

National Association of Teachers of Singing



**I.D.E.A.
Best Practices
Guide
2022**



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

NATS strives to be a welcoming and supportive community of members and students who celebrate the unique identities, varied backgrounds, and experiences of all individuals. We are dedicated to ensuring that all voices are valued and heard in an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all.

NATS takes the equitable treatment for all within our organization very seriously. Equitable treatment involves learning about **I.D.E.A.**: *Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism*. This NATS **I.D.E.A. Best Practices Guide** has been created to identify ways to promote I.D.E.A. within NATS. This guide provides guidelines for creating and maintaining a welcoming and supportive community and culture of diversity and inclusion, strategies for communicating across cultures, strategies for demonstrating that we value and validate each other and educating ourselves and identifying ways to build an inclusive NATS leadership team. It is our desire that this guide will help you and all NATS members gain a greater understanding of diversity in order to encourage enhanced awareness of inclusive practices for all identities.

DEFINITIONS

INCLUSION

At the core of *inclusion* is diversity. Inclusion means that all members feel as if they genuinely *belong*— that they are valued and relied upon, empowered, and ultimately matter. Like diversity, inclusion is an outcome and often the actual experience of NATS membership, an experience that holds real potential or implications of equity.

DIVERSITY

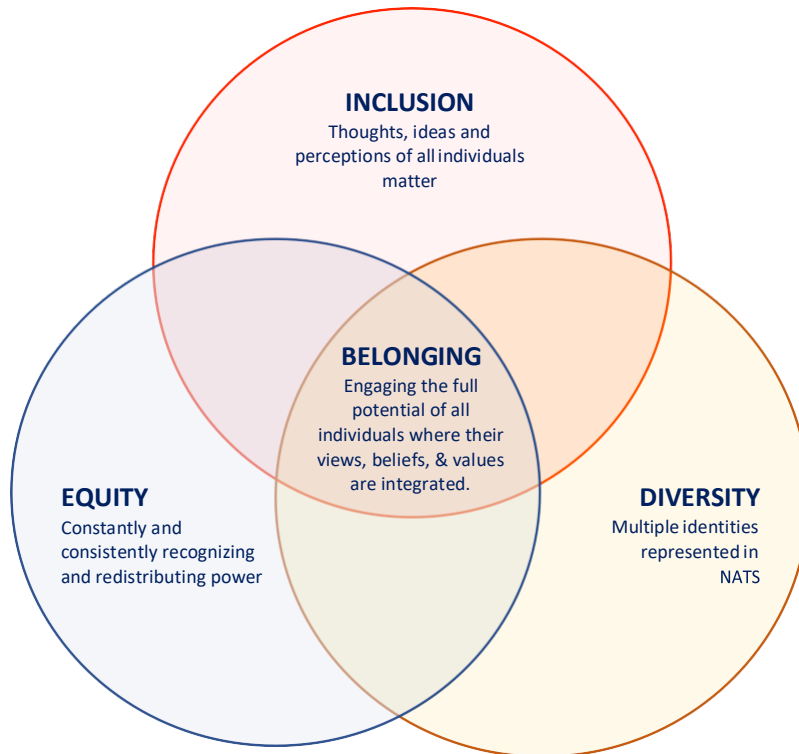
The term *diversity* can be understood as: the presence of difference. It's that simple. Diversity can refer to people of various races, genders, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religions, ethnicity, national origins, citizenship status, and mental or physical abilities. When applied to NATS, defining diversity should also include diversity of ideas and cultural diversity.

EQUITY

Equity is the norms, fundamentals, and policies in place that ensure everyone has access to the same opportunities.

ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism is the active process of identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures and behaviors that perpetuate individual and systemic racism. It does so by examining the power imbalances between racialized and non-racialized or differently racialized peoples.



Belonging is the desired outcome of successfully “ensuring that all voices are valued and heard in an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all.”

Guideline #1: Create a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion

A community that values diversity and inclusion is a place where leaders, members, and students of members demonstrate their respect for each individual's unique attributes. It is an environment that values diversity and inclusion requiring us to understand and respect the beliefs, values, and ethics of others while demonstrating our ability to effectively work with, communicate with, and interact with a diverse community of individuals. It is also essential that we create and sustain safe and affirming environments while observing the highest standards of conduct. The NATS environment must be free from harassment, discrimination, and intolerance.

