

# From Design to Delivery Guiding Principles for Fostering Inclusive Training Experiences

Inclusive learning environments are crucial for both engagement and learning retention—they ensure that everyone's voice is heard, respected, and valued and that individuals of varying identities feel supported and included.<sup>[1]</sup> Such environments also foster open discussions that promote empathy and shared understanding. In allowing for diverse perspectives to be shared, inclusive training spaces enable participants to learn from each other's experiences and thus develop a more comprehensive, nuanced understanding of the training content, which is especially critical for justice practitioners handling legal matters related to gender-based violence.

Training planning is clearly a complex and resource-intensive process that involves numerous components and considerations. This quick-reference guide offers principles for designing and facilitating more inclusive learning environments as well as practical tips for doing so. We recommend using this publication as a reference at each stage of the training design, implementation and evaluation process.

## ***Principle #1: Consider the Diverse Identities of Faculty and Learners***<sup>[2]</sup>

- **Assess prior knowledge and experience.** Begin the training planning process by learning as much as possible about the diverse range of prior knowledge and professional and personal experiences that your training participants will bring to the learning environment and training content. Where possible, conduct pre-assessments or surveys to gather

information about learners' backgrounds, skills, and experiences related to the subject matter, information that will allow you to tailor the learning experience to their existing knowledge.

- **Select training faculty whose lived experiences and professional expertise align with your learning objectives.** Consider assembling a co-facilitation team comprised of faculty members who have different identities, especially for training programs which include material related to power, privilege and oppression and/or that discuss culturally responsive practices. Ensure that each member of your training team is adequately trained in identity issues and is fluent in facilitating these discussions, responding to difficult issues that arise, and modeling cultural humility and respect.
- **Assume the perspective of participants with varied identities.** Actively seek to understand and meet participants' cultural and identity-related needs by reflecting on how practitioners with different identities might experience your training event. In particular, how might participants feel about and connect with your outreach and written materials? Your slides and visuals? The way your training faculty present the content, including the specific language and terminology they use? The interactive components of your training? What concerns might training participants have? How might you support diverse participants in feeling seen, respected, welcome and valued throughout the training process?

- **Incorporate culturally relevant content.** Recognize the cultural diversity among participants and the community members they serve and incorporate a range of relevant examples, case studies and references into the learning materials. This helps learners connect the content to their own experiences and the realities of their work and enhances their engagement and understanding of the material.

***Principle #2: Aim for Cultural Responsiveness and Humility***<sup>[3]</sup>

- **Lead by example.** Acknowledge and value the diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of your learners and recognize the richness that diversity brings to the learning experience. As the trainer or facilitator, model the behavior you expect from learners. Demonstrate active listening, respect and inclusivity in your interactions. Encourage open dialogue, welcome diverse viewpoints and create an atmosphere of trust and support.
- **Adapt instructional strategies to learners' cultural contexts.** Be mindful of the different learning styles, preferences, and communication norms within diverse cultural contexts and adapt your instructional strategies to accommodate these differences. Use a variety of teaching methods, such as visual aids, group activities, storytelling and experiential learning, to engage learners from different cultural backgrounds.

- **Prioritize continuous learning and self-reflection.** Engage in ongoing learning and self-reflection to enhance your own cultural responsiveness. Stay informed about different cultures, traditions, and perspectives, particularly those that are represented within your learner population and the communities they serve. Reflect on your own identities and challenge your own biases and assumptions. Elicit regular feedback from both learners and colleagues and be open to adjusting your approach to increase your cultural responsiveness.
- **Collaborate with cultural experts and community members.** Seek ongoing, meaningful input from cultural experts, community leaders and members of the learners' and litigants' cultural backgrounds. Involve these advisors in the curriculum development process and as faculty or guest speakers to provide authentic insights and perspectives. Their involvement can enhance the cultural relevance and authenticity of your training.

***Principle #3: Establish a Supportive and Respectful Learning Environment***

- **Communicate expectations and create ground rules together.** Communicate clear expectations for behavior at the beginning of the training program and revisit them as needed. Emphasize the importance of respect, active listening, curiosity and open-mindedness. In addition, involve learners in establishing ground rules for the learning environment by allowing them to

contribute their ideas and collectively agree on a set of guidelines that promote a supportive and respectful atmosphere. This fosters a sense of ownership and mutual accountability.

