

Inclusive and Accessible



Why This is Important

When an employer or organization is intentional about creating accessible and inclusive work environments, it initiates a sense of belonging among their employees. This contributes to a positive increase in employee engagement, morale, and retention. Staff feel like their lived experiences and values are respected and appreciated. Accessible and inclusive worksites also provide an opportunity to reduce implicit biases and assumptions that could negatively impact employees and eventually, the company's work and progress.

How to Support This Outcome

Education and Awareness:

- Be intentional about the use of inclusive language in the workplace.
- Explore glossaries with inclusive language guidelines and adaptable tools for reducing bias in the workplace such as the purple flag (see suggested TED Talk resource for more information).
- Participate in continuous culturally responsive and trauma responsive trainings.
 - Learn more about the diverse identities of your employees, customers, students, patients and the communities you serve.
 - Take the Harvard Implicit Bias Test.
 - Collaborate with a community partner or organization providing the training you are interested in.
- Learn about weight inclusive practices and approaches to wellness.
- Consult with experts such as disability advocates, architects and engineers to help design accessible spaces.

Behavior Change:

- Normalize asking employees about their accessibility needs and be prepared to meet them.
- Become a sponsor or mentor for new employees who are from communities that have been marginalized.
- Listen to the concerns mentioned by employees with lived experiences and address them in a way that is culturally responsive.

Policy and Environmental Change:

- Develop better policies to implement the Equal Opportunity Employer declaration.
 - Update policies on addressing discrimination in the workplace with input from employees with lived experience.
 - Prioritize language access by translating policies and training materials for multilingual staff and offer professional interpretation services during meetings, performance reviews, etc.
 - Incorporate bias-free hiring practices during recruitment and interviewing processes.
 - Create an Employee Transition Policy for employees who undergo gender transition during employment.
 - Provide gender neutral restrooms.
 - Honor religious practices by providing a private room for prayer and flexibility to step away to pray.
 - Offer food options without pork during office potlucks.
 - Avoid having potlucks during religious times of fasting such as Ramadan.

Supporting Remote and Hybrid Employees:

- Ensure all training courses and materials are available virtually.
- Develop an online webpage or shared folder to store training materials.
- Assign an online moderator during hybrid meetings.
 - This helps balance both in-person and virtual participants.
 - It is easier to keep track of the meeting chat and incorporate ideas from online participants.
- Confirm your meeting platform allows participants to turn on closed captioning.

Considerations for Employers of All Sizes

In order to create an accessible and inclusive work environment, employers have to be willing to undergo a culture shift. This is something that takes time and requires persistence, dedication, and continuous learning. Be prepared and willing to meet staff and people served where they are and accommodate the needs they have expressed. Do not be afraid to ask for help when unsure. There are many resources available to support employers and their organizations.

Where to Go for Resources

- American Psychological Association's Inclusive Language Guide:
[APA.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines](https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines)
- Harvard Implicit Bias Test: [Implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/TakeATest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/TakeATest.html)
- TED Talk – How to Reduce Bias in Your Workplace: [YouTube.com/watch?v=VEP7_BeXH64](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEP7_BeXH64)
- The WELCOA Institute's Training – Developing a Weight-Inclusive Wellness Approach:
Institute.WELCOA.org/courses/weight-inclusive-wellness-approach/

- Arizona Health Zone’s The Language of Health:
AZHealthZone.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/style-guide-language-of-health.pdf
- Human Rights Campaign Foundation – Workplace Gender Transition Guidelines:
TheHRCFoundation.org/professional-resources/workplace-gender-transition-guidelines
- Green Mountain Self-Advocates – Resource Library: GmsaVT.org/resource-library
- Pride Center of Vermont – Education: PrideCenterVT.org/education
- Vermont Professionals of Color Network – Jobs Board: VTpoc.net/jobs-board/
- Turner Consulting Group – Bias-free Hiring Quick Reference Guide:
Wmich.edu/sites/default/files/other/u102/2018/Bias%20Free%20Hiring%20-%20Quick%20Ref%20Guide.pdf
- State of Vermont Office of Racial Equity – 2023 Language Access Report:
RacialEquity.vermont.gov/language-access
- State of Vermont Office of Racial Equity – Equity Toolkit:
RacialEquity.vermont.gov/equity-toolkit
- Vermont Language Justice Project - VTLanguagejustice.org
- Vermont Center for Independent Living: VCIL.org
- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics – Religion member interest group:
Rmig.EatRightPro.org/home
- Recruitee – 9 Steps to Create an Inclusive Workplace Culture:
Recruitee.com/articles/inclusive-workplace-culture
- Harvard Business Review – 5 Strategies for Creating an Inclusive Workplace:
Hbr.org/2020/01/5-strategies-for-creating-an-inclusive-workplace
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission – Language Access Plan:
Eeoc.gov/equal-employment-opportunity-commission-language-access-plan-accordance-executive-order-13166
- University of Connecticut – Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health:
UConnRuddCenter.org/research/weight-bias-stigma/

For more info: The Vermont Department of Health is here to help. Contact the district office near you:
HealthVermont.gov/local

See the weight inclusive considerations in appendix