

Inclusion in a Virtual Environment

Our Corporate Promise is: Working together, aligned with City Council, we enable a better life for all Edmontonians. A key piece of this promise is *working together*, especially in our current virtual environment. At the City, we define inclusion as creating an environment in which all individuals feel like they belong and are valued for their unique perspectives and skills. We all need to attend to ensuring that people continue to feel like they belong - even when working alone from home. The five ideas outlined below can help us feel like we are *working together*.

ALL EMPLOYEES

The following ideas are appropriate for all employees, including leaders.

Participate in Team Bonding Activities

Loneliness is a real concern for people working from home. Counter social isolation with experiences of team bonding.

- Take the initiative to create a Google Chat group and use it to keep in touch with everyone. Share questions, funny memes, or thoughts. It is a great way for a group of people to stay connected.
- Join regular team meetings and share “kudos.” Create opportunities for colleagues to take turns recognizing each other’s accomplishments (no matter how small) and behaviours we are grateful for.
- Have a weekly “team challenge.” For example, your team may decide to share photos of their home workspace or photos of their pets with the rest of the group.

Acknowledge Your Colleagues

Peer recognition of meaningful work goes a long way. This simple act greatly boosts feelings of belonging and engagement in the workplace.

- Acknowledge when a colleague does an exceptional job, and acknowledge their perseverance and hard work during these challenging and complex times. This can happen during a team meeting, or over Google Chat.
- Do not forget to celebrate! Milestones such as birthdays or work anniversaries can be great catalysts for a team celebration.

Establish Inclusive Team Communications

The casual environment of virtual communications like Google Chat makes it easy to forget that it is still a professional setting.

- Just as we would in person, attend to any biases, judgements or assumptions you may have about your colleagues.
- Sometimes our use of GIFs, memes, and certain slang terms can perpetuate stereotypes against marginalized groups. Check out our [Inclusive Language Guide](#) for terms to use and terms to avoid.
- Check out this [quick guide](#) to inclusive emoji use, to ensure virtual chats remain fun and safe spaces for all.
- Use video-conferencing. Facial expressions and non-verbal cues can provide you with information that you would not receive over the phone. It also helps humanize the team.

Normalize Caregiving

Caregiving is often only associated with childcare. It is important to expand an understanding of caregiving during this unprecedented time to include caring for each other, caring for elderly parents, family members, and loved ones.

- Recognize the “new normal” and how children, family, loved ones and pets may unintentionally interrupt calls and video conferences. Create an appreciative orientation; these little interruptions can allow team members to get to know each other better, and inject some much needed humour. Consider introducing your family members/loved ones/pets to the rest of the team.
- This can be a time of anxiety and fear for many people. Check in with your colleagues about how they are doing and create space for colleagues to share how they are feeling.

Keep your Leader Updated on Your Work and Accomplishments

Leaders may be quite busy at this time, but it is still important to ensure that you can meet regularly with your leader.

- If your leader has not initiated it, connect with them about scheduling weekly or bi-weekly one-on-ones.
- Keep shared notes so that you have a shared understanding of the discussion and any decisions.
- Keep a record of your work so that you are ready to update your leader on your questions and accomplishments. This demonstrates that you value your time with them.

SUPERVISORS

The following ideas are specific to leaders.

Foster Team Bonding

Loneliness is a real concern for people working from home. Counter social isolation with experiences of team bonding.

- Encourage your team to create a Google Chat group and use it to keep in touch with everyone.

- Have regular team meetings and share “kudos.” Create opportunities for colleagues to take turns recognizing each other’s accomplishments (no matter how small) and behaviours we are grateful for.

Acknowledge the Team

Leader recognition of meaningful work goes a long way. This simple act greatly boosts feelings of belonging and engagement in the workplace.

- Ask your employees how they would like to be acknowledged. Some enjoy public recognition, some prefer private appreciation.
- Acknowledge when a team member does an exceptional job, and acknowledge their perseverance and hard work during these difficult times.

Establish Inclusive Team Communications

The casual environment of virtual communications like Google Chat makes it easy to forget that it is still a professional setting.

- Role model inclusive, non-biased communications and interactions, and address exclusive and/or disrespectful behaviours.

Normalize Caregiving

Caregiving is often only associated with childcare. It is important to expand an understanding of caregiving during this unprecedented time to include caring for each other, caring for elderly parents, family members or loved ones.

- Host a discussion with your team about “new norms” and how children, family, loved ones, and pets may unintentionally interrupt calls and video conferences. Create an appreciative orientation; these little interruptions can allow team members to get to know each other better, and inject some much needed humour.
- Ask team members what they need, and have open and honest conversations about these needs, including work time flexibility due to caregiving requirements.
- This is a time of anxiety and fear for many people. Create space for your team to share how they are feeling.

Prioritize One-on-Ones

As a leader, you know the importance of one-on-one meetings with your direct reports. With remote teams it is even more important than before.

- Block off designated time in your calendar and schedule one-on-ones with your direct reports on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.
- Keep shared notes so that you have a shared understanding of the discussion and any decisions.
- Engage more often than you think you need to. Especially during this time, it is easy to prioritize other work, and colleagues may be out of sight, out of mind.

- Consider occasional one-on-ones with your entire team, including those who do not report directly to you. Scheduling 20-minute check-ins with the larger team can be a great substitute for how you might usually wander around the office to say hello to all the staff in your section.

With the technology we have at our disposal, we are able to stay connected, be inclusive, and work together virtually more than ever before.

Resources:

[Safe Disclosure Office](#)

[City Chaplain, John Dowds](#)

[LifeWorks by Morneau Shepell](#)

[Inclusive Language Guide](#)

Adapted from:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cdb02d1ebfc7f4d8f68fd54/t/5e7cac3d50c13d2da7a93be2/1585228862866/Inclusive+Remote+Work.pdf>