

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI) MANUAL





Artificially Intelligent Manufacturing Paradigm for Composites

Led by Clemson University
230 Kappa St., Suite 200
Clemson, SC 29634-5701

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AIM Director
Srikanth Pilla, Ph.D.,
Professor and Director
Center for Composite Materials
University of Delaware
(419) 320-1861 | spilla@udel.edu



Preface by Nicholas Morgan, Inclusive Excellence Coordinator



At an early age, I was diagnosed with a neurodivergent disorder, ADHD (attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder) and other learning disabilities. This disorder means my brain is wired differently than an average child's. This disorder made it difficult for me to focus on school and caused me to be very forgetful and prone to emotional outbursts. My parents tried their best to help, whether it was putting me on medication or even having to homeschool me at times. It was not until after high school that I managed to get a handle on it, and even then, my mother was worried that I would struggle in college. Luckily, the colleges I attended offered much-needed accommodations such as extra time for tests and being able to sit in front of the classroom. These accommodations allowed me to push past my ADHD and graduate with a bachelor's degree from Western Carolina University. This undergraduate

degree allowed me to eventually get my master's from Clemson University two years later, leading to a full-time job there. My mom always reminds me that she doubted I would make it this far and she was glad that I proved her wrong.

The way I learn best is through experiences of hardship. Those experiences have taught me that you can't teach, communicate, or expect everyone to understand things the same way you can. Without the extra help I got from my friends, family, and the institutions to help me succeed, I would have never gotten this far in life. This is the kind of help I want everyone to have access to.

The point of this story is that while we are different in many ways, we are all capable of greatness if we are all given the chance to express it. We are sometimes hindered by society that only sees us through our gender race, or disability. At AIM, we welcome people of all diverse backgrounds, regardless of race, gender, neurodivergence, or mental or physical disabilities. We provide all sorts of reasonable accommodations for our students and staff that allow them to show their true colors.

Table of Contents

<i>Preface by Nicholas Morgan, Inclusive Excellence Coordinator</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	6
Executive Summary	6
Overview	6
Objectives	8
<i>Plans to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Issues</i>	9
Assessment and Benchmarking	10
Diversity Recruitment Strategy	10
Inclusive Job Descriptions and Advertising	10
Unbiased Screening and Selection Processes	10
Diverse Sourcing and Outreach	11
Candidate Experience and Inclusivity	11
Data Tracking and Reporting	11
<i>Inclusive Workplace Culture</i>	11
Diversity, Representation, and Equal Opportunities	11
Respect and Effective Communication	11
Training Programs, Workshops, and Engagement Activities	12
Accountability and Measurement	12
<i>Employee Development and Growth</i>	13
Career Pathing and Planning	13
Feedback and Performance Reviews	13
Stretch Assignments and Projects	13
Diversity and Inclusion Data Analysis	14
Mentorship and Coaching	15
<i>Equitable Policies and Practices</i>	15
Equal Pay and Compensation Transparency	15
Inclusive Benefits and Work-Life Policies	15
Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policies	16
Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and Affinity Groups	16
Continuous Monitoring and Improvement	16
<i>Building Community Partnerships to Further Advance DEI Efforts/Initiatives</i>	16

Cultural Competence 16

Collaborative Initiatives and Solutions 16

Accessible Communication 16

Capacity Building 17

Sustainability and Longevity 17

Recognition 17

 Validation and Appreciation 17

 Motivation and Engagement 17

 Visibility and Representation 17

 Cultural Transformation 17

Conclusion 18

Introduction

Executive Summary

At AIM, we recognize that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are not only fundamental values but also critical drivers of innovation, productivity, and organizational success. Our commitment to DEI is rooted in the belief that every individual deserves respect, fairness, and opportunities for growth, regardless of their background or identity. AIM EFRC Center DEI initiatives (Figure 1) took place mainly at South Carolina State University, Clemson University, the University of Florida, and the University of Delaware. This reflected AIM’s broad commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity across educational settings and research activities. These initiatives were strategically designed to cover various aspects of academic and professional development, effectively integrating DEI into the core mission of the center.