Do:

- **Recognize** that creating an organization culture of diversity and inclusion is an ongoing developmental process for individuals and organizations.
- **Commit to building awareness**, knowledge, and communication across cultures
- **Encourage others to be open**, flexible, and receptive of differences.
- **Foster a willingness to learn, change, and evolve** when we are presented with differences that do not immediately correspond with our own experience.
- **Mentor others** to recognize this need and commit to it.
- **Assume that all people are individuals**, who appreciate being demonstrably valued by others regardless of their ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, gender identity and expression, generational group, socioeconomic background, and other aspects of cultural identity.
- **Use gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language** in both written and verbal communication. Use nouns that are not gender-specific when referring to roles or professions. Avoid gender-specific

pronouns, and instead use the neutral “they.”

- **Work to ensure** that all environments, procedures, and policies are accessible to all.

Don't:

- **Assume that only persons from traditionally oppressed groups benefit from a community that promotes a culture that values diversity and inclusion.**

ALL leaders, members, students, and guests benefit from understanding and respecting the diverse identities of the NATS community.

- **Forget about elements of diversity that cannot be overlooked.**

Sexual orientation, age, gender identity and expression, religion, regional differences, country of origin, generation, and all other aspects of identity are also elements that impact communication and working styles for some of the different groups you come into contact within your position.

Guideline #2: Strategies for Communicating Across Cultures

There are several practices you can implement to increase the strategies for cross-cultural communication within NATS, such as:

- Demonstrating that you value diversity.
- Communicating that you affirm, validate, and value others.
- Showing empathy.
- Being non-judgmental.
- Recognizing your own assumptions and privilege.
- Exploring your own unconscious biases through both conscious and unconscious bias training to develop as an equitable leader.
- Demonstrating flexibility and a willingness to learn, change, evolve, and grow.
- Being conscious that humor may be inappropriate and misunderstood.

Additional best practices include:

- Providing an open and safe environment in meetings, auditions, and all NATS events: Be aware of situations and settings that are uncomfortable. *Reducing power dynamics.*
- Focusing on understanding: *Checking tone, style, and delivery of voice.*
- Seeking first to understand; then be understood. When interacting with others in a diverse community like NATS, it is likely that you will encounter new and/or controversial ideas. Demonstrating a clear understanding of these ideas by actively listening before formulating arguments for or against them. *Critique ideas rather than individuals.*
- Exploring the possibility that what is presented may not be the main issue: Listening to others and giving them time to tell their story in their own way and words; trust must develop before others share their vulnerability; trust is earned and developed over time; *Identify root or underlying issues, which may prevent you from developing a relationship.*
- Acknowledging differences and different experiences: Avoid saying "I know how you feel" as it is always untrue. Most cultural minorities are more skilled in coping in the majority culture than members of the majority culture. Most majority culture members are less skilled in coping within a minorities' culture.
- Introducing yourself with your pronouns.
- Being aware of differences in nonverbal communication patterns: eye contact and facial expressions.

- Respecting all people as persons who have the right to make decisions freely: Keep an open mind; avoid dictating, making judgments and assumptions.

Guideline #3: Enhance Respect

Enhancing respect is an ideal way of supporting the membership within NATS and helping them feel valued. Respect can be demonstrated through our choices, delegation of duties, behaviors, and communication—both verbal and non-verbal. There are several practices you can implement to increase awareness and sense of respect in NATS.

Do:

- **Make your expectations clear** to your leadership and members regarding verbal and non-verbal communication (e.g., answer emails in a timely manner, resist interrupting or talking over each other, etc.).
- **In regularly scheduled meetings discuss your Region or Chapter environment** or assess the climate, discuss feelings of respect, and solicit feedback from colleagues about ways to improve the environment/climate.
- **Identify best practices** for all to model.
- **Provide consistent feedback** to leaders/members who need further mentoring and support.
- **Recognize and Reinforce respectful behavior** when you see it.
- **Manage conflicts and disagreements with respect** in a timely and confidential manner.

Don't:

- **Assume that all NATS colleagues have the same definition of respect** as each other or as you.
- **Avoid conversations about disrespectful behavior** in the hope that the behavior will stop all by itself.
- **Rely on someone else to provide vision and tools for respect** in your Region or Chapter. This is part of your responsibility as a NATS leader.
- **Ignore inappropriate jokes** or humorous discussions around any diverse group or identity
- **Make generalizations** about any group or identity.
- **Reveal a person's sexual orientation or gender** identity without their expressed permission.
- **Assume cisgender-heterosexual identity** when sending invitations for NATS events
- **Assume gender-specific terms** like Mr., Mrs., Ms.

