



Energy Transition Navigator Program

2024-25 Program Manual

Chapter 2: Equity and Program Culture

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Articulate why equity is at the center of the CEJA and the Energy Transition Navigator Program.
- List and describe the core equity values that serve as the program's foundation.
- Center the core equity values in your program's culture and each of the program's elements.
- Describe how your organization can demonstrate compliance with federal laws that support equity.

The Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) workforce programs are equity focused. But what does that mean? This document will guide how workforce programs can foster an equity-focused program culture that empowers participants to engage fully, develop professionally, and reach their fullest potential.

Building an Equitable Clean Energy Workforce

The Energy Transition Navigator Program, as part of the **Climate and Equitable Jobs Act** legislation, was uniquely designed to:

- Raise awareness of training and career pathways for targeted groups that have historically been left out of workforce opportunities in clean energy, including:
 - People who live in environmental justice and R3 communities.
 - People with barriers to employment, including formerly incarcerated people.
 - People who are current or former members of the foster care system.
 - Displaced energy workers.
- Help people build careers in clean energy that provide sustainable living wages, contributing to economic independence.
- Remove barriers to training participation and job attainment.
- Provide participants with the skills for lifelong job security.
- Promote clean energy as a viable job industry for women and minority communities.
- Provide the clean energy industry with a consistent, skilled workforce.
- Create new partnerships between state agencies and community organizations.

By adhering to equity values and progressing toward these goals, Energy Transition Navigators will contribute to a more equitable clean energy industry in Illinois.

Historically, inequities have existed across affiliated clean energy industries (see the tables below). Data shows that there are racial and gender disparities in Illinois clean energy jobs.

According to Clean Jobs Midwest 2023 (based on data from the 2023 US Energy and Employment Report), 70.5% of the clean energy workforce in Illinois is male, and only 29.5% is female. African Americans are also significantly underrepresented in the Illinois clean energy workforce, as the table below shows.

Table 2.1: Demographics of the Illinois Clean Energy Workforce

State Population	Illinois Clean Energy Workforce	Illinois Population
Women	29%	49.0%
African American	7.7%	14.7%
Hispanic/Latino	18.2%	18.0%
American Indian/Native Alaskan	1.2%	0.6%
Asians	8.4%	6.1%

(Data source: [Clean Jobs Midwest](#), 2023)

Factors that impact this disparity include, but are not limited to:

- Race/ethnicity biases
- Gender biases (such as negative perceptions regarding women working in construction and the building trades)
- Lack of knowledge regarding occupational opportunities within the clean energy, construction, and building trade industries
- Lack of access to opportunities for training
- Lack of access to social capital and industry-specific networks necessary to get a job
- Hostile or unwelcoming workplace environments/cultures

The CEJA workforce programs seek to build a more equitable clean energy workforce by creating a pipeline of diverse candidates to help respond to the demand for clean energy services, and by removing barriers to completion and success through robust barrier reduction services.

Equity-focused Program Culture

Culture is a pattern of basic, shared assumptions learned by a group (Schein, 2010). A program's culture, or program environment, is the pattern of beliefs, values, rituals, relationships, and practices shared by

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the CEJA workforce programs, grantees, and participants. Program culture is critical to effective service delivery and participant outcomes.

The Energy Transition Navigator Program employs an **equity-focused program culture**. The term **equity** is often used in conjunction with other terms like equality, belonging, or inclusion. In fact, the acronym DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) has become common in our vernacular when we think about fair treatment in the workplace. Despite the colloquial use of these terms, equity has a specific definition relevant to CEJA.

Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. It is important to differentiate this from **equality**, which means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities.

