inclusive leadership includes advocating upward.** Use your voice to advance equity and inclusion —whether with your supervisor or within institutional systems—wherever you reasonably can.

Pursuing growth through education and reflection

- **Attend trainings and workshops on access and inclusion.** As a leader, you need space to ask difficult or uncomfortable questions and deepen your understanding. These learning opportunities help you grow as an inclusive leader and become a stronger resource for fostering inclusivity in the workplace.

- **Reflect on your own mindsets and behaviors.** Effective inclusive leadership begins with self-awareness. Learn about implicit bias and commit to the ongoing work of recognizing and mitigating your own. Educate yourself on cultural identities and cultural humility, then actively engage with your own identity and lead with humility and awareness.resource for fostering inclusivity in the workplace.

- **Use equitable evaluation practices.** Be intentional in how you assess your team's performance. Research shows that student evaluations of teaching often contain biases against women and people of color. Explore alternative or supplemental evaluation methods that minimize bias, including your own.

- **Embrace vulnerability as a leader.** Model openness by acknowledging your blind spots and areas where you're still learning. Lead by example in actively pursuing growth, education, and greater awareness of best practices.

Commit to Ongoing Learning *about* Inclusive Leadership

Seek out opportunities to learn more about developing skills as an inclusive leader. Below are additional resources to get you started putting these strategies into practice.

- Before your next meeting, review this *Inclusive Meeting Guide* by Harvard University's Office for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

- Language can be one of the most powerful tools towards creating inclusive environments. Check out the *Inclusivity Style Guide* by the American Chemical Society for communication guidelines.

- Attend professional development workshops in the areas of inclusivity and cultural awareness through the MSU Office of Access and Success, including Safe Zone and Cultural Bridges workshops.