

INCLUSION TIPS FOR OUTDOOR PROGRAM STAFF

The following tips have been compiled to give some guidance on how to make some practical changes to your programs to make it more inclusive of diverse races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, faiths, ethnicities, and more. These practices will be helpful regardless of whether you know how your participants or colleagues self-identify with respect to these various facets of diversity.

Participant Application Experience

- Make the application succinct:** Audit what questions you ask in your enrollment forms – for each question, ask yourself, what vital information am I looking for here? If it is extraneous, get rid of it.
- Make the application understandable:** Consider providing applications and information in languages spoken by your participants other than English (especially for minor participants whose caregivers do not speak English as their primary language).
- Paperwork support:** Offer support in filling out application paperwork, especially if applicant does not speak English as their primary language.
- Doctor's notes:** Offer support in obtaining a medical exam or doctor's check-off.
- Med screening:** Include emotional and mental health in health forms and medical screening, and indicate that it's important staff know about them. Often caregivers hesitate to disclose for fear of not being accepted into the program.
- Lodging and sleeping preference:** If your program has single gender lodging, ask participants what lodging they would prefer and honor anonymity if possible.
- Dietary restrictions:** Always ask about dietary restrictions and value participants' requests regardless of whether they are based on faith, culture, allergies, or preferences.
- Cultural needs:** Ask if participants have particular needs related to culture and faith, whether that is wearing particular attire, prayer, or other needs.
- Demographic information:** Offer the options for fill in race/ethnicity and gender (with the capability to store this information and use it in a way to improve experiences)
- Hygiene care:** provide information on backcountry hygiene and self-care to all participants irrespective of gender.

Program Structure

- Offer a range of program durations:** Not all people can take significant time off for a program. Offering a range of program durations, from short to long, weekend and weekday, will reach a broader range of people.
- Offer programming in more accessible natural areas:** Not all participants can physically access more remote natural areas. Offering programming in green spaces and natural areas closer to where participants may leave signals that these areas have equal value and offers them opportunities to recreate there again.
- Provide transportation assistance:** Transportation is a barrier for many participants to participate in programming. Assistance with transportation can look like bussing participants from specific areas to providing public transportation vouchers to reimbursing participants for their transportation.

- ❑ **Engage in a broad range of activities beyond traditional recreation:** Think broadly about participants' myriad connections to nature by offering programming that runs the gamut from less technical to more technical activities.
- ❑ **Offer intact group programming:** Some participants feel more comfortable engaging in outdoor programming with friends, family and loved ones. Offer programming that spans generations and for intact groups from schools, churches, clubs, and other community organizations.
- ❑ **Offer programming to empower local leaders and role models:** This may look like family programming to teach families the basics of camping, or training teachers and social workers (see Appalachian Mountain Club's YOP model).
- ❑ **Rethink the use of communications devices:** Though many outdoor programs eschew the use of cell phones on trip, more and more people are using devices as a form of connecting to nature (check out iNaturalist), from photography, to videography, to harnessing social media to communicate their experience to others.
- ❑ **Provide gender neutral sleeping options:** Providing options for both single gender and gender neutral (or mixed gender) lodging or tents will help create an environment in which all genders can feel safe (but make sure to ask participants for their lodging preference).
- ❑ **Consider culturally relevant meal and ration options:** Whether it's a few hour or multi-day program, having culturally relevant meals can transform a participant's experience. This can come from having a diversity of options or options that are catered to participant demographics. For example, some organizations have replaced dehydrated mashed potatoes, granola, and grits with items such as refried beans, dehydrated falafel, and savory Asian rice cracker mixes.

