



70 YEARS
INSPIRING YOUTH

2018 AVT BEST PRACTICES: CREATING AN IDENTITY-INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

The goal of California YMCA Youth & Government is to provide every young person in California the opportunity to participate in our program, so that they can be empowered to create positive and meaningful change in their communities. Y&G is a welcoming and inclusive program that believes, regardless of identity, that everyone has the chance to reach their full potential with dignity. Our core values are caring, honesty, respect and responsibility which together guide everything we do. Each program within Y&G is encouraged to structure their curriculum keeping in mind diversity and inclusion, which is a fundamental part in providing support and addressing the needs of each individual student.

In order to get the full experience of the program, you need a diverse group of individuals that fit various roles and who bring numerous ideas and knowledge to the table because of their background, identity, lived experiences and/or racial/gender/class lens. Therefore, if one individual is not contributing due to lack of inclusive and welcoming spaces, you lose the opportunity for more participation, increased creativity, improved productivity, global/interpersonal understanding and added insight.

Despite the benefits, inclusivity continues to be one of the most elusive challenges in non-profit & youth organizations. Many organizations find themselves saying, "We know inclusivity/diversity is important and we value that in our organization, but how do we start?"

WHAT DOES INCLUSION LOOK LIKE IN A YOUTH PROGRAM?

These best practices were compiled to assist Y&G Volunteer Program Staff with a guideline to implement inclusivity into your programming. This is just a resource that could help get you started. You are not required to follow these practices.

START THE CONVERSATION

- It starts with you. While California YMCA Youth & Government has its own mission statement, we need help from all our adult staff to enforce these concepts. Program areas are encouraged to establish their own mission statement and/or community agreement that all delegates are aware of to emphasize that this is an open and welcoming space. Make sure your team adopts and internalize such guidelines. Create parameters/processes that allow students to be able to go to a program staff volunteer with any grievances that may occur within that program area.

KNOW YOUR DELEGATES

- Now that you agreed to hold everyone in this space to a certain standard, let's start building relationships. Team-building activities are helpful in breaking the ice and getting to know people beyond superficial and identity indicators. Creating "Community Agreements" is an example of a team-building activity. Depending on the number of delegates, put them in groups and have them brainstorm various community agreements that could be applied to the group as a whole.
- Surveys that include behavioral questions like "What type of learner are you?" or "Explain a time you felt left out/upset by what an adult said to you". Ask which of your delegates want to run for a leadership position and which ones do not. Recognize the delegates who speak up the most and recognize those who do not. No delegate learns or communicates the same.
 - You might have to reach out to Core Staff to ask for them to provide additional information.

REFLECT THEIR REALITY

- If you continue to tell young girls that the "world is theirs" but they only see men in leadership positions, what does this indirectly tell them? When introducing delegates to prominent individuals within politics during a lesson, notice the type of individuals who are consistently mentioned. Does this empower your group of delegates or deter them? At the same time, Y&G actively strives to recruit a diverse group of potential volunteers who can bring different skills, experiences, knowledge, ideas and opinions to the table.

EXAMINE YOUR IMPLICIT BIAS/MISCONCEPTIONS

- It is very common for people to assume that other people share their own mentality, but this is not necessarily true. Everyone has their own story, their own family, their own educational background, their own personal values, etc. that can vary significantly from person to person. It is possible to have a blind spot or bias toward certain groups of people that was shaped by your environment growing up, people you've come into contact with, media or sometimes just lack of knowledge. This does not mean you are a bad person. Research identities you may not know or understand. Have candid conversations with people from different backgrounds than yourself. Really listen and understand that just because something doesn't personally affect you doesn't mean it doesn't happen. Conferences are not the opportunity to teach delegates what YOU think is right or wrong based on YOUR values, but rather give them full and objective information so that they can develop their own conclusion.