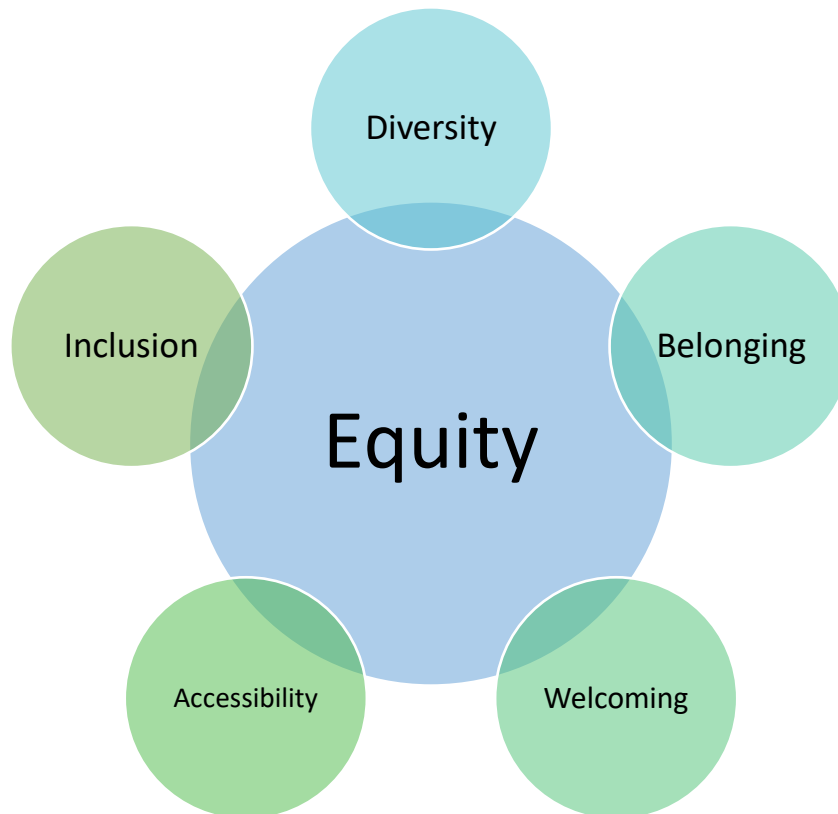
While the general principle of equality in workforce programs is both good and well-intended, an equity-focused program culture is very different from an equality focus. Here are a few ways the two terms differ:

Equality	Equity
All participants have access to the same resources	Participants are provided with the resources they need to succeed
Assumes what is required to be successful	Does not make assumptions
Tells!	Asks!

Equity recognizes uneven playing fields and seeks to respond to individual needs, instead of providing blanket services to everyone irrespective of their current position, resources, or needs. Equity challenges us to reduce barriers (*i.e., barrier reduction services*) while supporting participants on their journey to self-sufficiency. An equity-focused program culture considers the needs and circumstances of participants when allocating resources and providing opportunities. Centering equity means eliminating systemic barriers and leveling the playing field for target communities and population groups.

Defining Core Equity Values

An equity-focused program culture requires and works with the other core equity values of diversity, inclusion, welcoming, accessibility, and belonging. Welcoming others and making room for differences helps create a dynamic, creative, productive workplace and encourages a comfortable and enjoyable environment for all. Recognizing, embracing, and celebrating difference can foster a safe, supportive, and successful environment for disadvantaged and underserved groups¹ who have been and continue to be subject to prejudice and systemic discrimination. There is also substantial evidence that programs that embrace such a culture will experience better outcomes.²



Program **core values**³ are the core ethics or standards the program is expected to abide by. They serve as a guiding light for behavior and decision-making at each level within the program. They must inspire and constrain actions to incorporate ethics into the program’s culture. These core values are expected

² According to research by McKinsey & Company, gender and ethnic/cultural diversity continues to demonstrate a statistically significant correlation with financial performance. Diverse companies experience improved customer orientation, employee satisfaction, and decision-making (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, & Yee, 2018). Closing the gender gap in work could add up to \$28 trillion to the annual GDP by 2025 (Woetzel et al., 2015). Moreover, companies in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity at the management levels were 35% more likely to experience financial returns above their industry’s average (Hunt et al., 2018).

³ <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

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to drive the actions, behaviors, and decision-making. They should invite grantees to provide a welcoming, inclusive environment that counters previous negative experiences of underserved groups in the construction and building trades. Below we define each of these equity values.