Pre-Program

- ❑ **Teambuild:** Don't shy away from discussing the diversity within your trip leader or instructor team and identifying ways you can be inclusive of each other. This is particularly important when there is a diversity of communication styles, leadership styles, cultural norms, identities, experiences and backgrounds.
- ❑ **Do your homework on participants:** Based on any registration materials you may have for participants, try to remember at least one important aspect of every person as a way to connect with them when you meet in person. If applicable, call participants or participants' mentors to find out more about their goals, strengths, and challenges.
- ❑ **Culturally specific hygiene care:** Prepare for any culturally specific hygiene care needs, which may include hair care and skin care.
- ❑ **Set aside gear:** If you know that participants will need to rent gear in advance, set aside "bundles" of gear for them.

Participant Orientation

- ❑ **Don't single people out:** Unless a person asks to have a one-on-one conversation with you about their unique needs, do not single people. All of the below practices should be done structurally with the entire trip.
- ❑ **Language:** Role model inclusive language from the very first interaction. Here are some common language
 - Start your program orientation with the simple statement "We welcome everyone"



regardless of their identities such as race, ethnicity, ability, age, class, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”

- Create an environment where participants are welcomed to give you and others feedback on language, tone, and body language. Publically say thank you to anyone giving you feedback in the moment to role model.
 - Use language of empowerment, empathy, and encouragement not “tough love.”
 - Refer to romantic partners as “partner” instead of “boyfriend,” “girlfriend,” “husband,” or “wife.”
 - Use the language “As a self-identified man/woman, I . . .” just once during the first day or two of a trip—this can go a long way to express alliance.
 - Instead of referring to “men” and “women” or “girls” and “boys,” stay “whom I perceive to be male/female” or “whom I perceive to be a girl/boy” if you actually don’t know how people identify. You can also use gender neutral pronouns (they, them, theirs) if a person has not disclosed their gender identity to you.
 - Use the language of “any gender” or “all genders”, instead of “either gender” or “male and female” or “girls and boys.”
 - Use “women” instead of “girls” if referring to female-identifying participants who are not children.
 - Ask about participants’ about their guardians and family, since some participants do not have parents around or have traditional family structures.
 - Use “storm-proof” rather than “bomb-proof.” This can be a trigger for some who have experienced war (e.g., veterans, refugees).
 - A person is not “diverse.” When referring to participants who are different from the norm, refer to them specifically such as “female participants,” “participants of color,” “participants who identify as LGBTQ,” etc.
 - If you often refer to a group of people as “you guys” regardless of gender, keep in mind that this can negatively impact someone. Think about gender-neutral group references such as “y’all,” “folks,” “people,” or something else. If that doesn’t feel genuine and “you guys” is a habit, just add a disclaimer when you talk to participants that this is part of your culture and you don’t mean to imply that everyone identifies as a guy.
 - When you meet with instructors, don’t call it a “powwow”—this has a unique definition within the indigenous American cultures.
- Visible Flags of Allyship:** If it feels authentic to you, raise a “flag of allyship” by sporting a rainbow or similar symbol of allyship sticker on your water bottle, gear, or apparel. However, remember that allyship can’t be claimed-it must be earned.

Gear

- Be intentional during the issue process as this is where many participants, regardless of where they come from, feel intimidated and afraid. Take care to make sure participants have adequate gear and they *know* they have adequate gear.
- Don’t assume that the participant wears certain clothing because they appear to be either male or female. For example, don’t steer the young participant who presents as female to the pink women’s puffy jackets.
- If there is gendered gear (e.g. backpacks for women), ensure that participants know they can use any gear so long as it fits.
- Recommend gear that is good enough for the outing, and not top-of-the-line or high-end gear. Remember that you have fine-tuned your systems for multiple trips and that your



- participant's gear just needs to work for this trip.
- If possible, make a list of non-outdoor specific gear that is inexpensive but will work, e.g., Gatorade bottle for water bottle, Ziploc Tupperware for food, etc.
 - Carry hair and skin care products for all participants, including culturally specific hair and skin care products (e.g., sunscreen for pigmented skin, natural hair, and more).

