

Cultivating an Inclusive Departmental Climate

Building an inclusive environment for your fellow faculty, staff, and students in your department requires planning and attention to multiple dimensions. And you are only one person! This guide is designed to outline practical steps you can take to improve your departmental climate. Pick one dimension and move through the action steps outlined, apply lessons learned, and keep iterating.

What will be your entry point?

Build Community

Why it matters: Building community lays the foundation for so many of the interactions that take place in a department, from engaging respectfully during difficult conversations to promoting collective accountability to fostering inclusivity.

Actions you can take:

- Host a retreat before or at the beginning of the semester with the goal of fostering community
- Provide planned opportunities to engage socially, these can dovetail with departmental meetings, talks, lab meetings, or other scheduled activities where you anticipate strong attendance
- Encourage informal social gatherings
- Use inclusive language and encourage others to do the same
- Support [inclusive mentoring](#)
- Stay current on local, national, and international current events that may be affecting your colleagues and students. Acknowledge the difficulty of these moments and offer support.

Promote Respect

Why it matters: Being treated with respect is the most important behavior impacting engagement at work (source HBR, 2018). Setting the standard for respectful behaviors will improve retention and productivity as well.

Actions you can take:

- Role model the behaviors you want to see
- [Request](#) the Centering Respect workshop
- [Develop](#) ground rules for departmental meetings

Prepare for and Address Conflict

Why it matters: Conflict is inevitable, and as a leader, folks turn to you to help them address and resolve important conflicts. Unresolved conflicts can lead to hostility, isolation, and resentment, all of which can be more difficult to address.

- Learn and use the [CLARA Method of Communication](#) and encourage others to learn about this tool and use it as well
- Leverage the Faculty and Staff Assistance [Program](#), which offers conflict resolution and consultation
- Learn about generative conflict and help guide colleagues and students to frame conflict as a means to creating a greater understanding of others' points of view and creating more innovative solutions that address a broader range of needs

Recognize and Value Everyone's Work

Why it matters: Praising work performance leads to a range of positive outcomes, including increased productivity and greater satisfaction at work. Importantly, recognition can help foster resiliency when folks are faced with challenges because they know their contributions are seen and valued.

Actions you can take:

- Praise faculty, students, and staff publicly for their work accomplishments in meetings and over email. Overlook an accomplishment? It's never too late to share praise publicly.
- Accurately attribute credit and thank folks for their contributions
- Show up to support colleagues at events, panels, etc.
- Submit award nominations, including University and other prestigious awards. You can also establish a nomination committee to support in this task (Check out these internal award opportunities: [Chancellor and Provost Awards for Faculty Excellence](#) (Due beginning of March) • University and National Awards (Varies) • [Committee to Advance Our Common Purposes Awards](#) (Due in the Fall semester))

Communicate Effectively

Why it matters: People don't know what they don't know. By communicating institutional messages and policies, you can reaffirm Rutgers-New Brunswick's commitments, priorities, and aspirations.

Actions you can take:

- Communicate university, school, and/or departmental policies and act in accordance with them
- Communicate departmental values and expectations often
- Be open and honest about decisions, especially resource allocation

- Do not rely on word of mouth to share opportunities, use email and other far-reaching communication methods

Promote Professional Development and Continuing Education

Why it matters: Knowledge about equity, inclusion and diversity topics is ever evolving and a lifelong learning process. Encouraging faculty and staff to continue to grow professionally shows investment in your colleagues' success.

Actions you can take:

- Know the University resources that support learning and professional growth ([University Human Resources](#), the [Tyler Clementi Center for Diversity Education and Bias Prevention](#) and universitywide [Diversity Education](#), [Center for Faculty Success](#), [Faculty Diversity Collaborative](#) and more)
- Set the expectation that even as experts, faculty need to continue to learn
- Explore the Diversity Events [Calendar](#) and promote attendance
- Encourage faculty and staff to explore professional development opportunities and to set time aside each week to engage in professional development

Pay Attention to Work-Life Fulfillment

Why it matters: Our personal and professional lives are often intertwined and a site where gendered, racialized, and faith-based imbalances (among others) are likely to occur. A commitment to success requires holistic attention, so folks can manage competing priorities effectively.

Actions you can take:

- Be flexible, look for flexible solutions
- Ask people what they need and be clear when there are no University resources to meet a need
- Show empathy and encourage others to do the same
- Recognize that not everyone's experience at Rutgers is the same (due to differing privileges and access to power)
- Avoid scheduling meetings on [religious days of significance](#), and if you must schedule a meeting provide alternative ways for folks to engage, especially if important decisions will be made
- Avoid scheduling meetings outside of regular business hours

Respond to Illegal/Unacceptable Behavior

Why it matters: Illegal and unacceptable behavior must always be addressed. Being proactive in knowing how to address these situations and knowing when to report will help you navigate both challenging moments and crises.

Actions you can take:

- Develop and communicate a zero tolerance policy for discrimination, bullying, and harassment
- Know the [policies](#), especially knowing when you are a mandatory reporter and make sure folks know when you must escalate what is shared
- When someone reports on unacceptable/illegal behavior, acknowledge the courage it took to approach you and determine what they need without imposing what you would do in the same situation (Fine and Sheridan, 2015)
- If you receive a complaint, act swiftly and fairly (Fine and Sheridan, 2015)

Check out Campus Climate Action Planning [Guide](#) for data, tools and strategies for continuing to improve your departmental/School climate.

Sources:

Fine, Eve and Jennifer Sheridan. 2015. "Enhancing Department Climate: A Guide for Department Chairs." Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI). Retrieved on July 29th, 2024 at <https://wiseli.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/662/2018/10/ClimateBrochure.pdf>.

Rogers, Kristie. July/August 2018. "Do Your Employees Feel Respected?" *Harvard Business Review*. (96) 4: pp. 62-71.