APPENDIX

IDEA FROM DAY ONE: Building an Inclusive and Engaging Orientation Program

Every new hire arrives at the organization with their own story shaped by diverse perspectives and varied experiences. When the new staff begin the onboarding process, each is comparing the real experience with the organization with their expectations based on the image of the organization “sold” to them during the recruiting and hiring process.

When there is a gap between their expectations and the real-life experience, the new hires may feel misled. If the staff member believes the gap is too wide, their response may be to leave immediately, convinced there has been a breach of trust. Those who stay will have a mistrust of the organization that grows as they notice consistent gaps between what the company “promises” in writing and verbally and what is actually experienced. These consistent gaps will reinforce the belief that the organization cannot be trusted and does not value its employees, accountability, or equity. As a result, these staff members are less likely to be fully engaged and invested in their work or the organization.¹

It is vitally important to ensure that what is stated matches what is experienced. The experience begins the moment the new hire says yes. Consequently, it is important to incorporate those values that are esteemed by the organization during the hiring process into the onboarding and orientation process. If inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) are a part of those values touted as highly regarded by the organization during the hiring process, DEI needs to be evident from day one until the day the staff member’s relationship with the organization ends.

A library’s orientation process speaks volumes about its approach to IDEA. Recruiting diverse candidates is not enough. To retain and promote new employees, there must be a welcoming and supportive environment from the first encounter.

In planning how to weave IDEA into the library’s processes and programs, including the onboarding and orientation consider the following:

1. **Incorporate the Five Hallmarks of Inclusion below into the library’s processes and programs.**
   - Valued: You are appreciated and respected for your unique perspectives and talents.
   - Trusted: You make meaningful contributions and are influential in decision-making.
   - Authentic: You can bring your full self to work and express aspects of yourself that may be different from your peer.
   - Psychological Safety – Latitude: You feel free to hold differing views and make mistakes without being penalized.
• Psychological Safety – Risk-taking: You feel secure enough to address tough issues or take risks.

These five hallmarks of inclusion were identified in a study conducted by Catalyst. Consider ways that your library can communicate the five hallmarks of inclusion to your employees. Employees need to know they are valued, trusted, able to be authentic and psychologically safe to share their own viewpoints and ideas (even if they are different). They also need to be able to trust accountability exists at every level and permitted to act on outside of the box ideas without being penalized. These hallmarks should not only be communicated but also incorporated into the library’s processes and programs for all employees at every stage of their career during their entire tenure with the organization.

2. **Clearly define what inclusion means to the library**

Everyone may not define inclusion the same. Present specific examples of what inclusion looks like within your organization. In addition, provide an explanation about why inclusion matters to the library’s internal and external customers.

3. **Showcase the library’s commitment to IDEA often and in a variety of ways**

Articulate and emphasize the library’s commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access regularly. Whether the library is just beginning its IDEA journey or has an existing IDEA plan in place, clearly communicate what has been done and the overall IDEA focus and goals. The commitment should be communicated to and by staff at every level in a variety of ways from policies and procedures to creative and innovative experiences and programs.

• If the library has a policy that addresses discrimination, add that to the list of policies covered during the orientation. Discuss the organization’s discrimination reporting process if one exists. Make certain the process is safe, transparent, and accessible.
• If there are affinity groups in your organization, inform the new hires about them during the orientation. If there are department-wide initiatives, cover how they can get involved during the orientation process.
• Include an in person or video message about IDEA from the Director and other leaders and staff as a part of the orientation program and other events.
• Invite a diverse group of staff members to attend orientation to share their personal career experience with the library.
• Evaluate the accessibility of the library’s onboarding materials and all the materials disseminated to staff. Adjust the way information is communicated if necessary. Due to neurodiversity, some learn best with written communication and others learn best with face-to-face conversation.
• Make printed onboarding materials available in accessible formats (such as large, Sans Serif font or Braille) when needed. Include closed captions on all audio and video materials and enable live captioning on virtual meetings.
Both CCPL and VBPL provide staff with the opportunity to request any necessary accommodations required to ensure full participation during the orientation session. VBPL sends each staff member an invite letter which asks staff to share any accommodation requirements, so that staff may disclose any accommodation requests privately prior to orientation. Since staff may not always disclose if they need learning accommodations for seeing and hearing, CCPL orientation facilitators communicate which accessibility tools are available to all staff.

- Assess the images in the library’s onboarding materials and all the materials disseminated to staff and external customers. Ensure that the images in the printed and video materials include people of various ages, genders, races, cultures, and abilities.

4. Seek feedback to foster an inclusive culture

Doing so will communicate how serious the organization is about creating an inclusive environment and result in capturing invaluable information.

- Invite new hires to participate during the onboarding process by engaging in a discussion about the organizations’ values during the orientation.
- Orientation is a great time to learn from diverse hires about their expectations, hopes and ambitions. Find out what they want to learn, who they want to build relationships with and whether they have any concerns. Showing genuine interest in the new hire’s concerns goes a long way toward establishing a sense of rapport, trust, and team building. Repeat the questions a month or two later, after they have settled in.
- If an organization is having a hard time retaining diverse employees and does not know why, it is imperative to ask employees what the problem is and what are possible ways to address or correct the issues or reasons people continue to leave. Waiting to ask these questions during the exit interview or a diversity audit will be too late to deal with the problem of losing high performing talent.
- Engage new employees early. Ask for new hires’ assessment of the organization’s IDEA approach during and right after the new employees’ 90-day honeymoon period. Be open to hear what the employees have to say. Make sure that the employees know their feedback is extremely important to the organization.

Inclusion is an ongoing effort that has the potential to significantly impact the work environment in a positive manner. Evidence shows that the more diverse an organization is, the greater the success it will have at recruiting and retaining top talent. According to a 2020 Glassdoor survey, 76 percent of job seekers and employees polled said a diverse workforce was an important factor for them when evaluating job opportunities and companies.

To have an effective strategy of incorporating the organization’s values, including IDEA, the commitment must start at the top and be supported at every level. Catalyst’s findings show that a manager’s behavior has a direct link to an employee’s experience of inclusion — in fact,
almost half of an employee’s experience of inclusion can be explained by managerial inclusive leadership behaviors. The Level Playing Field Institute conducted the Corporate Leavers Survey. The results revealed that more than 2 million professionals and managers leave their jobs every year because of discrimination. When asked what would have kept them onboard, 34.1 percent of people of color chose the “Better management that recognizes abilities” option.

Invest in guest speakers and ongoing trainings to keep staff up to date and aware of IDEA strategies and how to create and support an inclusive work environment. This will be helpful in ensuring that existing employees are acting in accordance with and speak with confidence about IDEA practices within the organization and answer questions new employees will have as they settle into the organization.

Since an effective onboarding process will not, by itself, result in an inclusive environment, the IDEA commitment must be well integrated into the employee-organization relationship. When employees feel both included and that their employer supports diversity, they report experiencing trust and increased engagement at work.

It is imperative to begin to share that commitment from the first formal encounter with new hires if not before. An organized and effective onboarding and orientation program integrated with diversity, equity, and inclusion will empower new recruits to perform at their best and ensure they will be a valued part of the organization for a long time.
Notes


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.