The First 48 Hours

- **Role model positive interactions with all staff:** Be courteous and acknowledge all in-town staff, including logistics, assistants, facilities and maintenance staff, kitchen staff, and more. Introduce them to the participants as invaluable to your programs.
- **Hygiene talk:** Consider talking to all participants about backcountry hygiene, including menstruation-related hygiene, without making assumptions as to who is male/female. During the hygiene talk, be sure to refer to “people who menstruate,” as not all females menstruate; people of all gender identities could menstruate.
- **Privacy in the field:** In some field situations such as grizzly bear country, sailing, river, and glacier and tundra-based outings, attempt to create a toilet system that respects everyone's privacy. For example, in grizzly country you could recommend traveling as a group and then dispersing within earshot and quick access but out of sight.
- **Tent groups:** If there is a single gender tent policy in your program, frame it as a tactic for same-gender bonding, rather than policing sexual activity, as some of your participants may not be heterosexual. If you have any genderqueer or trans participants, ask what tent arrangement they would most comfortable with. Do your best to have this conversation prior to the start of the trip.
- **Creating your Learning Environment:** Rethink the social norms of the trip when discussing the learning environment, including language, behavior, jokes, nicknames, etc. Oftentimes, something we consider “out of the norm” is well within the norm for participants from certain communities. For example, loud and rambunctious behavior may be a sign of group bonding, and not fighting. Statements we consider “mean” or “rude” may be a cultural communications style that shows familiarity and love. Nicknames based on race, body shape, etcetera may be done in affection and not to make people feel excluded.
- **Celebrate, don't ignore, diversity:** Set a tone that isn't about ignoring the differences (e.g., don't say, “let's not focus on differences-let's focus on the common experience we are going through' or “let's be color-blind”). Differences should be acknowledged, celebrated, and a source of learning.

Programming and curriculum

- **Add appropriate DEI curriculum:** If it fits the needs of your participant group, and something you feel moderately comfortable facilitating, add an activity/discussion that explores diversity, equity and inclusion, that you have adequate time to debrief.
- **Take on roles that defy stereotypes:** To encourage participants to rethink norms and be intentional about who teaches what class and takes on particular roles. For example, a male-identified instructor could talk about backcountry hygiene and how to bake cinnamon rolls, and a female-identified instructor could teach a component of technical rock climbing and help fix tent zippers as a way to defy gender stereotypes.
- **Program progression:** Be versatile and flexible with the program progression and



- structure—some participants tend to have far less outdoor experience and are far more outside their comfort zone; to ensure all participants’ learning needs are met, stay flexible in program structure.
- ❑ **Culturally relevant, responsive, and responsible programming:** When you build your program, think about how to make lessons relevant to every learner’s life (culturally relevant), how to bring multiple perspectives and voices into your curriculum (cultural responsibility), and how to teach to every learning style (cultural responsiveness). With respect to cultural responsibility, highlight and amplify a more diverse and contemporary set of voices than the “usual suspects” (Muir, Abbey, Leopold, Thoreau etc.)
 - ❑ **Role models:** Point out role models from a participant’s community that defy stereotypes and help participants see themselves reflected in the outdoors.
 - ❑ **Consider all connections to nature:** In planning programming, remember that not all participants have the same experience in nature as you do. Some people have negative associations with camp (e.g., refugees, folks who have a history of internment in camps), trees (due to history of lynching), the dark and fire.
 - ❑ **Meet participant’s where they are at:** All participants have a different experience and comfort levels in the outdoors and with specific skills. Meet participants where they are at and be sure to validate their experience, even if it is something you’ve done hundreds of times (e.g. making it to the top of a climb). For example, ask them “how was that for you?” instead of “wasn’t that amazing?”
 - ❑ **Avoid assumptions about “grit” and “resilience.”** Not all participants need to build grit or resilience, and may in fact already arrive with ample grit and resilience due to struggles in their daily lives.
 - ❑ **Don’t tokenize participants:** Avoid assuming that any one participant can represent “her people” (e.g. looking to the one Latina girl on the trip to educate you about Latina culture) or highlighting participants’ difference from the “norm.”
 - ❑ **Leave No Trace:** Think about LNT differently
 - When it comes to the noise levels, participants from certain communities relate to the outdoors through community, including singing, talking loudly, being rambunctious.
 - With certain communities, participants may want to leave offerings to honor their ancestors or the spirits.
 - With “pack it in-pack it out,” remember that for some participants, what they pack out ends up in landfills that impact them and their communities disproportionately.
 - ❑ **Cultural curriculum:** Even if there is no cultural component to your trip, integrate human history curriculum the same way you would natural history.
 - ❑ **Class themes:** If you teach a class with a particular accent or motif, be sure that it is culturally appropriate. Remember that even if no one would be offended, it sends a message to your participants that culturally inappropriate behavior is ok.
 - ❑ **Allyship:** Don’t believe that because you have a dominant identity—“a White dude”—that you are not in a position to be a good ally (in fact you make the best ally many times) or get involved in teaching classes about diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - ❑ **Mess up! It’s okay!** When faced with a concern that is outside of your comfort zone, don’t worry about messing up during a conversation. A great disclaimer is, “hey, I’m not exactly sure I’ll be able to express myself clearly, but I think this conversation is important for us to have, so please bear with me.”