- **Foster respect and open dialogue.** Emphasize the importance of respecting diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. Encourage learners to listen actively and engage in thoughtful discussions. Create opportunities for open dialogue among learners from different cultural backgrounds in which they can share their unique perspectives and experiences and find common ground.
- **Proactively manage conflict.** Recognize that conflicts and disagreements may arise in the learning environment, especially when potential biases or prejudices arise. Establish a process for identifying and addressing such issues in a constructive manner, including creating a mechanism for participants to raise concerns with faculty as well as planning among the co-facilitation team for how to respond.
- **Cultivate a sense of collaboration and community.** Foster a sense of community among adult learners by promoting collaboration, teamwork, and peer support. Encourage learners to build relationships, share resources, and offer assistance to one another. Facilitate activities that promote connection and create a supportive network. Designate specific times and formats for collaboration within the learning process, including dedicated group work sessions, online discussion forums and virtual collaboration tools.

- **Monitor and address inappropriate behavior.** Be vigilant in monitoring the learning environment for any signs of inappropriate or harmful behavior, such as bullying, discrimination or disrespect. Promptly address any such incidents, ensuring that affected faculty and learners feel supported and the harmful behavior is named and corrected.

***Principle #4: Facilitate Peer-to-Peer Learning***

- **Encourage peer teaching and mentoring.** Create opportunities for peer-to-peer teaching and mentoring in which learners can share their knowledge and expertise with one another. Allow learners to take turns presenting or leading discussions on specific topics. This not only encourages active engagement but also strengthens learners' understanding of the subject matter and their feeling that they are valued contributors to the learning process.
- **Create a supportive feedback culture.** Encourage learners to provide constructive, prompt feedback to their peers, including as relates to the ways issues of identity, power and privilege are manifesting in the training environment. Teach them how to provide feedback in a respectful and constructive manner, focusing on specific strengths and areas for improvement. Create an environment in which learners feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback, thus promoting continuous professional development and mutual support.

- **Reflect on collaborative experiences.** Incorporate opportunities for learners to reflect on their collaborative training experiences, including the role of identity, and identify lessons learned. Prompt them to reflect on the challenges faced, strategies employed and insights gained from working collaboratively. Encourage learners to share their reflections and insights with the larger group, promoting an ethos of shared learning.

***Principle #5: Foster a Spirit of Continuous Learning and Self-Reflection***

- **Encourage self-reflection.** Promote self-reflection as an essential part of the learning process. Encourage learners to pause and think about what they have learned, how it relates to their own identities and experiences, and implications for their personal and professional growth. Provide prompts and reflection questions that guide their thinking and encourage them to write down and/or discuss their reflections with a colleague.
- **Promote a lifelong learning mindset.** Emphasize the importance of lifelong learning and instill a growth mindset among learners. Encourage them to embrace challenges and discomfort, acknowledge blind spots, biases and areas for growth, view mistakes as opportunities for learning, and continuously seek new knowledge and skills. Foster an environment in which humility, curiosity, exploration, and a passion for learning are celebrated.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Center for Justice Innovation's Technical Assistance Team at [dvinfo@innovatingjustice.org](mailto:dvinfo@innovatingjustice.org) and/or Futures Without Violence's Institute for Leadership in Education Development (I-LED) at [futureswithoutviolence.org/ILED](http://futureswithoutviolence.org/ILED) for additional guidance on creating inclusive learning environments.

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## Endnotes

- [1] Inclusion around disability and diverse learning styles is equally crucial to training design but is beyond the scope of this publication. For guidance on that topic, the Center recommends the helpful resources created by [Activating Change](#).
- [2] Types of identities to consider include racial and ethnic identity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, and survivorship.
- [3] Cultural humility is a humble and respectful attitude toward individuals of other cultures that pushes one to challenge their own cultural biases, realize they cannot possibly know everything about other cultures, and approach learning about other cultures as a lifelong goal and process. Definition from [study.com](#).

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