

APPRECIATING DIVERSITY

Positive Youth Development Domain

4-H has made a promise to America's youth that it will reflect the population demographics, vulnerable populations, diverse needs, and social conditions of the country¹. This promise requires 4-H to reach new and diverse communities across the country. Volunteers are vital to the achievement of this promise and must use materials and practices that reflect the people, language, art, and stories of diverse cultures.

First, it is important to understand a few definitions that guide the development of our work². In recent years, there are several acronyms that have emerged that you may hear. A few that are commonly used in 4-H are **DEI** (diversity, equity, inclusion), **JEDI** (justice, equity, diversity, inclusion), and **AEB** (access, equity, belonging).

Diversity includes our unique identities such as age, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, physical and mental ability, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual practices, employment status, geographic location, and other characteristics.

Equity means that everyone receives the unique resources and opportunities that they need to reduce or eliminate barriers to inclusion.

Robust equity is the intentional promotion of thriving for all people in all communities and especially those that experience inequity and injustice.

Inclusion is the act of creating spaces and places where each person has authentic

value, respect, and support as part of the environment, group, and community.

Social justice is the act of distributing power, resource, opportunity, societal benefits, and protection in a way that is equitable for all members of society.

Access, embodied in the concept of opportunity for all, means youth of all backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in 4-H programs. Increasing access means removing barriers that might get in the way of participation³.

Belonging is a basic human need. It is characterized by a subjective feeling of connection to people, places, and experiences; a sense of "fitting in" and acceptance; and that one is of valued and respected^{4,5}.

Culture refers to the shared experiences of groups of people, including languages, values, customs, worldviews, and other attributes.

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that unconsciously affect our understanding, actions, and decisions⁶. To develop your own competencies related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, it is important to first gain knowledge and understand yourself. First, identify and understand your own cultures—most of us belong to more than one cultural group.

As you move to understand your own cultures and where you have implicit bias,



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you can take the next step toward building your JEDI muscles:

- Read about or take courses in implicit bias and intercultural competency.
- Take the Harvard University Implicit Association Test⁵.
- Listen to podcasts on social justice and robust equity.
- Join and take part in groups that include people who are not like you and challenge your current beliefs.

It is important to acknowledge that examining one's biases can be hard work and for some may even be uncomfortable.

Developing your competencies in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion will help you recognize that youth across the nation represent a diversity of races, ethnicities, nationalities, gender expressions and identities, sexual orientations, physical and mental abilities, and religions. As a volunteer, keep in mind the following practices when working with youth:

- Practice social justice by distributing power and resources that are equitable.
- Provide opportunities and resources that eliminate barriers to include all.
- Reflect the diversity of your community.
- Create spaces and places where each person has authentic value, respect, and support.

Specific things volunteers can do to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all:

- Know more about youth in your activities than just what you can see.
- Greet each member by their preferred name when they come into your activity space.
- Celebrate all holidays that are important to all members of your group.
- Help members learn about customs, celebrations, languages, and characteristics of cultures not represented in your program/activity/event.
- Immediately stop racial slurs, jokes, or any language that targets people of a culture, ethnicity, or other characteristic of diversity. Some that are common among youth are "That's retarded" and "That's so gay."
- Help all youth know they belong in 4-H by *always* being a caring and supportive adult.
- Adapt your activity times, places, and spaces to accommodate the cultural norms, physical capabilities, or other characteristics represented in your group.
- Seek opportunities to expand your own understanding of cultural differences.
- Help members of your group establish group norms that are positive and respectful of all participants.

The guiding outcome is that 4-H is a place where all youth can learn, grow, and thrive.



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References

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