Informal Activities

- Costume parties:** Though dressing in non-gender conforming attire can be liberating for some participants who either feel trapped by societal constraints on what is appropriate apparel for “men” versus “women” or some participants who are experimenting with their gender identity and expression, they can also go over the line. Costume parties can result in reinforcement of stereotypes when participants make caricatures of the opposite gender. Just be vigilant that a safe environment is maintained throughout your party and address any issues in the moment.
- Sharing circles:** Share personal stories from the beginning so participants can look beyond socioeconomics—“sharing circles” is an alternative to “Hot Seat” where you can pose one important question to all the participants and have them share their responses (“Who is a role model in your life and why?” “What do you want to tell the world you have accomplished when you are older?” “What does ‘family’ mean to you?”)
- Empowering participants:** Do lots of community building early on through games, nightly readings, singing while you hike, and stories, etc. and have the participants lead these activities.
- Cultural appropriation:** Beware of engaging in activities that constitute cultural appropriation. Some games caricature individuals from certain communities (e.g., “Wah!” “Ninja”). Other activities, such as wearing “war paint,” using “totem animals,” and adopting indigenous-sounding trail names also constitute cultural appropriation.

Check-Ins/Coaching/Risk Management

- Conduct frequent informal check-ins with participants (like on the trail). Try to have a meaningful conversation with every participant on trip within the first 24 hours.
- Rather than using check-ins as a way to provide feedback and go over the participants’ goals, use the early check-ins to build rapport.
- “Challenging” participants? Flip your mind set to, “there are no challenging participants, only challenging situations.” This mindset encourages staff to think about how the social environment may contribute to the issue at hand.
- Include emotional risk management in your risk management protocols (in addition to illness and injury)

Trans* Inclusivity

- Understand the difference between gender identity, gender expression, natal or biological sex, and sexual orientation.
- Ask for all participants’ gender pronouns.
- Honor the participants gender identity, whether it is transgender, genderqueer, male-to-female, female-to-male, Two Spirit, or any of the myriad other ways people identify (remember gender is a universe and we are all stars).
- Do not refer to people as “transgendered” (gender does not happen to someone).
- Check in about any specific support they might have regarding their transition.
- Remember that not all people who are identify as trans* have made or are in the process of making physical changes.
- For those who do undergo physical transition, the prevailing terminology is “gender confirmation surgery” not “gender reassignment” or “sex change operation.”
- Give the person adequate privacy – if you’re not sure what their privacy needs are, ask!