Diversity means honoring the humanity of all people and valuing the unique contributions that different people bring to the table. Diversity includes all the characteristics that make one individual or group different. It recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that must be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender—the groups that most often come to mind when the term "diversity" is used—but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, veteran status, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values.

Inclusion and Welcoming requires authentically bringing disadvantaged and underserved individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision-making in a way that shares power and influence. To be inclusive means more than having individuals and/or groups in the room; it means listening and allowing their input to impact decisions. In other words, inclusion and welcoming are the means to achieve environments wherein everyone is treated fairly and respected, has equal access to resources, and can fully participate and contribute. Cultivating an inclusive and welcoming environment requires proactively leveraging the diverse perspectives within the group to impact the institution's policies, practices, and norms. Inclusive and welcoming environments benefit everyone and pave the way for empathy, successful communication, and understanding.

Accessibility is the degree to which an environment, service, or product is understandable, meaningful, and useable by as many people as possible. The Illinois Department of Human Resources defines accessibility as the degree to which all people, including people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency, can fully use or participate in services, facilities, workplaces, products, and communications with ease.

Belonging is the sense that you can bring your whole and authentic self to a group without fear of discrimination or estrangement. Feeling a sense of belonging means that your differences are acknowledged, celebrated, valued, and contribute meaning to the group. Belonging has been linked to participant retention, completion, and overall reduction in program attrition.

Professional Development around Equity

Successful implementation of the Energy Transition Navigators Program integrates the program's core equity values to foster an environment that allows individuals to feel safe, participate fully, develop professionally, and reach their fullest potential. **All members of your team must receive training in these core equity values.**

While DCEO will provide basic equity training, it is the grantees' responsibility to ensure their staff is appropriately trained to incorporate the core equity values into their service delivery approach. Additional training and professional development may be required.

Below are a few resources you can use for additional staff training:

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- Illinois Department of Human Rights: [An Introduction to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for All State Employees](#)
- Illinois State Board of Education: [Equity Information and Resources](#)
- Illinois Board of Higher Education: [Illinois Educational Attainment and Equity Dashboards](#)
- Equity in the Center: [Racial Equity Tools](#)

How to Foster an Equitable Workforce Program Culture

Commitment to these core equity values means upholding them in your program and intentionally pursuing policies and practices to support all program participants and team members. These questions should be considered during the planning process and during program delivery.

- How will an equity focus inform your program goals?
- How will you analyze the impacts of your program on all participants, including underserved groups, such as persons with barriers due to their lack of education, job training, reliable housing and transportation, legal system involvement, or disability?
- How will you infuse the core equity values into your program's culture?
- How will you avoid potential legal consequences by implementing a comprehensive anti-discrimination, harassment, and bullying policy and developing a reporting and routing process?
- How will you establish partnerships with culturally competent organizations and employers to deliver the program?

Embrace Difference by Cultivating Cultural Competence

The core equity values of diversity, inclusion, welcoming, accessibility, and belonging mean more than meeting specific metrics. Staying true to the core equity values means ensuring that each participant feels that their humanity is honored. It means ensuring that participants feel that they belong in the program and the classroom, their voice is heard, and their differences and unique contributions are valued.

Embracing difference means developing **cultural competence** to effectively deliver program services for different groups of people. Cultural competence is key to embracing differences among racial and ethnic groups, gender identities, rural and urban communities, and other different cultures. Cultural competence includes the following elements:

- **Cultural knowledge:** Having a basic understanding that there is diversity in cultures across the population.
- **Cultural awareness:** Being open to the idea of changing cultural attitudes.
- **Cultural humility:** Becoming self-aware of personal and cultural biases.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Being sensitive to the significant cultural issues faced by others. Knowing that differences exist between cultures, but not assigning values to those differences.

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Grantees should provide professional development to help staff members develop not just cultural knowledge and awareness, but also cultural humility and cultural sensitivity when engaging with different groups of people.

Consider the following questions:

- How will the program build cultural competence among staff members? How will you develop a culture of humility and sensitivity, encouraging self-reflection and a willingness to learn from others who are different?
- What steps is your program taking to ensure members of the target populations are present, and that their contributions and voices are heard?
- How is your program developing partnerships with culturally competent organizations?
- How is your program creating a sense of inclusion, welcoming, and belonging for people with differences?
- How is the program helping participants build self-confidence and self-efficacy in their differences, which will be valuable as they transition to full employment?