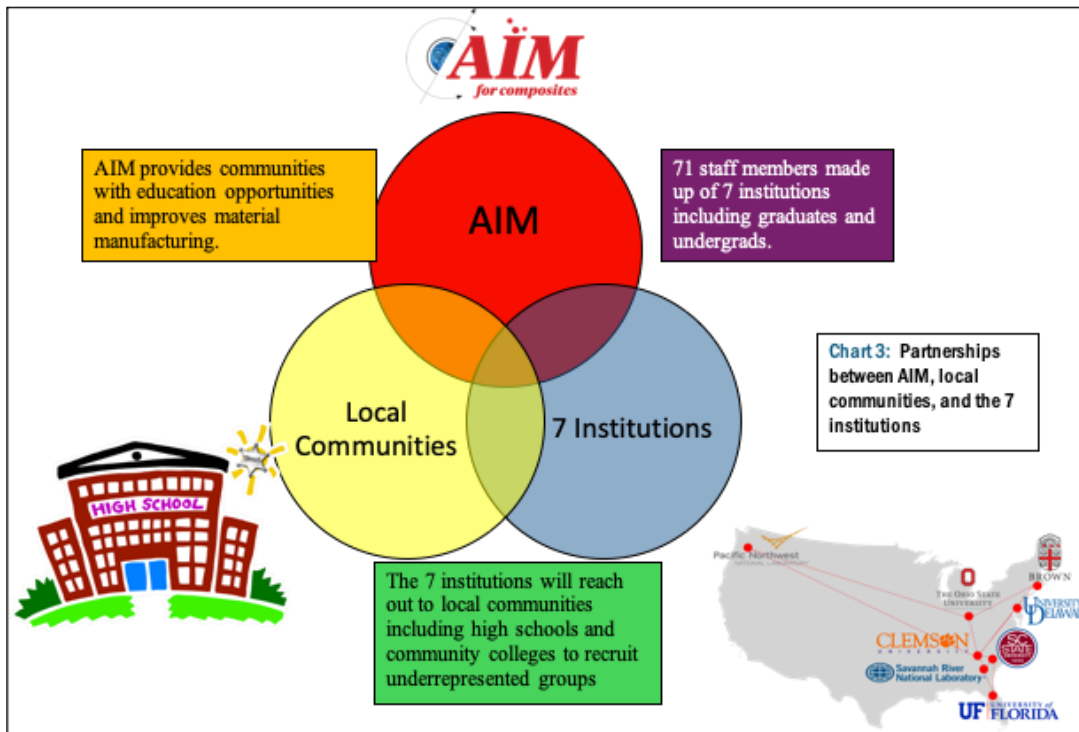


Figure 1.

Overview

We have developed a DEI strategic plan that describes AIM EFRC activities, tasks, milestones, deliverables, evaluation methods, and protocols, including a timeline to accomplish our DEI goals. The development, implementation, and updating of the DEI strategic plan should be led by the inclusive excellence coordinator with input from the DEI advisory board and the EFRC director. As part of the center’s commitment to DEI, center personnel should undergo diversity training facilitated by the inclusive excellence coordinator. This training should foster a welcoming and inclusive environment by supporting those from underserved groups and training a broad coalition of allies from both majority and underserved populations. By participating as a group in this training (both in-person and virtually), center members should seek to create a culture of inclusion within

and among the research groups, advancing equity and encouraging the inclusion and mentoring of all individuals. Creating this culture of inclusion will help students at the center, but training students as allies will also help a much broader set of students that interact with members of the research team in the larger student population. These strategic priorities are summarized in [Figure 2](#).



Figure 2.

The diversity training should consist of two phases, one in each of the first two years of the center's establishment. All graduate students involved with the center are required to attend the training sessions. The first-year workshop, "Microaggressions & Bystander Behavior: A Tool Kit," will equip attendees to recognize microaggressions and give them tools to intervene and help someone experiencing microaggressions. In the second year, the "Intersectional Microaggressions: Race, Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation & More" workshop will cover humans' multiple, intersectional identities. There should be at least one "booster" event every year, such as a brown bag lunch discussion. Center personnel should commit to attending these sessions. While the training should be scheduled at one of the center's review meetings to encourage in-person and collective participation of the center's personnel, virtual sessions should also be arranged. A summary of these commitments is provided in [Table 1](#).

Table 1.

