**Creating Equitable Environments for Volunteers**

In addition to working towards equity in the communities we serve, nonprofits must also cultivate equity within our own organizations. Volunteer administrators have the responsibility to create equitable environments for their volunteers that allow them to perform at their best. The following suggestions are designed to allow organizations to consider different identities and how to make every person feel welcome and safe in your organization and while volunteering. An organization can cultivate inclusivity and equity by following these guidelines, performing their own research, and creating its own equity statement or equal opportunity statement in any volunteer description or application.

This document is based on research cited on the accompanying document ***“Resources for Creating Equitable Environments for Volunteers”*** and based on lived experience. If you feel that your identity has been misrepresented in this document, please contact us. While HandsOn is still on a learning journey ourselves, we wanted to share this guidance based on what we have learned to date. We want to encourage others to continue to provide us feedback on these and other equity issues, so that we can incorporate them and share with others. We are always wanting to learn more about how we can better support diverse people and amplify their voices.

In general,

* If you have questions about a group or identity -- use Google to find resources, or research on your own to answer your questions. Do not ask invasive questions.
* If you someone calls you in -- listen actively and refrain from being defensive. Take responsibility for your actions, including if your actions had unintended consequences
* If you realize you made a mistake -- take responsibility and create an appropriate plan of action to make amends. Have patience with yourself and respect for the offended person.

#### Anti-ableism

* When available, allow for the option of indoor, seated volunteering activities
* Communicate openly with volunteers to discuss their physical ability and comfort. Make accommodations when available.
* When available, allow for the option of a quiet, more isolated environment for those with sensory and social sensitivity
* Offer virtual volunteer opportunities when available
* Don’t assume someone’s ability.
* Keep in mind that some disabilities are invisible.

#### Anti-ageism

* Don’t make assumptions about someone’s abilities, interests, or life experiences based on their age

#### Anti-classism

* Consider childcare needs and its associated expenses for volunteers to act flexibly and accordingly. If possible, provide free childcare or allow for family-friendly volunteering options and environments
* Research nearby bus stations to communicate transportation to volunteers. Include this information if you also include information on parking.
* Access to a laptop or desktop may be limited. Consider using Google Drive as opposed to Microsoft Suite because Google Drive is a free service.
* Many people have volunteer experience without being formal volunteers
* Respect all labor and work experiences. Avoid the term “unskilled” when describing some labor
* If possible, provide food for volunteers which is culturally appropriate and meets dietary restrictions

#### Anti-Islamophobia

* Some Muslim people may have dietary restrictions for religious reasons, especially during the month of Ramadan when they may fast during the day. Make accommodations when serving food.
* Some Muslim people express their faith through their appearance and clothing -- be respectful and do not touch their religious clothing or discriminate against their expression.
* Some Muslim people pray at certain times of day. Provide a quiet place for them to pray if appropriate.
* Muslim holidays are not federal holidays -- be aware of certain dates which may conflict with their observance
* Avoid assuming someone’s faith, for example avoid assuming that they celebrate Christian holidays or pray in the same way as Christians do.

#### Anti-racism

* BIPOC stands for Black, Indiginous, and People of Color. People from these different backgrounds face different experiences and discrimination. Be specific when you are talking about a specific group (for example, Black, Latinx, American Indian, Asian, and Southeast Asian), and honor the differences between these groups.
* Discrimination against BIPOC people in professional settings often has to do with presentation (such as a Black person’s natural hair or hairstyle) and “professionalism”
* Notice when you are in spaces which do not include BIPOC people and address the issues that have led to that outcome
* BIPOC people should be in leadership positions for equity initiatives, but their leadership should never be limited to their identities as BIPOC people. BIPOC people should be in leadership positions across all conversations and initiatives
* BIPOC women are frequently passed over for leadership positions and initiatives -- ensure their involvement and inclusion

#### Anti-queerphobia

* Queer can be an umbrella term which includes LGBTQIA+ people -- some people would prefer to be called LGBTQIA+ instead of queer. LGBTQIA+ stands for lesbian, gay, bsixual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual. The + symbolizes other non-heteronormative identities
* When introducing yourself and your volunteers, ask for volunteers’ preferred pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs)
* Avoid assuming someone’s gender, pronouns, or sexual orientation by using gender neutral terms such as “they,” “spouse,” and “partner”
* Use gender neutral language when addressing the group or members of your group. Instead of saying ladies/gentlemen or sir/ma’am you can say “distinguished guests,” “honored guests,” “friends,” “folks,” and “y’all”
* Consider making single-stall bathrooms gender neutral
* Allow people to self-select which bathroom they go to
* Some non-binary people go by the honorific “Mx.” instead of Mrs./Ms./Mr.

#### Anti- anti-semitisim

* Jewish holidays are not federal holidays -- be aware of certain dates which may conflict with their observance
* Some Jewish people have dietary restrictions for religious reasons. Make accommodations when serving food.
* Some Jewish people express their faith through their appearance and clothing -- be respectful and do not touch their religious clothing or discriminate against their expression
* Avoid assuming someone’s faith, for example avoid assuming that they celebrate Christian holidays or pray in the same way as Christians do.

#### Anti-sexism

* People often defer to men’s leadership; look for women/nonbinary people who are leaders and seek out their expertise
* Avoid assuming that women are interested or skilled in performing domestic labor; avoid assuming that men are interested or skilled in performing physical labor
* Consider the needs of primary caregivers and ensure that they have flexible childcare or family-friendly volunteer options
* Avoid using terms of endearment like “sweetheart” unless it is consensual and agreed upon. People of any gender may find this patronizing.

#### Anti-sizeism

* Include accommodations for diverse bodies including height and weight
* Make no assumptions about someone’s health or ability based on their weight

#### Anti-xenophobia

* For immigrants who might be undocumented, find alternative means of background checks, such as using just a name and home address (vs. requiring a Social Security number or driver’s license).
* Thoughtfully consider what information turned up by a background check would be “disqualifying” for any given volunteer opportunity
* Find translators or use a free, digital translation service such as Google Translate in order to effectively communicate the volunteer opportunity and instructions
* Respect that cultural differences may result in different expectations, communication styles, and presentation
* Providing opportunities to immigrants can be helpful to those who are new to working in the US and would benefit from local work experience, references, and connections

***Compiled by Julia Ough for HandsOn NWNC***

***Edited and Approved by the HandsOn NWNC Board of Directors***

***August 2020***