

Practicing Equity and Inclusion

Promoting Equity and Inclusion

Recruiting a diverse workforce that reflect a variety of racial, socio-economic, gender, disability/ability, sexuality backgrounds is an achievement. Yet, it is only the beginning of creating an inclusive environment. Your division has the responsibility and privilege of fostering a culture that feels comfortable, supportive, and encouraging of all fellows, especially those from traditionally marginalized groups. Doing so allows a fellow to feel at home in their training program and within academia as a whole. When this environment is cultivated, fellows may also be more successfully recruited to stay as faculty. The points below are tips for promoting inclusion within your division.

1. Embrace alternate perspectives. Do not strive to have your division be a melting pot, where individuality is asked to conform to a divisional standard. Leave room for the expression of diverse and unique opinions and see these expressions as a strength of your division.
2. Set clear expectations. Every workplace has its own culture and customs. Write down a list of “how we do things” and then go back and ask yourself for each one: why do we do this? Does it have purpose? Is it necessary? Can it come across as exclusionary to new fellows? Settle on which ones are important and fair and clearly communicate them in orientation. Bonus for explaining why! Anything that is common, but not necessary can be introduced like “some staff like to __, you are welcome to do that or find your own style.” Anything that is exclusionary should be let go of.

3. Get to know your new fellow! Did they move for their new job? Do they have any kind of support in the area or field? How can the organization support the transition? Maybe its arranging coffee dates or inviting them over. It can be intimidating to approach leadership when you are new, a person of color, and lower in the hierarchy. Reaching out first eases the burden & reduces the feeling that talking to your boss is like being called into the principal's office. Also respect that some may not want a more personal connection.

4. What are the new fellow's goals? What is their dream position? Identify ways that the division can support them through mentorship and sponsorship. Be open to the fact that those goals may not perfectly align with their training or how things have been done.

5. Listen to their feedback, not just about the learning experiences, but about the division as a whole. The newest people in an organization should be heard the most because they approach it with fresh eyes; they quickly learn where there's a disconnect between mission and practice. They're constantly asking themselves, "why do we things this way?" Hear them.

6. Demonstrate humility. No one expects that things are going to go perfectly. Be willing to admit when you did wrong and apologize. That means a world of respect to someone lower in the hierarchy. Work together on a path forward.

7. Do not view your fellows from marginalized groups as a learning opportunity or look to them to provide education about their background to the division. They can only speak from their experience, not for all people from that background, and they should never feel

obligated to share. All divisions need an understanding of how issues of diversity/equity/inclusion impact their work. Use funds to bring in speakers to host workshops, host book discussions, etc.

8. Develop reliable & effective mechanisms for feedback. At least one option should be anonymous. Be respectful and open. Demonstrate follow-through when concerns are raised. Show leadership through proposing solutions, instead of looking to fellows to fix the problems they raise. This approach comes across as dismissive, instead of empowering.

I hope the tips above demonstrate what kind of cultural shift is needed to change this pattern. Unfortunately, the actions recommended above are not the norm. Thus, individuals from marginalized groups commonly do not feel at “home” in their divisions and feel like they are held responsible for the discord because they don’t fit into the pre-existing culture. To help you learn more about these challenging experiences, I’ve included some resources below.

Additional Resources:

- <https://zora.medium.com/when-black-women-go-from-office-pet-to-office-threat-83bde710332e>
- <https://www.statnews.com/2020/01/16/black-doctors-leaving-faculty-positions-academic-medical-centers/>