How Can Institutions Model Inclusion in the Workplace?

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What Is the Issue?

In recent years, science communication and informal science learning organizations have worked to develop individual programs and educational efforts that focus on ways to better engage communities historically underrepresented in STEM. These efforts are important, but broadening participation efforts need to move beyond the programmatic to the institutional. Embedding inclusion throughout an organization's operations will lead to more comprehensive, better supported, and more impactful and sustainable results.

Things to Consider

Research shows that an organization's culture (the institution's values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms) and structure (how it arranges its staff, jobs, and decision-making processes) drive institutional strategies and practices. In other words, organizational culture and structures determine what matters, what happens, and how it happens.

For example, a STEM after-school program that is inclusive of children with same-sex parents must not only develop an inclusive curriculum but must also include culturally competent staff. It must ensure that administrative functions are aligned, including, for example, that registration or contact forms use inclusive language such as "caregiver/parent." These thoughtful approaches to internal, institutional structures and practices result in more coherent experiences for external audiences.

Why It Matters to You

- **Science communicators** and **STEM educators** can develop programs or event structures (hiring, curriculum, etc.) that reflect institutional priorities.

- **Leadership** and **boards** can champion and support inclusive organizational practices and structures that can, in turn, better position the organization for success in its broadening participation efforts.

- **Funders** can request that programs demonstrate how they have aligned institutional structures and practices with their goals for broadening participation in STEM.

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Things to Consider (continued)

Creating truly inclusive environments, where communities historically underrepresented in STEM feel a sense of empowerment, welcome, and belonging, requires that we (a) critically examine the ways our organizations may be replicating dominant culture norms and practices that may exclude certain groups and (b) take steps to ensure that all levels of the organization are working together toward broadening participation.

This includes, for example, examining hiring practices and staff retention, board membership, decision-making processes, random acts of tokenism, and developing cultural competence across the institution.

Reflective practice through self- and external assessments, ongoing professional development and training, benchmarking with peer organizations, and feedback from (and collaboration with) communities who are underrepresented in STEM can deepen cultural competence and inform broadening participation efforts. As organizations or programs deepen their understanding and change their own practices, they can begin to make progress toward equity and inclusion in their communities.

Recommended Actions You Can Take

- Develop and share a clear institutional message about the value the organization places on equity and inclusion. Use this as a starting point to help build common language and foster conversations across the organization.

- Identify organizational strengths and weaknesses and use these to determine areas where there are opportunities to change. A toolkit or checklist can help you explore potential actions such as hiring policies and practices, cultural competence training, and developing work groups who can lead efforts toward more inclusive practices

Reflection Questions

+ How do your current organizational or program structures reflect and advance a commitment to broadening participation in STEM? Where do they fall short, and how?

+ Who are the audiences and communities you work with? How do your organization's values, experiences, workforce, and culture reflect and meaningfully include these groups?

+ How can you help staff and volunteers at your organization remain consistently aware of the core values and practices supporting equity and broadening participation?

Tools You Can Use

- The American Alliance of Museum's *Welcoming Guidelines for Museums* offers concrete ways institutions can become more welcoming to LGBTQ guests and families. The checklist may be adapted for other communities.

- This article in *Dimensions* magazine describes the efforts of two museum leaders tackling issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in their own institutions (issue 63).

- This article in *Science* describes barriers in undergraduate science programs faced by populations underrepresented in STEM, and provides recommendations for institutions looking to address those issues (volume 357, issue 6356).

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