



IPG
Diversity &
Inclusion

INTENTIONAL INCLUSIVITY

WHILE WORKING REMOTELY

AWARENESS, OWNERSHIP AND ADVOCACY
FOR VIRTUAL TEAMS

INTRO

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting every one of us. While this crisis may feel challenging and isolating, it is important to remember that intentional inclusion can help mitigate the impact on our well-being, sense of belonging and productivity.

The purpose of this guide is to find helpful strategies for teams to be mindful of changing dynamics and working inclusively while navigating a completely virtual workplace.

In conjunction with this guide, the IPG Diversity & Inclusion team has created the microsite www.inclusiveatwork.com, which will be updated regularly with tools, trainings and other resources.

If you have questions or comments, please email us at:
diversity@interpublic.com.

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Maintaining Inclusion

As we respond and adapt to the evolving impacts of COVID-19 on our working environments, it's ever more important to maintain a mindful and compassionate approach as our overlapping identities and multi-dimensional lives intersect. How do we continue to work, show empathy and maintain trust?



How we talk about this situation matters

- Recognize we are all impacted. Encourage your teams to take the issue seriously and do their part to minimize potential transmissions.
- The "young & healthy" narrative is not only ageist and ableist, it ignores the immuno-compromised and people living with invisible or mental disabilities.
- Do not contribute to discourse that is harmful to everyone, especially those who are most marginalized.

Call out racism and xenophobia

- Uncertainty can fuel fear and anxiety which can lead to poor decision making, bigotry and biased narratives, including anti-Asian/Chinese rhetoric.
- Be vigilant and call attention to harmful narratives regarding the COVID-19 outbreak among your teams.

Remote is our new normal

- Consider new childcare/elder-care responsibilities team members may be navigating.
- Consider how school and business closures will impact team members.
- Make room for unexpected interruptions and non-traditional working hours.
- Ensure remote work is equitable and inclusive for all employees.
- Institute flexible policies so employees do not fear negative consequences for asking for time to care for their families.

Conduct regular all-team meetings

- Dedicate time to share concerns and alleviate the need for COVID-19 to consume every meeting.
- Share verified information from trusted sources to mitigate fear and hysteria spread by the dissemination of false information.
- Share IPG's Covid-19 Watchpage. [Click here for link.](#)

Allyship

What's an ally? An ally is someone who actively promotes and aspires to advance the culture of inclusion through positive, intentional and conscious efforts that benefit people as a whole. Remember allyship is active, not passive. True allyship involves taking actions to stand up for and support those who are marginalized.

Inclusive language

- Avoid racializing COVID-19 – it is an illness; it has no race or ethnicity.
- Adopt inclusive terms like “spouse” or “significant other.”
- Make sure to use pronouns correctly. It's good practice to share pronouns at the start of meetings:
 - e.g., “Let's start this meeting with our names and pronouns. I am Jay and I use they/them as my pronouns.”

Feeling seen and heard

- Make space for complex emotions by creating group chats/calls for teams to express their feelings in times of uncertainty and heightened emotions.
- Share growth opportunities and helpful guides, articles and resources with your team to help navigate new situations.

Believe underrepresented peoples' experiences

- Practice active listening and learn new ways to support underrepresented team members.
- Advocate for them and their skills.
- Recognize and acknowledge blind spots.

Covering

- A strategy people use to minimize or hide a stigmatized part of their identity in order to avoid potential negative effects of bias.
- Respect how much or how little people want to share as work and home life blend.
 - e.g., an LGBTQ+ member of the team who is not out publicly at work, or is not out to their families creates a complicated dynamic.

Code-switching

- When a person changes how they speak or act depending on who they engage with.
- Be mindful that working from home can make these situations even more complex.

Microaggressions

- Subtle verbal, behavioral or environmental actions (intentional or unintentional) that communicate bias toward targeted groups including people of color, women, LGBTQ+ persons, persons with disabilities and religious minorities.
- The impact of these subtle yet systematic inequalities can be exacerbated in written and text form.
- To learn more about microaggressions, [click here](#).

“Employee feelings of inclusion are linked to a 56% increase in job performance and a 50% drop in turnover risk.”