Specific behaviors that convey respect include:

- Interacting in ways that demonstrate that you value (and/or affirm) them and their experiences.
- Communication that is open and transparent.
- Decision making that is transparent, communicated, and inclusive.
- Information being shared in a timely and consistent manner.
- Disagreeing without losing one's temper or otherwise conveying disrespect.
- Greeting NATS leaders, members, students, vendors, and guests by acknowledging them verbally and non-verbally.
- Respecting people's time by arriving at meetings and ending meetings promptly.
- Being open to criticism and feedback.
- Providing critical feedback in a manner, which is caring and respectful to the specific individuals.
- Taking responsibility for the consequences or negative repercussions of one's actions.

Guideline #4: Identify Ways to Build an Inclusive NATS Leadership Team

Inclusive teams are characterized by open communication, transparent decision making, and creativity. The purpose of building an inclusive NATS leadership team is to create a productive environment of trust and respect. NATS is a diverse community. We have members that represent multiple and different identities. Our differences and similarities are based on age, gender identity and expression, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, ability, and other forms of identity as well as opinion, which requires us to develop an inclusive community.

Do:

- **Communicate and regularly remind NATS membership of the importance of developing and maintaining an inclusive culture within NATS.**
- **Encourage the following behaviors that demonstrate inclusion:**
 - communicating information consistently,
 - being open to feedback,
 - respecting colleagues regardless of different styles or beliefs, and
 - offering critique in a constructive manner.
- **Mentor District and Chapter leadership** in a way that creates model behaviors that you would like to see from them.
- **Respond to inappropriate jokes or comments immediately.** Silence sends a message of agreement.

Don't:

- **Rely on the same people for advice all the time.** Whom you seek to advise you should be as varied as your Region or Chapter membership. If you surround yourself with a non-diverse group of leaders or advisors who never push back or point out challenges, then your pool is not sufficiently inclusive. Seek out the perspectives of colleagues who have different backgrounds and expectations. Region or Chapter decisions, activities, and events will generally benefit from having diverse feedback.
- **Use some of your meeting times as an "information dump."** Facilitate meetings that invite participation, explore ideas, and model dialogue.
- **Allow exclusionary or intolerant behavior to go unaddressed.** Respond efficiently and with respect to behaviors that mock, shame, insult, or have the potential to injure members.

Conclusion

When considering diversity, we are not just talking about those visibly different from us. We are talking about all of us in all the ways we are different. Differences can include our education, our experiences, where we grew up, how we grew up, our temperaments, what populations we teach, our values, attitudes, and beliefs. NATS *is* diverse—we are all different.

Recognizing and accepting dissimilarities and valuing each and every person in NATS, regardless of these dissimilarities, will help all of us feel included and valued. We are depending on you to model leadership of and interactions with members that is respectful and accepting. As is stated in the **NATS Diversity and Inclusion Statement**, NATS is “dedicated to ensuring that all voices are valued and heard in an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all.”

I.D.E.A. Best Practices Reference List

IDEA Best Practices. (2018, September). Retrieved from <https://www.bordbia.ie/globalassets/bordbia.ie/about/diversity-toolkit.pdf>

Diversity and inclusion resources. Retrieved from <https://www.aamc.org/professional-development/affinity-groups/cfas/diversity-inclusion-toolkit/resources>

Diversity and inclusion toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/institutionaldiversity/resources>

Duong, L. (2016, May 24). The do's and don'ts of workplace diversity initiatives. Retrieved from <https://www.quantumworkplace.com/future-of-work/the-dos-donts-of-workplace-diversity-initiatives>

Gender Inclusive Language. Retrieved from www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/toolbox

Murray, R. (2019, April 3). Twelve pitfalls to avoid when creating a diversity and inclusion council. Retrieved from <https://shegeeksout.com/12-pitfalls-to-avoid-when-creating-a-diversity-inclusion-council/>

Updated by Diana Allan and Carole Blankenship (January 2022)

Preparation by Diana Allan; assistance by Linda J. Snyder and Matthew Valverde (April 2020)

For addition to all NATS Leadership Manuals

Reviewed and approved by Karen Brunssen, President, Carole Blankenship, President-Elect, and the NATS Advocacy Committee (June 2020)

Loraine Sims, Chair; Gregory Brookes, Jill Terhaar Lewis, Jess Munoz, Stephen Ng, Marcía Porter, Darryl Taylor, Linda J. Snyder; Karen Brunssen, President