COMMUNITY FORUM PROGRAM GUIDEBOOK

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For: Ontario Association of Certified
Engineering Technicians and Technologists (OACETT)

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SETTING THE FOUNDATION
WHY BELONGING AND INCLUSION (BI) MATTERS

Purpose of this Guide

This guide is intended to support the creation of inclusive, equity-informed community forums for OACETT members. Whether you are participating in a community forum discussion, posting for engagement, or connecting with your Chapter, this resource will help you recognize and uphold the values that make inclusive spaces powerful, respectful, and transformative.

How do we define BI?

- **Diversity of Thought:** Welcoming a wide range of perspectives and ideas by valuing different ways of thinking, problem-solving, and interpreting experiences.
- **Equity:** Recognizing that different members face unique barriers and tailoring resources and support accordingly.
- **Inclusion:** Proactively and intentionally involving individuals from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that every voice is valued and heard.
- **Accessibility:** Removing barriers to participation through thoughtful design, accommodation, and proactive communication.
- **Cultural Humility:** Engaging in continuous self-reflection and learning about our own biases and others' lived experiences.
- **Belonging:** Fostering environments where people feel respected, safe, and free to be their authentic selves.

Why BI Strengthens Outcomes

When belonging and inclusion are embedded into forum spaces, members feel genuinely seen, valued, and included. This leads to deeper engagement, as individuals are more likely to contribute openly when the environment reflects and respects their identities and lived experiences. Inclusive design also ensures that everyone can participate fully, regardless of ability, language, or background, making spaces more accessible and welcoming.

Forum relationships grounded in BI principles foster trust, shared growth, and mutual respect. By acknowledging power dynamics, embracing cultural humility, and valuing different perspectives, these spaces move beyond transactional exchanges to allow more meaningful connections and transformative discussions. The result is more innovative dialogue, stronger interpersonal connections, and community impact that is lasting and equitable.

DESIGNING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY FORUMS

Community forums are vital spaces for connection and dialogue. Every member plays a role in fostering belonging through respectful, inclusive engagement.

Inclusion Begins with Awareness

Every positive and intentional contribution helps shape who feels acknowledged, valued, and encouraged to participate. Inclusive spaces are built when members remain mindful of whose voices are present and whose may be absent. Those who contribute frequently are encouraged to create space for others to engage, while less vocal members should be reassured that their perspectives are equally important. Forums are most inclusive when members actively listen, amplify a variety of perspectives, and engage without assumptions regarding others' identities, backgrounds, or beliefs.

Communicate Clearly and Thoughtfully

Effective and inclusive communication ensures that all members, regardless of background or communication style, can participate equitably. Members should strive to use clear, inclusive, respectful language and avoid colloquialisms and acronyms, or cultural references that may not be widely understood. When sharing images or multimedia, providing brief descriptions or captions enhances accessibility for individuals using assistive technologies or engaging in different ways. Imagery should reflect the diversity of the community and avoid reinforcing stereotypes. Seemingly small decisions can contribute significantly to a welcoming environment.

Foster Respect and Safety

Psychological safety is fundamental to any respectful online space. All members are expected to uphold shared values and protect individuals from harm, harassment, or exclusion. Members should communicate respectfully, even during disagreement, and focus on ideas rather than individuals. When inappropriate or harmful content arises, use available reporting tools to address concerns. Maintaining a safe space is a shared responsibility and essential for open, honest dialogue.

Share the Space

Power dynamics and participation imbalances can exist even in digital spaces. Members are encouraged to be mindful of how often and in what ways they contribute. Creating an inclusive environment involves ensuring that all members, regardless of confidence, role, or identity, feel invited to participate. This may include offering encouragement, acknowledging others' contributions, or pausing before responding to allow space for new voices. A respectful forum culture is not about perfection, but about continuous learning, empathy, and intentional inclusion.

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EMBEDDING BI IN STRUCTURES, POLICIES, AND EVALUATION

Building an equitable and inclusive environment requires shared commitments and ongoing reflection. While OACETT is responsible for embedding Belonging and Inclusion (BI) in their structures and policies, members play a vital role in upholding these efforts through everyday engagement.

Upholding Shared Commitments

Members are expected to act in accordance with the Code Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct, which is a cornerstone of membership and certification within OACETT. This outlines the agreed standards for respectful, inclusive, and equitable participation. Upholding these commitments means more than passive agreement—it involves regularly reflecting on how one's behaviour aligns with shared expectations and contributing to a space where all members feel welcomed, valued, and respected.

Engaging in Feedback and Accountability

Inclusive communities are strengthened by open feedback and the willingness to learn and adapt. Members should feel invited to share their experiences, offer constructive feedback, and contribute ideas for improving equity across the program or space. When providing input, it is helpful to focus on both individual experience and collective impact. Members also play a role in holding themselves and one another accountable to shared standards, speaking up when something feels misaligned with BI values and using available channels to raise concerns when needed. This strengthens the integrity and responsiveness of the community as a whole.

Reflecting on Inclusion and Impact

Participation in evaluation processes is a meaningful way to support BI. Whether responding to surveys, engaging in dialogue, or reflecting individually, members can help track whether the environment is truly inclusive and equitable in practice. This might involve responding to questions about whether everyone feels welcome, whether diverse perspectives are valued, or whether certain groups face barriers to participation. Reflecting honestly on these questions—and noticing patterns over time—helps ensure that BI efforts remain active, not passive. Members are encouraged to see themselves as part of the process of learning, improving, and evolving together.