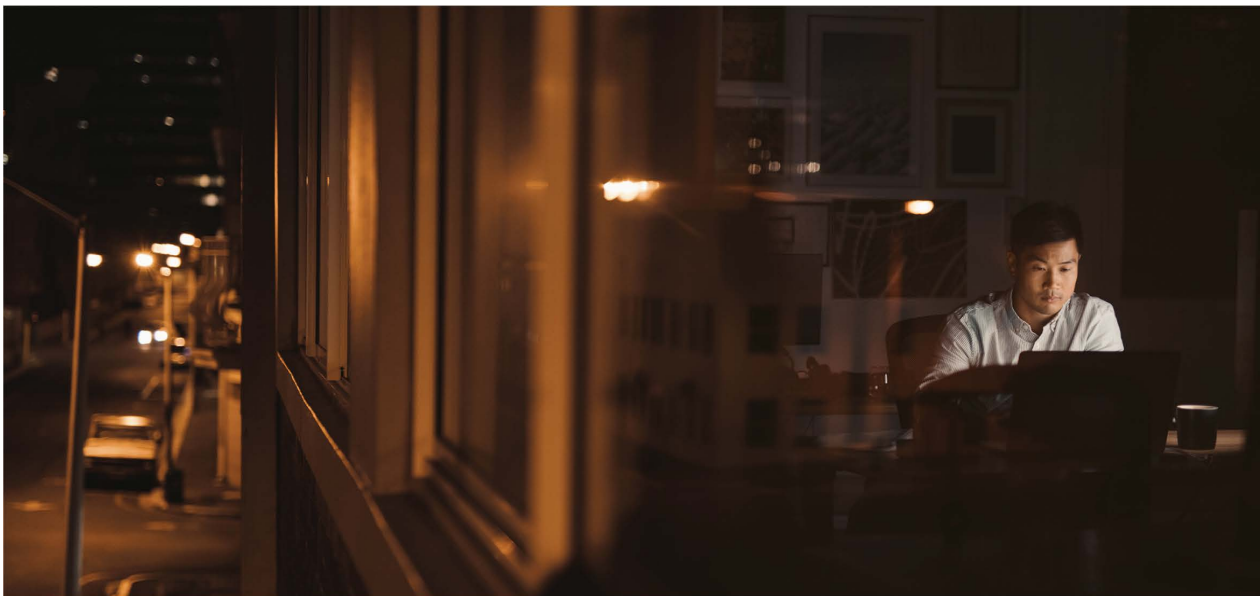
– Catalyst Learning Burst, *Managing Your Remote Team Inclusively*

Working Equitably

Keep in mind that everyone's situation is different. Now more than ever, it's vital to hold space for all dimensions of diversity and acknowledge that we are all in this together. Take an equitable approach by checking in with your team.

Assess the team situation and take stock of where everyone is with regard to:

- **Technology**
 - Varying levels and access to technology can create disruptions in workflow and meetings
- **Infrastructure**
 - Even in the best-case scenario, internet usage is at its peak right now and outages are likely
- **Personal dynamics**
 - Children, caregiving, and living situations all play a role in our capacity to be present and focused
 - Expect delays and offer help wherever possible



Tune into the needs and concerns of individual team members

- Acknowledge that different tactics work for different people
- Start times may be earlier or later; lunch may not be at 12pm, etc.
- Experiment with what works for each person and the team as a whole

Step into "enablement mode"

- Ask "How can I help?" and "How can I unblock you?"
- Resolve the needs of each individual team member so they are set up for success
- Remember: remote onboarding is a continual process

KEEP IN MIND:

- Don't expect perfection, or even "normal"
- Be flexible and positive about possible solutions
- Be honest, open-minded and respectful
- Ask versus tell; collaborate versus dictate

"Distance, diversity and digital communication make it essential for managers to foster a sense of team purpose. Remind everyone of your common goals and how they contribute to them."

– Catalyst Knowledge Burst, *Managing Your Remote Team Inclusively*

Inclusive Communication

Ensure information is communicated and disseminated equitably. Even when in the office, everyone's communication style is different. Being intentional about how we communicate is key to adjusting to new workflows.

Be flexible about how teams communicate

- Recognize that some methods may work better for certain people and not others. Be intentional about the choices being made.
- Communicate priorities clearly so teams understand what to focus on – and when.