Center Member Standing	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Booster Events
Faculty, Scientists, and Staff (PI and co-PIs)	(Previously taken by Director)	(Previously taken by Director)	One 1-hr event required per year of the grant
Graduate students	Required in 1 st year	Required in 2 nd year	One 1-hr event required per year funded under grant

Undergraduate students	Optional but strongly encouraged	Optional but strongly encouraged	Encouraged to attend with lab mates and faculty
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Our DEI plan includes a strategic priority to recruit and retain a diverse body of students and researchers, which will require targeted action.

Recruitment activities:

- Coordinated recruitment among partner institutions, including supported visits
- Seamless, low-effort interactions with project websites and key information
- Social media planning and implementation connected directly to outreach and marketing
- Increased funding for student participation in conferences and exchange programs
- Apprenticeships/internships for up to 10 students from underserved groups per year

Retention activities:

- Effective mentoring and orientation programs to smooth transitions
- Systematic mentoring and mentor training for early career professional development
- Intervention strategies for students at risk of leaving due to preventable circumstances

We aim to build and enhance opportunities for research and scholarship for diverse personnel, especially from underserved communities. Further, we have established a summer apprentice/internship experience opportunity, especially for those from minority backgrounds. This opportunity should be advertised at our partner institutions and minority institutions across the country. Our DEI advisory board network should also be leveraged for wide marketing of this summer opportunity. Also, workforce readiness for industry, academic, and national lab careers should be implemented through our Early Career Academy.

These DEI initiatives will encourage members of underserved groups to pursue STEM careers, specifically in the areas researched in this center, to increase opportunities for minority and disadvantaged communities. Up to 40% of the center budget should be dedicated to recruiting, retaining, and mentoring members from underserved communities.

Objectives

- **Representation and Inclusive Hiring:** A diverse workforce brings a plethora of perspectives that enrich the educational and research environment. This goal focuses on implementing equitable recruitment strategies that attract a broad range of candidates and creating retention strategies that address the specific needs of diverse employees. This will increase diversity representation at all levels of the organization, with a focus on underrepresented groups. This also includes setting targets for hiring from diverse backgrounds, decreasing potential recruitment barriers, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities for career advancement.
- **Inclusive Workplace Culture:** The center will emphasize fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace culture where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents. This goal involves promoting diversity awareness and education, addressing unconscious bias and microaggressions, and creating an environment

where individuals from all backgrounds can thrive. This will support minority individuals and encourage the integration of DEI into everyday center practices, making inclusivity a norm rather than an exception.

- **Employee Development and Growth:** A main focus will be providing opportunities for professional development and career advancement that are accessible to all employees, regardless of their background or identity. This goal includes offering training and mentorship programs, creating pathways for skill development and promotion, and addressing barriers to advancement for underrepresented groups.
- **Equitable Policies and Practices:** The inclusive excellence coordinator, center leadership, and the DEI advisory board will review and revise organizational policies and practices to ensure they are equitable and inclusive. This may involve implementing pay equity measures, providing accommodations for employees with disabilities, offering family-friendly benefits and flexible work arrangements, and eliminating discriminatory practices that perpetuate inequities.
- **Build Community Partnerships to Further Advance DEI Efforts/Initiatives:** Collaboration with external organizations can enhance DEI efforts significantly. This goal involves forming partnerships with other educational institutions, non-profits, businesses, and community organizations to share resources, knowledge, and practices related to DEI. These partnerships can lead to joint programs, shared training resources, and cooperative research projects, all of which can expand the impact of DEI initiatives beyond the boundaries of the institution.
- **Adaption and Recognition:** We track key performance indicators related to diversity, equity, and inclusion to assess our progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability at all levels of the organization. Through regular feedback mechanisms, surveys, and reporting, we solicit input from our employees and stakeholders to inform possible amendments to our DEI strategies and initiatives. We also have formal recognition programs that highlight members, both individuals and teams, who demonstrate commitment to DEI principles in their work. Each of these nominations and selection processes for these awards are transparent and inclusive, allowing all employees to participate. Each of these accomplishments will be publicly acknowledged through internal communications, newsletters, and company-wide meetings.

Plans to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Issues

At AIM, one of our core goals is to have a diverse workforce at all levels from the top down. This is done by focusing significant recruitment efforts and resources on underrepresented groups. This is done through a 7-step process shown [Figure 3](#).