Race & Ethnicity Inclusivity

- “People of color” or “people of the global majority” are the prevailing terms rather than “minorities” within the US.
- Don’t conflate people of color with “urban,” “inner city,” “underprivileged,” “at risk,” “poor,” or “low income”
- Don’t be afraid to talk about race and ethnicity. Colorblindness can negate people’s identities and experiences.
- Don’t assume that all races or ethnicities are a monolith; there is immense diversity within racial and ethnic groups.
- Don’t assume a participant of color is on a scholarship: Talk about scholarships with all participants, but don’t assume that a participant comes from economic disadvantage simply because they are of color.
- Honor specific ethnic identities: How someone looks to you may not be how they identify. Pay attention to whether someone identifies as “Latino” versus “Hispanic” or “African American” versus “Black.” They mean different things and we shouldn’t mix them up.

Faith & Spirituality Inclusivity

- Remember that ethnicity is different from faith; try not to conflate the two (e.g., someone who is Arab is not necessarily Muslim).
- If your participant has specific needs outside the “norm” of the program (e.g., wearing a hijab, observing the Sabbath by not moving on Saturdays, prayer), let them know you will do our best to honor their needs. Consider whether the request will undermine equity, trip schedule, learning, safety, or legality. If not, then it should be honored.
- If you are unable to honor a particular need, explain why.

Age Inclusivity

- Remember that both young and older folks experience ageism.
- Highlight how much people of different ages can learn from each other. Role model how each age group holds valuable, yet different life experience and perspectives.
- Research shows that adults learn best through peer learning. In a group of adults, facilitate peer learning.
- Avoid the phrase “you’ll understand when your older” or any other phrase that implies younger people have less life experience.
- Don’t disparage an entire generation (e.g., “millennials”).

Veteran Inclusivity

- Do not assume a veteran is disabled or differently abled.
- There is no universal veteran or veteran experience – veterans are young, old, of many ethnicities, classes, etc.
- Ask a veteran what part of the military they served or what their MOS (military occupational specialty) code was; often veterans have very strong ties to the work they did in the military.
- The majority of veterans do not have PTSD or a TBI (traumatic brain injury), but a majority do struggle to reintegrate. The outdoors and community in the field can play a positive role in that process.



Ability Inclusivity (adapted from www.serviceandinclusion.org/handbook/inclusion.pdf)

- Honor how people identify (sometimes it's person first language as in "person with Down's syndrome" sometimes not, as in "deaf person.")
- Inappropriate language: "afflicted," "birth defect," "cerebral-palsied," "crippled," "deaf and dumb," "emotionally disturbed," "handicapped," "invalid," "lame," "Mongoloid," "midget," "dwarf," "epileptic," and "deformed") and "retarded). (www.adl.org/education-outreach)
- Ability isn't just physical; people can also have cognitive disabilities (like learning disabilities and dyslexia), and mental health disabilities (like ADHD, depression). And don't conflate the various types of disabilities (that is, a person with a physical disability doesn't necessarily also have a cognitive disability).
- Don't assume that a person with a disability needs your assistance.
- Look directly at everyone when communicating with them.
- Employ multiple teaching methods to reach all learners, and explain any visual aids you use clearly (e.g., "Here is a chart and on the left column is . . .")
- Specifically, understand that learners with dyslexia and non-spatial learners may struggle with map reading, knot tying and other spatial tasks, so try to not ask people to read things out loud or perform a task on the spot.
- Ensure all participants can fully participate in activities; don't excuse people from activities.
- Do not touch any devices used to assist the person (wheelchair, crutches, cane) or prosthetics-they are to be considered an extension of the person.
- If someone has a speech impairment, do not interrupt them or finish their sentence. Allow them to finish.
- Use the word "accessible" instead of "handicapped" (e.g., "due to her spinal cord injury, she has an accessible lodge"). This focuses on the environment and barriers rather than on a personal impairment.