Pause to consider who isn't on the call/email

- Make an agenda with key issues and items that need to be discussed.
- When there are lots of people in the meeting, it can help to select a moderator to read through comments and in the chat. This helps ensure everyone has a chance to chime in.

Asynchronous communication

- Normalize the possibility of disruptions and the need to reschedule by being open and flexible.
- Proactively share hours available (child nap times, etc.)
- Signal and respect availability by letting others know when you need "heads down" time.
- Ask "Is now a good time to...?"



KEEP IN MIND:

- Virtual all-team stand-up for 10-15 min daily
- Weekly 1-on-1's with each team member
- End each week with a roundup of accomplishments

Video communication

- Helpful for team members with difficulty hearing.
- Also use tools with capability to blur or mask backgrounds.
 - e.g., introverts may have difficulty when typically relying on body language to help assert points during meetings.

Phone conversations

- Allow for attendees who need or prefer audio participation only.

“Inclusive meetings ensure that you get the best and most innovative solutions from your team. When everyone feels comfortable speaking up, you’re able to take advantage of their diverse perspectives and thinking.”

– Catalyst Knowledge Burst, *Running More Inclusive Meetings*

Raising Issues

Recognizing tone, impact and accountability matters! Remember that above all, we are in this together. Teamwork is more important than ever to get through times of crisis.

Try not to make hasty decisions about team members

- Ask yourself 3 questions, pause, and reflect:
 - What information don't I have?
 - What else could be true?
 - Is now the right time to bring this up?

Move on from past grievances

- Let go of minor disputes whenever possible.
- If an issue is ongoing, consider having a phone call or video chat to resolve it.

Separate intent from impact

- When communication is primarily virtual, your tone or the message itself can be taken differently than you originally intended.
- Even with the best intentions, the impact of our words may be hurtful.
 - e.g., ellipses and all capitals (all-caps) may be taken differently than intended. Some people read all-caps as excitement, others as yelling.
- Take accountability and move forward, together.

Be positive wherever possible

- People are more likely to express negative thoughts and ideas in writing.
- Try emphasizing positivity with more intention.



“Emojis and GIFs can be used as a guide to interpreting tone, to soften feedback, or to strengthen positive communication such as a thank-you or a compliment on a job well done. If your team isn’t already using emojis, encourage them to experiment with their use.”

– Catalyst Learning Burst, *Managing Your Remote Team Inclusively*

Coping with Isolation, Together

Engage in positive social interactions with team members by creating virtual activities. This improves team morale and can help diffuse tension. Remember to keep it work-friendly!

Personal Coping Strategies

- Take brain breaks. Try not to sit and work all day! Set up times to get up or move around.
- Recognize others will need to do these things, too.
- Optimize self-care, however that looks for you.
- Use time/task-tracking systems to keep yourself motivated and check items off as you go.

Team Coping Strategies

- Consider creating virtual watercoolers, like a chat channel for mindless silly talk, funny videos, photos of pets, etc.
- Try setting up 20-minute coffee/tea breaks for the entire team.
- Send short videos to the team showcasing what you did over the weekend.
- Try a "go to lunch" hour with a team video chat.



KEEP IN MIND:

- Inclusion starts with office dynamics, even when we're not in the office
- Always make sure to be respectful
- Get to know your team as a priority
- Be a role model for inclusive language and team behaviors

“It seems obvious, but casual “water cooler chats” – or any instance in which employees make connections and share interests such as sports teams, books, or even the weather – are a first step in building empathy and trust among colleagues.”

– Catalyst Knowledge Burst, *Managing Your Remote Team Inclusively*

Conclusion

These are unprecedented times. Now more than ever, inclusiveness, understanding, compassion and kindness are paramount. We all have a responsibility to ourselves and our teams to take accountability for our words, have patience for uncertainty and be gentle with each other. Remember that working from home may be new to a lot of us – and that working remotely with our entire households also at home is certainly uncommon.

While this guide is meant to help teams get through the day-to-day routines, there are deeper topics we are building on for a more in-depth analysis on the ways in which Diversity & Inclusion are impacted by remote work. So be on the look-out for more ways to improve connection, teamwork and inclusion.

If you have questions, comments or would like to see a topic addressed, please email us at diversity@interpublic.com.