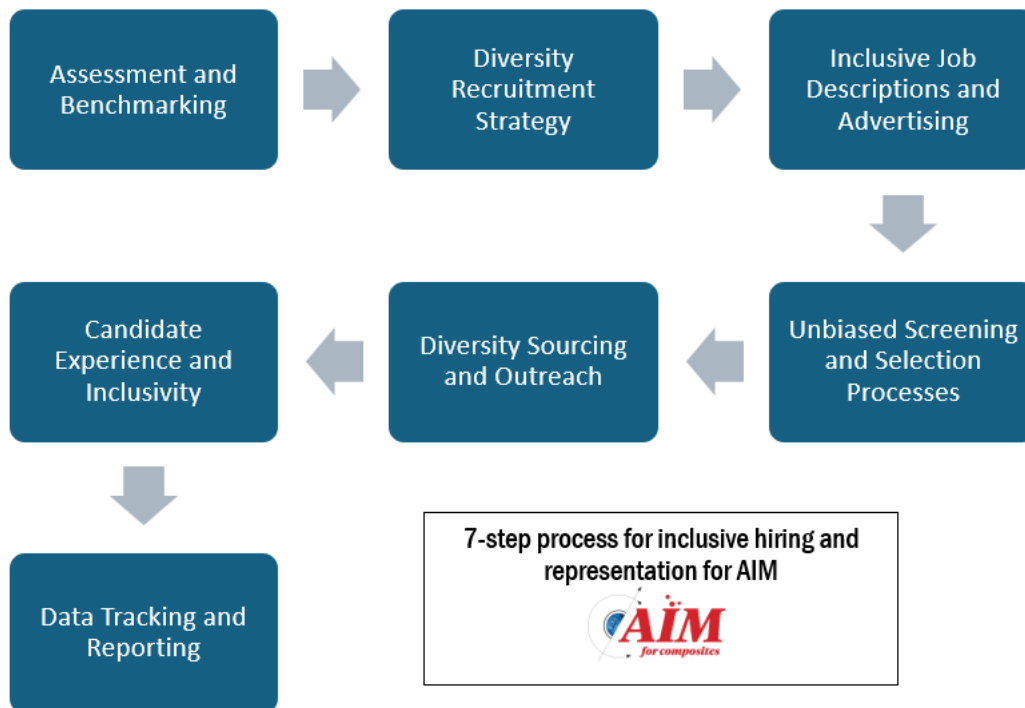


Figure 3.

Assessment and Benchmarking

We will start by conducting an assessment of current diversity representation at all levels of the organization, including leadership positions, teams, and departments. AIM will also benchmark against industry and other organizational standards and best practices to identify areas for improvement and set realistic diversity goals.

Diversity Recruitment Strategy

In order to get the best candidates, AIM will develop a comprehensive diversity recruitment strategy that outlines specific objectives, action steps, and timelines for attracting candidates from diverse backgrounds. We want to identify underserved and underrepresented groups to prioritize in recruitment efforts and establish partnerships with diverse talent pipelines, community organizations, and educational institutions to expand the candidate pool.

Inclusive Job Descriptions and Advertising

To attract a diverse set of candidates, AIM will review and revise job descriptions and advertisements to use inclusive language and avoid biased language or requirements that may inadvertently exclude qualified candidates from underrepresented groups. This will also involve highlighting the organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in job postings to attract diverse candidates.

Unbiased Screening and Selection Processes

AIM will implement a structured interview protocol and standardized evaluation criteria to minimize bias in the screening and selection processes. Hiring managers and interviewers will be provided

with unconscious bias training to increase awareness of potential biases and mitigate their impact on hiring decisions. Diverse representation on hiring panels will prevent groupthink and ensure various perspectives in decision making.

Diverse Sourcing and Outreach

To have a wide, diverse candidate pool, AIM utilizes diverse channels and networks to reach a wide range of candidates from underrepresented groups. AIM has formed partnerships with the following institutions that focus on diversity and inclusion to expand candidate outreach:

- Clemson University
- University of Delaware
- Ohio State University
- South Carolina State University
- University of Florida
- Brown University
- Savannah National Laboratory
- Pacific Northwest National Laboratory

Candidate Experience and Inclusivity

AIM clearly outline the hiring process, including timelines and expectations, to all candidates. Accommodations will be offered for candidates who need them during the application, interview, and assessment process. After the interview has taken place, candidates in order to provide feedback on the hiring process. Identified areas of opportunity will be addressed to continuously improve the inclusivity of the hiring process.

