



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

NAVIGATING INCLUSION IN A POLARIZED CLIMATE
TOOLS FOR COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP IN HUMAN RIGHTS WORK



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This guide accompanies the IAOHRA conference workshop, helping you reflect, plan, and take action as you build courageous, inclusive workplaces in politically sensitive environments.

OPENING REFLECTION

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

WHAT DOES THIS QUOTE MEAN TO YOU AS A LEADER IN TODAY'S CLIMATE?

WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN LEADERS RISE ABOVE NARROW CONCERNS TO ACT FOR THE GREATER GOOD?

IN YOUR OWN WORK, WHAT IS ONE "NARROW CONCERN" YOU NEED TO RISE ABOVE TO SERVE THE BROADER MISSION?

WHO DO YOU NEED TO ENGAGE TO HELP YOU ACT ON THIS BROADER VISION?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES



IDENTIFY AND DISRUPT PERFORMATIVE INCLUSION PRACTICES.



ALIGN STRATEGIES WITH HUMAN RIGHTS VALUES AND COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS.



LEAD WITH COURAGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN POLITICALLY CHARGED CLIMATES.



BUILD INCLUSIVE CULTURES IN CHALLENGING CLIMATES.

KEY CONTEXT AND SECTOR PAIN POINTS

Widespread fear of federal funding cuts, including EEOC and HUD programs.

Resource limitations in many agencies and nonprofits.

Political polarization causing silence or reactive leadership.

THIS SESSION EQUIPS YOU TO ANTICIPATE AND ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES WITHOUT LOSING FOCUS ON MISSION AND VALUES.

YOUR LEGAL AND MORAL MANDATE

Federal Civil Rights Protection

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin.
- These federal protections remain the legal foundation for all human rights agencies.

Fair Housing Act Safeguards

- Ensures protection against harassment or discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin.
- Reinforces that housing is a human right.

Expanded Protected Classes & Evolving Rights

- Legal coverage also includes age (over 40), disability, genetic information, pregnancy, and veteran status.
- Recognizes the intersectionality of discrimination and evolving case law.

Moral Imperative & Public Trust

- Beyond compliance, agencies are ethically bound to create workplaces and communities where every person feels safe and valued.
- Communicates to staff and the public: We are here to protect you, our mission is unwavering.

REFLECTION & NOTES

HOW IS INCLUSION PERCEIVED IN YOUR AGENCY RIGHT NOW?

WHERE DO FEAR OR POLITICS HINDER YOUR WORK?

**WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO LEAD WITH COURAGE
DESPITE CONSTRAINTS?**

USE SPACE BELOW FOR ADDITIONAL NOTES

10 STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING INCLUSION IN POLITICALLY SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

1. Acknowledge Sector Pain Points: Address funding fears and resource challenges openly.

2. Center Your Legal Mission: Stay anchored in Title VII and Fair Housing protections.

3. Speak Directly to the Marginalized: Reassure those who feel unprotected: you are still here for them.

4. Train Your Frontline: Equip staff with knowledge and confidence to communicate protections.

5. Diversify Revenue Streams: Reduce reliance on federal funds through new funding sources.

6. Share a Unified Message: Ensure consistent, values-based communication.

7. Build Internal Coalitions: Strengthen coordination between HR, legal, and outreach teams.

8. Collect & Use Local Data: Show impact and advocate effectively with evidence.

9. Prepare Scenario Plans: Create proactive strategies for funding or legal changes.

10. Reignite Your 'Why': Stay grounded in your mission to protect human rights and dignity.

CASE SCENARIO: INCLUSION UNDER FIRE

SCENARIO:

A commissioner requests removal of the word 'inclusion' from your agency policy, citing political neutrality.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How would you respond as a leader?

What message do you send to staff and the community?

What steps ensure your values are upheld while navigating political risk?

REFLECTION & NOTES

**LIST ONE BOLD ACTION YOU WILL TAKE IN THE NEXT 30 DAYS
TO STRENGTHEN INCLUSION IN YOUR AGENCY:**

WHO WILL YOU ENGAGE AS ALLIES OR CHAMPIONS?

**WHAT CHALLENGES MIGHT ARISE AND HOW WILL YOU
ADDRESS THEM?**



Thank You

FOR PARTICIPATING

Remember, courage is a daily practice.

“LEAD WITH HUMANITY”

For resources, connections, or to
share your progress:



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The Weaponization of DEIB

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