Overcome Barriers

The foundation of the CEJA workforce programs is ensuring equitable access and opportunities to historically underserved populations. Equitable access begins at the outreach stage. There may be barriers that people face in attending outreach events. Perhaps events are only offered during the day. Perhaps they are located far away from where people live. Perhaps people will need childcare or transportation to attend events. Equitable outreach ensures that barriers to participation in outreach events are reduced. Energy Transition Navigators should also focus on reducing barriers in the application phase. Energy Transition Navigators should focus on helping participants connect to the CEJA Workforce Hubs or Climate Works Centers to access barrier reduction services.

- How will your program reduce barriers so that people can attend outreach events and apply to participate in the CEJA workforce programs?
- How will your program assist people through the application process?
- How will your program inform potential participants of the barrier reduction services?
- How will your program make referrals to partners and other organizations that provide these barrier reduction services?

Build a Community of Collaboration

Energy Transition Navigators, in bringing people into the CEJA workforce programs, are responsible for creating a safe, welcoming, and collaborative environment. Energy Transition Navigators should promote respect, practice open listening, and attend to the lived experiences of all potential participants and staff.

- How are staff taught to empathetically listen and collaborate?
- Are standards for communication defined and taught to staff?
- Are staff offered continued education on key topics like trauma or gender-informed services?

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- What mechanisms are in place that ensure student and staff contributions are valued?

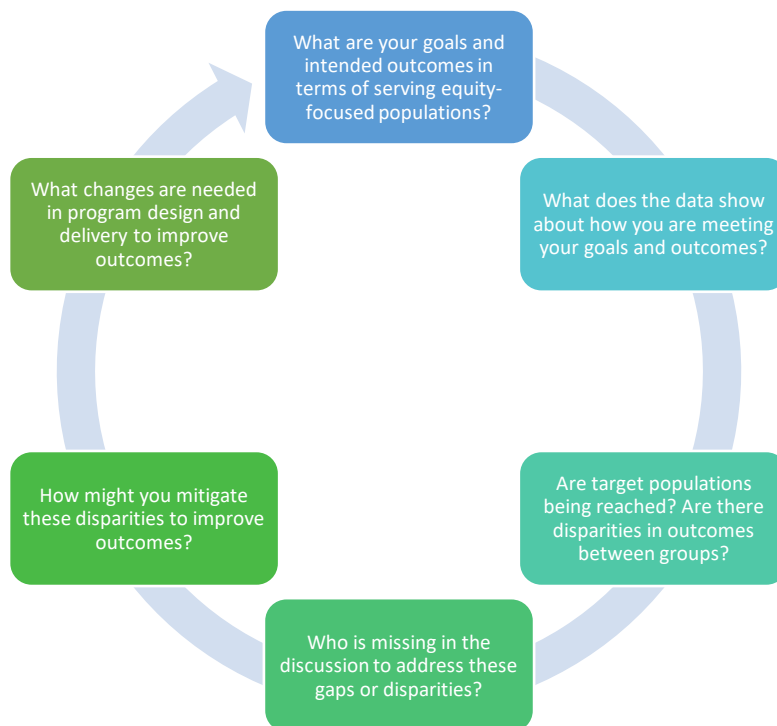
Note: While DCEO will provide basic equity training, it is the grantee's responsibility to ensure their staff is appropriately trained to build a community of collaboration.

Track and Measure Success

People and programs grow when goals are set, outcomes are measured to see how goals are being met, and programs are adjusted to promote further success or strengthen weak points. An equity focus should inform all aspects of this process. It is important to remember that goals and outcomes are intended to measure a program's impact and the difference it makes in participants' lives.

What do equitable goals and outcomes look like? The CEJA workforce programs are intended to increase opportunities in the clean energy industry for people and communities that have been left out in the past or who have faced historical barriers to participation in the clean energy industry. Equitable goals and outcomes will consider past gender and racial disparities in the construction and building trades and seek to address those disparities. Setting equitable goals and outcomes means considering the unique demographics of your region and the environmental justice and R3 communities in your region.