Data Tracking and Reporting

AIM will track data on the demographics of applicants, candidates interviewed, and hired personnel, including race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability status, and other relevant factors. This will include monitoring retention rates of hires from underrepresented groups to assess the effectiveness of DEI initiatives in retaining diverse talent. AIM will also track promotion rates and career progression of employees from different demographic groups to identify and rectify potential disparities.

Inclusive Workplace Culture

In order to retain a diverse workforce, AIM must have leaders who are willing to create a workplace that is suitable for everyone. While these aspects will be mentioned throughout the manual, it is important to know how they are all connected.

Diversity, Representation, and Equal Opportunities

AIM is committed to promoting diversity in hiring practices and ensuring that employees from all backgrounds are represented at all levels of the organization. This also includes providing equal opportunities for career advancement, professional development, and recognition regardless of factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability.

Respect and Effective Communication

Effective diverse organizations require open and honest communication among employees, where everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinions, concerns, and ideas without fear of judgment or reprisal. This includes promoting a culture of respect and empathy, where individuals are sensitive to the experiences and perspectives of others, and where differences are seen as strengths rather than barriers.

Training Programs, Workshops, and Engagement Activities

Education and training initiatives are vital for raising awareness and understanding of DEI principles among students, faculty, and staff. Providing training and education on topics such as unconscious bias, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership helps members understand and navigate issues related to diversity and inclusion, and providing professionalization support allows for members, especially those with minority identities, to progress more quickly and confidently in their career paths. [Table 2](#) outlines a sample of the initiatives that AIM EFRC will develop to support center members' professional growth.

Table 2.

Event Type	Attendees	Example Topics
DEI Training Workshop	AIM Members Only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microaggressions • Intersectionality • Responsible Research • Environmental Health and Safety
Supplemental Training Sessions	AIM Members Only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Development • Mentorship • Proposal Writing and Review • Teaching and Curriculum Development
AIM Outreach Webinars	Open to the Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Machine Learning & Artificial Intelligence • Composite Manufacturing • Proposal Writing and Academic Careers • Careers in Technical Consulting

Accountability and Measurement

To track progress toward DEI goals, the center will establish metrics, benchmarks, and accountability mechanisms. This involves regularly monitoring and evaluating DEI initiatives, collecting data on diversity representation and inclusion metrics, and holding leaders and teams accountable for advancing DEI objectives. Addressing instances of discrimination or bias promptly and effectively across all levels is imperative for the success of AIM DEI programming and will

demonstrate the center's commitment to cultivating a culture of inclusivity and safety for all members.

Employee Development and Growth

Career Pathing and Planning

The center will offer guidance and support to personnel in developing their career paths. Resources provided will include career development workshops, mentorship programs, and career coaching to help employees identify their goals and create actionable plans to achieve them.

Feedback and Performance Reviews

Supervisors will conduct regular performance reviews and provide constructive feedback to center members on their strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for growth. This will encourage open dialogue between employees and managers to discuss career aspirations and development needs.

Stretch Assignments and Projects

Opportunities to take on challenging assignments or lead cross-functional projects within the center will allow personnel to develop new skills, expand their knowledge, and demonstrate their capabilities. These opportunities include:

- **Inclusive Leadership Training:** Provide opportunities for employees to design and deliver inclusive leadership training programs for managers and leaders within the organization. This could include developing curriculum, conducting workshops, and providing resources to help leaders foster a more inclusive work environment.
- **Diversity and Inclusion Data Analysis:** Request employees to assist with a comprehensive analysis of diversity and inclusion data within the organization, including demographic data, employee engagement surveys, and performance reviews. This analysis could help identify areas for improvement and inform DEI initiatives and strategies.
- **Employee Resource Group (ERG) Leadership:** Empower employees to take on leadership roles within employee resource groups (ERGs) or affinity groups focused on diversity and inclusion. This could involve organizing events, facilitating discussions, and advocating for the needs of underrepresented employees within the organization.
- **Accessibility and Inclusion Audit:** Task employees with conducting an accessibility and inclusion audit of physical spaces, digital platforms, and company organizational within the center. This audit could identify barriers to access and inclusion for individuals with disabilities and inform strategies for improvement.
- **Inclusive Marketing Campaign:** Assign a team or individual to develop an inclusive marketing campaign that celebrates diversity and promotes inclusivity both internally and externally. This could involve creating diverse representation in marketing materials, showcasing diverse stories and perspectives, and promoting messages of equity and inclusion.

