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Creating Welcoming Environments

The Importance of Inclusivity

Overview

Our world is becoming more diverse in many ways. Diversity, equity, and inclusion enhance our communities, the economy, and the overall well-being of individuals.

Inclusion is a foundation of the work of Michigan State University (MSU), MSU Extension, and Michigan 4-H. We welcome all forms of diversity. One of MSU Extension's shared values states:

We will welcome everyone. We will foster inclusivity across our organization, in our programming, through our community partnerships and in our hearts. We will nurture an environment that respects and values human differences as we continuously work to expand our reach to diverse audiences. (MSU Extension, 2018)

Our charge to MSU Extension volunteers is to help create an environment where you, as well as others, are welcome and included as your authentic selves. Representation matters for a strong sense of belonging. With diverse representation in our programs, you, as a volunteer, truly serve your whole community and can gain important skills in working with others and hear new perspectives and ideas.

Definitions

As you embrace the important role you will have as a volunteer in enhancing inclusivity at MSU Extension, you should understand what the terms *diversity*, *equity*, and *inclusion* mean. The key components of each follow:

- › **Diversity:** our varied collective and individual identities and differences; our similarities, and differences in backgrounds, identities, and perspectives
- › **Equity:** fair treatment, equal opportunity, and access to information and resources; respect and dignity in the environment; addressing barriers, discrimination, bias, and inequalities for a participant to feel successful and engaged
- › **Inclusion:** actively inviting all to contribute and participate fully in the programming; creating a space where all voices are important and no one person represents an entire community; an open environment where everyone feels equally respected

(The above definitions are based on *DEI Working Definitions* from the MSU Office of the President.)

The three terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion are all important and interconnected. Volunteers can have an impact on all three with fellow volunteers, participants, and staff. You can use a variety of strategies to create an inclusive environment in your volunteer work. The goal is to allow others to feel welcomed, respected, and encouraged to be themselves and active in the program.

To contact an expert in your area, visit extension.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)

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Application

To explore ways that you, as a volunteer, can enhance inclusivity, consider the efforts others have used to welcome you into a space. What actions did they take? How was the space arranged? What big and small things took place to make you feel seen and included in the space? Some of these same strategies may be applicable in the spaces you volunteer in. What one method can you use at your next volunteer opportunity? What methods or actions have you already used to create a welcoming environment when you volunteer?

Find out more:

We encourage you to continue exploring methods for inclusivity in your volunteer role and invite you to review our other resources for MSU Extension volunteers.

› **Creating Welcoming Environments: Inclusive Communication**

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/creating-welcoming-environments-inclusive-communication>

References

Michigan State University. (n.d.). *DEI working definitions*. MSU Office of the President.

Michigan State University Extension. (2018). *Shared values*. https://www.canr.msu.edu/od/directors_office/

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