Tracking and measuring outcomes will help grantees evaluate the extent to which the program is meeting its equity goals and values. Measuring outcomes can be used to evaluate what is and is not working and identify any disparities in outcomes among different groups. Strategies can be adjusted to address these disparities. The diagram below shows how grantees can set goals and outcomes, track how outcomes are met, and adjust program design and delivery to ensure equitable outcomes.



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Your Grant Manager and the CEJA Regional Administrators will work with you to review your goals and outcomes, monitor your progress in meeting these goals and outcomes, analyze the data to identify any equity concerns or disparities in outcomes, and help you develop strategies to address disparities and gaps.

How will you track and measure success in terms of equity goals? The Energy Transition Navigator Program requires participant tracking and reports to help you track and measure success. An equity focus is embedded in these processes. Here are a few examples of how equity will be measured and evaluated in the program.

Equity question	Tracked and measured by . . .
Is the program reaching target equity investment eligible populations?	Equity investment eligibility requirements will be tracked in the CEJA Reporting System. Grantees will enter contact information for all inquiry contacts who attend outreach events and express interest in joining a CEJA program.
Is the program inclusive of people of different races, ethnicities, genders, abilities, and cultures?	Grantees will enter demographic information for all inquiry contacts and applicants in the CEJA Reporting System.
Are outreach materials accessible? Do they feature diverse groups of people?	Custom outreach materials developed by the grantee will be reviewed by the Grant Manager to ensure they align with the program's equity values.

Equity in Action

The recommendations below apply to the above questions and should provide grantees with specific guidance about how to center equity in their processes. Many of these recommendations apply across one or more categories. Remember, to be truly equity-focused, the principles must be applied to both staff and potential participants.

Organizational Policies, Procedures, and Processes

1. Develop a set of written policies, procedures, and processes for your organization that address the core equity values.
2. Ensure all policies, procedures, and processes are in writing and aligned with the core values. These must be used as a reference to ensure that you follow your intentions and can also be used for accountability.
3. In each program discussion, ask what equity value considerations need to be addressed. Consider appointing someone to advocate for the core equity values in discussions until this becomes a habit and equity is embedded in your program.

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4. Develop a conflict resolution policy. These topics can sometimes get complicated. Expect that people may get offended, and you may offend them, even if unintentional. Have ways to recover from such events in a constructive, team-centered way.
5. Consider forming a DEIA team with representation from staff and participants to assess performance, respond to concerns, and make recommendations for improvement.
6. Listen fully to participant feedback regarding their experiences, even if you have observed the situation differently.
7. Identify concrete metrics for measuring and continuously improving diversity, inclusion and welcoming, accessibility, belonging, and equity.

Note: The development of organizational policies, procedures, and processes requires specific subject matter expertise. If this expertise does not exist within your organization, consider contracting with a qualified consultant to provide support.

Staffing

1. Ensure ALL program staff receive DEIA training. While DCEO will provide some basic equity training, consider the additional training and professional development your staff might need. Seek staff buy-in and emphasize the importance of this training. Unless staff have bought into these values, the training will fail to have the intended benefits.
2. Identify outreach staff from the target population groups and communities you are trying to serve; environmental justice and R3 communities, returning residents, foster care alumni, and other people with barriers to employment. Outreach staff will be more successful if they have shared experiences with potential participants.
3. Ensure ALL program staff model behaviors that align with equity values and practices.

Recruitment

1. Make all outreach events and activities accessible. Consider location and access to public transportation. Work to remove transportation and language barriers that some participants may face. Make sure the buildings are ADA accessible. For online events, enable closed captioning and make sure slide presentations are easy to read. On event registration forms, ask if they will require any accommodation to participate.
2. Actively outreach to and recruit diverse groups. Go to where the people are. Refrain from expecting them to come and show up if they have historically been underrepresented. Leverage trusted partners, including those from similar backgrounds and community leaders.
3. Nurture the program's existing diversity. Word of mouth is a very powerful tool.
4. Make sure that recruitment materials show people who are diverse and representative of the people you are trying to serve.