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TOOLS, PROMPTS, AND RESOURCES

The following tools and resources are provided to support inclusive, reflective participation. Members are encouraged to explore and apply them thoughtfully, using them as a foundation for more equitable communication and collaboration.

Inclusive Language Guidance

Inclusive language helps foster belonging and prevents unintended harm. This guide supports members in choosing words that are respectful, identity-affirming, and accessible to a broad audience.

- **Use people-first or identity-affirming language.** For example: "person with a disability" or "disabled person," depending on individual preference. When in doubt, ask.
- **Avoid stereotypes or outdated terminology.** Replace terms like "crazy," "normal," or "manpower" with alternatives like "unexpected," "typical," or "workforce."
- **Use gender-neutral expressions.** Opt for terms such as "everyone," "colleagues," or "team" instead of "guys" or "ladies and gentlemen."
- **Be mindful of cultural context.** Recognize that idioms, slang, or humour may not be appropriate or inclusive to all participants.

Considerations for Inclusive Dialogue

Use these questions when engaging in community forums to encourage thoughtful, inclusive spaces:

- "Whose voices or perspectives might be missing from this discussion?"
- "How might our identities or lived experiences shape the way we're approaching this topic?"
- "Is there anything about this space that might make it easier or harder for someone to participate fully?"
- "What assumptions are we making, and how might we challenge or reframe them?"
- "How can we ensure that our feedback or guidance is both constructive and culturally respectful?"

Additional Resources

- [Harvard Implicit Bias Test](#)
- Community Forum/Mentoring Program Code of Conduct

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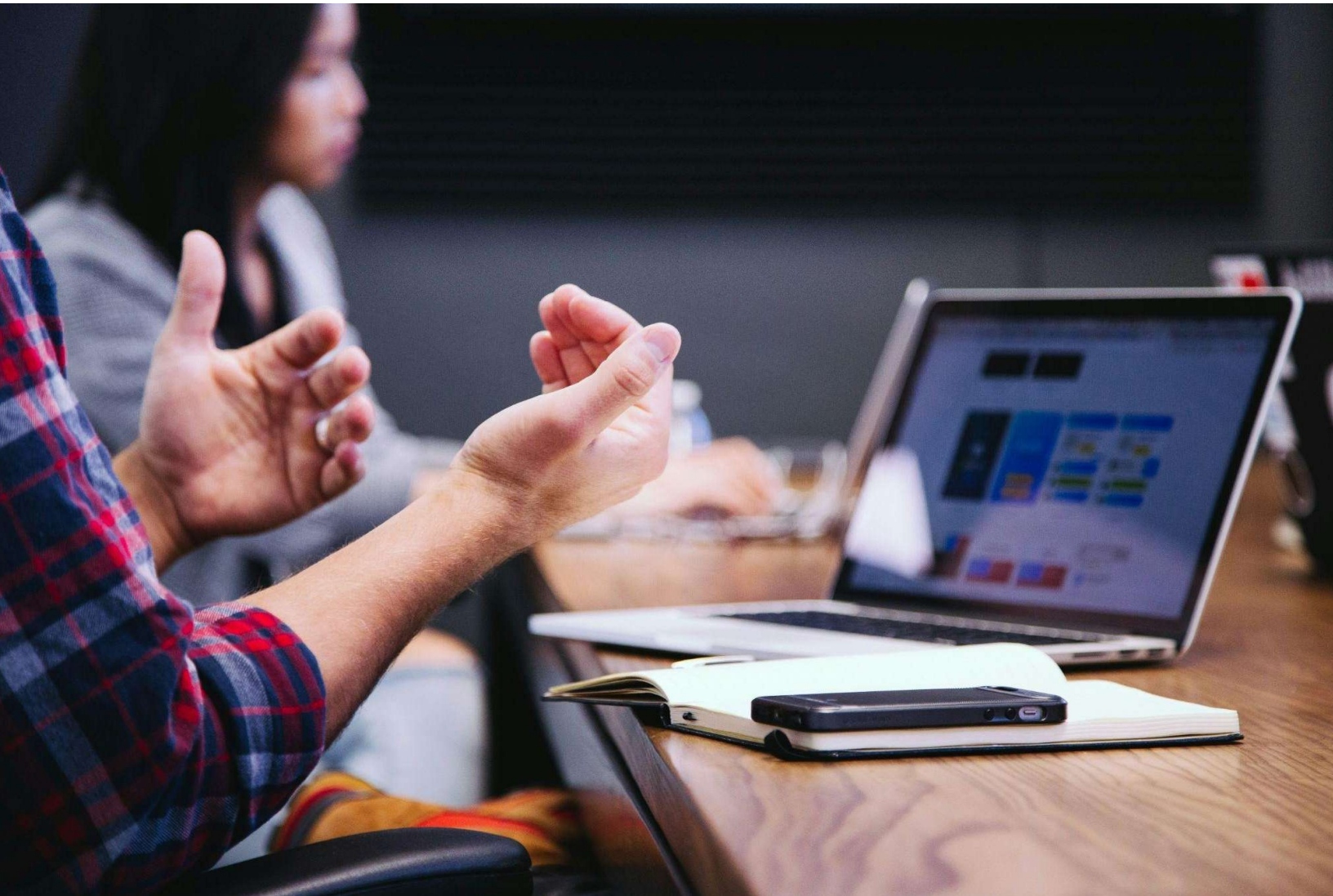
Contact the Team

Belonging and Inclusion Committee

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