Diversity and Inclusion Data Analysis

Assign employees to conduct a comprehensive analysis of diversity and inclusion data collected via center member survey completion. Analysis of this self-reported data could help identify areas of improvement and inform DEI initiatives and strategies. In addition to collecting this data on AIM EFRC personnel, this same survey (edited to remove non-applicable questions) will be distributed during each high school outreach event to track external participant demographic data. Example survey questions and answers are provided in [Table 3](#).

Table 3.

Question	Response Options
What is your gender identity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man • Woman • Non-binary • Prefer not to answer
What is your race?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Indian or Alaska Native • Asian • Black or African American • Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin • Middle Eastern or North African • Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander • White • Multiracial • Prefer not to answer
What are your ethnic origins or ancestry?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Europe (e.g., Greece, Sweden, United Kingdom) • Eastern Europe (e.g., Hungary, Poland, Russia) • North Africa (e.g., Egypt, Morocco, Sudan) • Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa) • West Asia / Middle East (e.g., Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia) • South and Southeast Asia (e.g., India, Indonesia, Singapore) • East and Central Asia (e.g., China, Japan, Uzbekistan) • Pacific / Oceania (e.g., Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea) • North America (Canada, United States) • Central America and Caribbean (e.g., Jamaica, Mexico, Panama)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South America (e.g., Brazil, Chile, Colombia) • Prefer not to answer
Do you have any disabilities in the following categories: hearing, vision, cognition, mobility, self-care, independent living, and/or neurodivergence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Don't know • Prefer not to answer

Mentorship and Coaching

Employees will be paired with experienced mentors or coaches who can provide guidance, support, and advice on career development, skill-building, and navigating challenges in the workplace. COSMIC, for example, is a great tool for incoming students at Clemson University to use by pairing them up with upperclassmen mentors. Mentorship programs at each member institution that may be leveraged are listed below:

- Clemson University–COSMIC: <https://www.clemson.edu/science/students/cosmic.html>
- Ohio State University–Match Mentoring Program: <https://asccareersuccess.osu.edu/undergraduate-students/other-resources/match-mentor-program>
- University of Delaware–ibuddy mentoring program: <https://www.udel.edu/academics/global/signature-programs/cgps-communities/ibuddy/>
- South Carolina State University–KIP Mentoring Program
- University of Florida–Mentorship: <https://career.ufl.edu/gain-experience/mentorship/>
- Brown University–Mentoring and Professional Development: <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/institutional-diversity/resources/campus-resources-students-faculty-staff-and-alumni/mentoring-and-professional-development>
- Savannah National Laboratory–DEI Accessibility: <https://www.srnl.gov/about-us/diversity-equity-inclusion-accessibility/>
- Pacific Northwest National Laboratory–STEM Mentoring: <https://www.pnnl.gov/news-media/mentoring-next-generation-stem-workforce>

Equitable Policies and Practices

At AIM, the same policies apply equally to all members, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or disability. When creating these policies, careful consideration was given to establishing inclusive support for all members from a wide range of backgrounds and current situations.

Equal Pay and Compensation Transparency

The center will ensure pay equity by regularly reviewing compensation practices to identify and address any disparities based on gender, race, ethnicity, or other factors. Pay scale and promotion criteria transparency will promote fairness and accountability.

Inclusive Benefits and Work-Life Policies

AIM's policies that support the diverse needs of employees, such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave, childcare assistance, and accommodations for disabilities, will be accessible to all members, regardless of their background or identity. These policies will be advertised openly and members are encouraged to utilize them as needed.

Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policies

Clear and comprehensive guidelines to prohibiting discrimination, harassment, and retaliation based on protected characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or age provide the basis for AIM EFRC's policies. Members will be trained to effectively recognize and address bias and discrimination.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and Affinity Groups

AIM supports the formation and activities of ERGs and affinity groups that provide spaces for employees with shared identities or experiences to connect, support each other, and advocate for change within the organization. The center will provide resources and leadership opportunities for these groups to amplify their impact.