KEEP GROWING & LEARNING

- Make a plan and continue to review it. What are your short and long-term goals when it comes to inclusive programming? Consider creating monthly goals and progress markers. Share your ideas with Core Staff so that we can better support your efforts. Implement processes and procedures that can further enforce your strategies. Understand that identities and cultures are constantly evolving and changing. Keep up to date on research as it pertains to identities and youth development. Continuously placing focus on inclusion is not always an easy process. It will take time and effort, but it's a significant and beneficial component of any community.

PLATINUM RULE

- *"Do unto others as they would have you do unto them, not as you would have them do unto you."*
The Golden Rule is to treat others as you want to be treated, but **the Platinum Rule** understands and accommodates for the fact that not everyone wants to be treated the same way. It says that we should treat people how they want to be treated, regardless of how we might personally want to be treated in similar situations. Never assume things based on identity-specific customs based on social context. Always ask and never assume.
 - **Example:** I like having doors held open for me, but Jane prefers to open her own doors. Instead of insisting that she shut up and let me open her doors, I abide by the Platinum Rule, and I let her open her own doors when she wants to.

RELEVANT PROGRAMMING

- Asking Core Staff for background data of your delegates will be helpful here. Create curriculum that is relevant to your delegates. Add cultural references and knowledge that they can connect with. This will keep them more engaged as well as provide cross-cultural learning for other students. Incorporate less commonly heard points of view in lessons. Too often marginalized voices go unheard and discounted. Offer your delegates a wider view of the world by incorporating magazine articles, books, and speeches by people who don't possess socially-dominant identities like upper-class, white, cisgender, straight, Christian and/or men.

AVOID ADULTISM

- Defined as "behaviors and attitudes based on the assumptions that adults are better than young people and entitled to act upon young people without agreement". Adultism may hinder the development of youth, in particular, their self-esteem and self-worth, as well as their ability to form positive relationships with adults, or even see adults as allies. Our delegates are way smarter than we give them credit for. Empower your delegates to form their own voice based off the knowledge you provide to them. Youth voices should be sought out and truly heard at all levels of program planning.

TOKENISM

- Defined as "the practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minority group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly" (via Merriam Webster). Don't elevate a delegate's voice (or fellow volunteer on your team) to make them the spokesperson of their entire community. Don't try to meet a "quota" where you believe since you have a person of color on your team, then your group is therefore diverse and inclusive. All identities, whether apart of the privileged group or not, can work on being more inclusive and open to all. As you noticed from our activity, just because two people might have similar identities, does not mean they experience those identities in the same way.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

- The thing about privilege is that everyone has it and whether you believe you do or not, you still benefit from it. While it is encouraged that you have candid conversations with people from different communities, make sure to do your own research. Never assume that it is a marginalized individual responsibility to educate you about their experience, it can be both mentally and emotionally draining. Marginalized individuals have the right to choose when and how to use their voice. There is an abundant amount of resources (both via internet or local library) that can aid in educating and providing insight.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

"An Incomplete Guide to Inclusive Language..."

<https://open.buffer.com/inclusive-language-tech/>

"15 Culturally-Responsive Teaching Strategies"

<https://www.prodigygame.com/blog/culturally-responsive-teaching/>

"Ways to Make Youth Programs More Inclusive"

<https://www.prodigygame.com/blog/culturally-responsive-teaching/>

"50 Tips & Tricks to Facilitating a More Inclusive Classroom"

<https://www.weareteachers.com/tips-tricks-inclusive-classroom/>

"LGBTQ Inclusion in Youth Program Environments"

http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/pm/pm_lgbtq_0613.cfm

"Inclusiveness: Building Stronger Connections"

http://actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/inclusiveness.cfm

"Diversity, Equity, & Inclusivity Resources for Classrooms"

<https://www.common sense.org/education/top-picks/diversity-equity-and-inclusivity-resources-for-classrooms>

"List of Diversity-focused Activities/Icebreakers"

https://www.uh.edu/cdi/diversity_education/resources/activities/

"Diversity and Inclusion Resources"

<https://extension.wsu.edu/4h/for-volunteers/volunteer-training/diversity-and-inclusion-resources/>

To view this handout online, go to www.calymca.org >> "Resource Portal" >> "Volunteer Staff Resources."