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Leading with Justice

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Following a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) advocacy framework provides an essential model for helping to structure the leadership, decision-making, and advocacy methods of campus leaders.

invested in eliminating food insecurity and its stigma in an equitable way. By adopting a DEI-based framework, advocacy efforts will ensure that historically marginalized communities are not further hurt nor forgotten. Rather, they will become front and center in the movement for basic needs. Your campus might already be having these conversations, so ask around and be sure to be engaged in this conversation and learn with others on campus too.

Learning and Unlearning

To practice equity when advocating for basic needs, it is important to learn which campus communities struggle the most with accessing these resources and why those particular communities are the most disadvantaged. That is why it is critical to educate yourself and others on the historical events and policies that have caused and continue to perpetuate such inequities.

This type of learning can and does happen through an open, ongoing dialogue among members of various affected communities. However, your learning about systematic inequalities and racist state policies should not require you to demand additional, uncompensated (emotional) labor from the communities that currently endure these inequities.

Deliberate and continuous unlearning is an important component of educating yourself on the many state inequities various historically marginalized communities face, and their connection to basic needs access in the higher education sphere. Unlearning refers to the process of acknowledging the subconscious beliefs we have internalized about a certain group that further perpetuates violence against that group, *and* immediately and actively doing the work necessary to correct our thinking and actions.

In the basic needs movement, unlearning can look like deliberately fighting against stereotypes of the students who seek assistance or destigmatizing food insecurity on your college campus. By unlearning these deep-seated biases, we ensure that we are not engaging in toxic behaviors when advocating for basic needs, and as such, continuing to practice inclusivity.



Both learning and unlearning in an advocacy context are lifelong commitments. They do not exist in some hierarchical structure with video game levels that you conquer as you reach the ultimate peak or final level. Rather, you continuously ground your basic needs advocacy efforts in a DEI framework and never stop educating yourself on what and who matters.

For instance, you might want to learn about the racial wealth gap that impacts college affordability and also, unlearn biases around the Model Minority Myth and assumptions about the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. Can you think of other pressing issues you should learn more about, or biases you should unlearn?

Inclusive Listening and Dialogue

As you learn and unlearn, constantly check all lines of communication among those involved in basic needs advocacy efforts. Communication should be clear, respectful, transparent, and effective. Communication also critically necessitates listening: listening to those who have firsthand experience with unmet basic needs and who do not benefit from a wide array of systematic privileges. This means you should be actively listening to these communities in order to understand their experiences, rather than listening to them to respond immediately afterwards.

You must recognize and validate these experiences without centering yourself (especially if you come from a more privileged background) nor your actions and feelings. By authentically and actively listening to those who have been impacted directly, solutions that are mindful and inclusive of those with lived expertise can be presented and ultimately implemented. If a clear, constant, and equitable line of communication is practiced among all—with those most impacted having the loudest voices at the forefront of the movement—then it will prevent the erasure of diverse groups of members and most importantly, it will ensure they are exercising their agency to advocate for what is best for themselves and their communities.

Community Building

Through gradual learning and unlearning combined with inclusive communication, an equitable community of students will be formed. Ideally, this is a space where students belong and feel united because everyone is aligned toward a common goal: basic needs security. As such, community building functions as a direct pathway to long-lasting campus change. However, community building is often a complex and intricate process.



A multitude of perspectives and experiences will be at play, so ideological clashes are often inevitable.

- **Avoid Performative Activism:** Performance activism is advocacy done to increase one's social capital. As such, devotion to the cause is not genuine, and so no tangible, transformative action is taken to help.
- **White Savior Complex:** Refers to a white person who provides (nonconsensual) help to non-white people in a self-serving manner. The white person takes on the persona of a “hero” who believes they know best, therefore stripping the agency and power from the non-white community.
- **Agreement vs. Alignment:** Alignment means everyone can support a decision as if it were their own, even if they might have done something different. When there is agreement, every person truly believes the direction of the decision and resulting actions are both their personal choice and the choice of the group. There can be alignment without agreement.
- **Normalize Making Mistakes → Apologize and Learn:** Learning about intention vs. impact is crucial to ensure violence is not further perpetuated against a group. Still, mistakes will be made, and so you must hold yourself and your community accountable to normalize apologizing, and followed by bettering your efforts through constant education.

The following table summarizes how the three advocacy actions are grounded in everyday DEI principles.

Principles	Action	DEI Mindsets	Example
UNLEARN + LEARN	Learn about which historically marginalized communities face basic needs insecurity in your community. Ensure any potential solutions are grounded in the lived reality of these communities and unlearn any internalized biases against them.	How will this solution impact the most vulnerable? What unintended consequences could emerge? How do I remain committed to learning and unlearning while engaged in this work?	Engage in a conversation with your peers to understand their backgrounds. What are you learning? What are you realizing you have to unlearn?
COMMUNICATE	Communicate alongside communities most in need about possible solutions. Throughout this communication process, all parties should be practicing transparency and respect for all diverse experiences.	What communication norms can you commit to ensure equitability? Are you actively listening to those around you, or are you centering your voice?	When a new member joins your efforts, ensure a healthy space is created to him/her/them. Is this person providing a new perspective and if so, are you actively listening to these differences?
BUILD COMMUNITY	Build a diverse coalition of people who understand and have experienced the structural and systematic struggles of having their basic needs unmet.	Does your community membership reflect the diverse experiences and identities of those facing basic needs insecurity? How are you adhering to inclusive and anti-racism practices?	Look around at your coalition of leaders. Is it an all-white club? Or, does it reflect a diverse set of identities and experiences? Who are the leaders?
= DEI ADVOCATING	Together, the coalition will leverage their experiences and expertise to advocate for basic needs through a DEI framework, ensuring a diversity of voices.		