Continuous Monitoring and Improvement

The inclusive excellence coordinator, center leadership, and the DEI advisory board will assess the effectiveness of DEI policies and practices through data collection, employee feedback surveys, and audits. They will use this information to identify areas for improvement and make adjustments to ensure ongoing progress towards equity and inclusion.

Building Community Partnerships to Further Advance DEI Efforts/Initiatives

Community partnerships play a pivotal role in advancing DEI efforts.

Cultural Competence

AIM will focus on developing Cultivate cultural competence within the organization to ensure that interactions between center members and with local community members are respectful, inclusive, and sensitive to diverse perspectives.

Collaborative Initiatives and Solutions

Community organizations, non-profits, and other local stakeholders are great groups to collaborate with to develop and implement DEI initiatives that extend past the center's own reach. Pooling resources and expertise can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes. By partnering with community organizations, center members can more fully understand the unique challenges and experiences of different groups. This insight is invaluable for developing effective DEI strategies that address systemic barriers and promote equity, and the center can use this gained knowledge to improve internal practices and policies.

Accessible Communication

Communications about DEI efforts will be easily accessible to all center and community members, including those with disabilities or limited English proficiency. To accomplish this, multiple channels

and formats to reach diverse audiences, and the center will strive to abide by ADA accessibility standards with all publications.

Capacity Building

Training and resources will empower community members to become active participants in DEI initiatives. This could include workshops on allyship, cultural competency, and advocacy skills.

Sustainability and Longevity

Strong community engagement creates a sense of ownership and investment in DEI efforts and the center overall, leading to greater project sustainability over time. Community partnerships provide ongoing support and accountability, ensuring that progress is maintained beyond initial initiatives.

Recognition

AIM understands that recognition efforts support the success of DEI initiatives in a variety of ways. Within the center, this recognition can take the form of spotlight posts on social media, call-outs during meetings and events, and awards. Due to their importance, the impacts of recognition will be highlighted below.

Validation and Appreciation

When leaders acknowledge the efforts of individuals or groups who contribute to advancing the center's DEI goals, it will validate their work and demonstrate appreciation for their commitment to fostering a more inclusive environment. Center leadership understands that highlighting the value of this work endorses its merit and ensures that all center members know that their contributions, past and future, will not go unnoticed.

Motivation and Engagement

Recognizing DEI efforts motivates individuals to continue their work and encourages others to get involved. It fosters a sense of belonging and engagement among center members, leading to increased participation in DEI initiatives. Research consistently shows that diverse teams are more innovative, creative, and better equipped to solve complex problems, so getting more a more diverse group of center members to participate in these efforts is essential for their success.

Visibility and Representation

AIM will prioritize making the contributions of underrepresented groups visible and promoting their representation in leadership positions and decision-making processes. It helps combat stereotypes and biases by highlighting diverse perspectives and experiences. It also demonstrates that AIM truly is committed to its DEI goals of recruiting and supporting members of diverse backgrounds.

Cultural Transformation

The center will also signal its commitment to creating a culture where everyone feels valued and respected by acknowledging and celebrating diversity and inclusion efforts. Recognition reinforces desired behaviors, norms, and practices, contributing to long-term cultural transformation.

Conclusion

DEI is more than just a buzzword; it's a fundamental aspect of fostering a fair, respectful, and innovative work environment. By embracing DEI principles, AIM EFRC will benefit from a broader range of perspectives, experiences, and ideas, leading to increased creativity, better problem-solving, and enhanced productivity. Moreover, the center's DEI initiatives will not only improve employee satisfaction and retention but also contribute to a positive organizational image and reputation. Therefore, investing in DEI is not just the ethical strategy; it's also a smart business strategy for long-term success and sustainability.

Looking forward, AIM EFRC will continue advancing DEI through proactive policies, education, and community engagement. By measuring progress, listening to diverse voices, and advocating for inclusive practices, we will collectively build a future where every individual has the opportunity to thrive personally and professionally. AIM recognizes that DEI is an ongoing journey towards a more equitable and inclusive world, and its policies and practices holistically reflect this. By embracing diversity, striving for equity, and promoting inclusion, we will enable all center members to thrive within AIM EFRC and build necessary skills for the next steps in their careers.