Application Assistance

1. Consider how you might address barriers in the application process. Can you offer translation services? Are bus passes available so that participants can attend in-person meetings?

2. Inform participants about the requirements of the program and the barrier reduction services and stipends that will be available to them as participants in the CEJA workforce programs. Help them make an informed decision about their participation and the long-term career benefits they can achieve.
3. Take the time to learn who the potential participants are and how they self-identify concerning their specific groups.
4. Identify and leverage strengths in diverse potential participants and build on those strengths. Consciously acknowledge all sexes, genders, and ethnicities in educational settings. Positively affirm contributions and inquire about relevant personal experience.
5. Use supportive communication that frames participants as future members of a professional community (the clean energy industry), not just a potential participant in a program.
6. Validate participants' self-worth, inherent ability, and creativity to help counter "imposter syndrome" and respond positively and affirmatively to their internal questions, "Am I supposed to be here?" "Do I fit in here?" "Can I be successful here?" "Do I belong here?"
7. Strengthen the voices of underrepresented groups by participating in meaningful engagement, problem-solving, and empowerment with participants who have not historically had power in the current environment (the clean energy industry).

Compliance with Laws and Policies that Support Equity

Because your program will be serving people from many different backgrounds, your organization will need to establish policies and practices that ensure that everyone is treated with dignity, decency, and respect. This will include cultivating an environment that is free of discrimination, harassment, bullying, or other emotional or physical harm.

- Discrimination is bias or prejudice resulting in denial of opportunity or unfair treatment when hiring, creating, or applying policies, training, promoting, firing, or laying off employees, or in any other terms and conditions of employment or program participation.
- Harassment can be a wide range of unwelcome and offensive behaviors. They usually are repetitive but do not have to be.
- Bullying is a persistent pattern of mistreatment from others in the workplace/training environment that causes either physical or emotional harm. It can include such tactics as verbal, nonverbal, psychological, or physical abuse and humiliation.

There are a number of federal laws that protect people from harassment and discrimination. These include:

- **The Equal Pay Act of 1963.** This Act is a United States labor law amending the Fair Labor Standards Act. This Act abolishes wage disparity based on sex. [Read more](#). (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.)
- **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.** This Act prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin. [Read more](#). (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.)

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- **Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972.** No person in the United States, based on sex, should be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. [Read more.](#)
- **Illinois Human Rights Act.** State law that prohibits discrimination concerning age (40+), ancestry, arrest record, citizenship status, color, conviction record, disability (physical and mental), familial status, gender identity, marital status, military status, national origin, orders of protection, pregnancy, race, religion, retaliation, sex, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, unfavorable military discharge. [Read more.](#)
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).** This Act prohibits discrimination against physically or mentally challenged people who can perform the job's essential functions. It also requires employers to offer reasonable accommodations to enable those workers to do their jobs. [Read more.](#) (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

Your organization is expected to implement policies and practices that demonstrate your commitment these laws. This may include requiring staff to receive training on these laws, implementing fair labor policies, posting guidelines for professional conduct in your building, making sure your facility is ADA accessible, and more.

As a part of compliance with these laws, all grantees must have an anti-discrimination, harassment, and bullying policy in place, utilizing the policy template found in the Energy Transition Navigator Partner Guide.

Despite your efforts to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, there may still be instances of discrimination, harassment, or bullying among your staff and participants. These instances must be proactively addressed, adhering to the Anti-Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying Policy template. Utilize the following forms to document and address complaints. Copies of these checklists and complaint forms must be shared with your Grant Manager as complaints are addressed.

- Checklist for Addressing Discrimination, Harassment, Bullying Complaints
- Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying Complaint Form

Remember that compliance with these laws will help to demonstrate your commitment to equity and ensure that staff and participants are treated with dignity, decency, and respect.

Additional resources

Energy Transition Navigator Partner Guide:

- Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying Policy Template
- Checklist for Addressing Discrimination, Harassment, Bullying Complaints
- Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying Complaint Form

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