

## BUILD COMMUNITY: Steps for Community Building

### WHAT IS COMMUNITY BUILDING?

Community building means providing support that enables the diverse members of a unit get to know each other better, build closer connections (whether in relation to work or social relations), and be able to develop relationships based on respect, shared experiences, and trust.

Community building for equity, diversity and inclusion means finding ways that all members of a diverse team can get together to share and build upon their differences, get to know each other better and work together towards common goals.

### WHY IS COMMUNITY BUILDING IMPORTANT?

Everyone deserves a place of work where they are appreciated, welcomed and valued for who they are. Community building creates connections which make possible the sharing, integration and synthesis of the diverse perspectives of the members of a unit. It builds resilience in relationships as people have a richer and deeper appreciation of the members of their unit as people. A strong sense of community enables work to flow more smoothly, eases collaborations, improves creativity and reduces the risk of smaller interpersonal misunderstandings escalating into unit-wide interpersonal conflicts, which require resources and time to manage. Community building is preventive medicine that keeps your team healthy and functioning well.

### PRINCIPLES THAT SUPPORT COMMUNITY BUILDING

Effective community building starts with a positive, inclusive orientation and approaches that create a safe environment:

- The leader sees community building as crucial for success of individuals as well as teams.
- Time is allocated for people to participate.
- There are varying ways to engage, recognizing the wide range and diversity of people in your unit, so that everyone can find a way to participate comfortably.
- Participants expect learning, growth and challenges.
- The leader takes the lead to be vulnerable, to share, and to acknowledge what they need to learn.
- Participants acknowledge power, privilege, different positionality and their impacts on people's experiences.

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## THINGS TO AVOID

To do this well, make sure you avoid some approaches that can work against community building. These include:

- Forced sharing. Sharing personal details should always be optional and pressure-free.
- Expecting members of marginalized groups to lead, to be the ones to self-disclose, or to be more visible than the majority members of the unit.
- Events organized around elements that can exclude. Whether it's an expectation that everyone will consume alcohol, or a holiday celebrated by only some, avoid having exclusive elements as the focus of an event.
- Too much oversight by leaders. Members need to be able to participate without feeling that their performance is being observed or judged.

## EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES AT UVIC

- Shared lunch times and meals. This could range from establishing a central lunch space, adding snacks to make it welcoming, hosting a potluck, or occasionally catering a lunch.
- Walking groups. Have regular times established for campus walks and encourage participation. Consider a sign-up sheet as well as invitations so that everyone knows they are welcome.
- Icebreaker activities or check-in times built into regular meetings that encourage members to socialize, connect and feel seen. Let people know ahead of time so they can prepare. Examples:
  - Share one word describing how you feel today
  - Share the most interesting project you're working on
  - Share the most challenging project/situation you're facing
  - Share something fun/ something interesting you have read or observed
- Interactive education. Learning together, particularly in interactive formats, is a great way for a team to grow and grow closer. Examples:
  - Take an [EQHR course](#) on sexualized violence, discrimination, racism, and more
  - Take a course together through the [Learning Calendar](#) (Human Resources) or [Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation](#)
  - Bring in units on campus to share their work or provide updates on projects
- Fun! Whether people are participating in games, social outings, attending arts events or more, these are opportunities for people to connect through a shared experience. Enjoying an activity together fosters relationships because we share and learn about others, giving us a more full sense of who they are beyond their employment roles.

## NEXT STEPS FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

Talk with your unit about your interest in building community and take time to explore what options are most valuable for members (see document "Include It: Embed EDI Dialogues" for ideas about holding this conversation). Build these ideas in over subsequent months and then follow up to see what's working and what else is needed.