

# PTA Leader Toolkit

2023 – 24

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## Section 8: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI)

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## INTRODUCTION TO DEI

PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child. Diversity, equity, and inclusion supports every child with one voice, no matter their race, ethnicity, zip code, income, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, or abilities. LAPTA recognizes that advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion is an integral part of PTA’s work and its vision of making every child’s potential a reality. *LAPTA Toolkit: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* is a resource for PTA leaders to develop and advance their diversity, equity, and inclusion plans and programs in their school and community.

**Diversity** is the range of human differences such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs.

**Equity** is the fair and impartial treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals considering systemic inequalities and outcome disparities within society.

**Inclusion** is active, intentional, and ongoing engagement in diversity in which different individuals or groups who may otherwise be excluded or marginalized are accepted, engaged, and welcomed.

To best serve all students, PTA leaders should become familiar with the demographics of their school and community. This includes enrollment data by gender, ethnicity, disabilities, economic disadvantage, English language learners, migrants, homelessness, and foster care. To access additional specific data, request information from the school or district administration.

# PROMOTE DIVERSITY IN THE SCHOOL

As a powerful voice for ALL children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child, PTAs are well-equipped to foster the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their schools and community. Diversity is the strength of PTA! Those who are intentional in their DEI efforts are most likely to experience great outcomes that benefit all children and their families rather than just isolated patches of success.

A great place to start DEI work in the school is to establish PTA as a sanctuary for all families to gather information, express opinions, concerns, and needs, and feel heard and embraced. PTA can be a resource empowering those traditionally less likely to be engaged in their children's learning and well-being by organizing parent or guardian training and events and by sharing information on relevant topics. Analyze the level of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the PTA's membership, governance, programs, and advocacy efforts. Identify areas of success and other areas in need of more work. Set goals and action plans to address each of these areas.

Form a DEI Committee with clearly defined charges and goals that are periodically reviewed and updated. PTA needs to seek a diverse membership that reflects the diversity of the student body and community it serves through targeted outreach efforts. Consider which groups are less likely to join the PTA or participate in meetings and events. To achieve successful outreach, learn about other cultures, traditions, challenges, and restrictions of the groups needing outreach.

Address issues that matter the most to those needing engagement. Ensure PTA's advocacy efforts represent all children including those typically marginalized and those whose families may not be equally engaged. PTA's advocacy initiatives must be non-political and non-biased. Create a welcoming environment for conversations considered difficult and with a clear understanding that not all members agree on everything, but they must agree to uphold PTA's mission and values. All must agree on the collective goal to serve and to keep all children safe. Engage in ongoing meaningful conversations with school and district administration, school boards, and other stakeholders that recognize the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all decisions.

In the constant efforts to seek new volunteers, PTA leaders are encouraged to recruit leaders from under-represented groups. Consider the whole person such as individual interests, passions, expertise, color, gender, cultural background, or spoken languages. Recruiting people in areas of PTA work that they are passionate about and interested in is more likely to set them up for success and encourage them to grow as leaders. Recruitment does not end with identifying individuals with leadership qualities. It is important to set them up for success and offer support while providing them with the space needed to put their own personal stamp on their work. Establish fair and equitable practices in all areas of PTA's work, including decision making, nominations, elections, appointments, participation, events, topics, and services. Such practices establish trust and respect for the organization as a whole and its leadership.

Have all PTA meetings and events reflect a welcoming and inclusive environment for all. Most importantly, if leaders are reminded of PTA's mission, vision, and core values as the focus and purpose of all PTA work, they are on the right path to applying the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Refer to *How to Hold an Inclusive PTA Meeting* and *How to Organize an Inclusive PTA Event* later in this section.

# **HOLD AN INCLUSIVE PTA MEETING**

When scheduling PTA meetings and times, consider possible conflicts, religious holidays, and work limitations that might prevent some from attending. Possibly alternate days of the week and times of the day. Meetings could be held at two times in one day, such as 11:00 am and 7:00 pm. Survey the school community to find best ways to reach most families.

Assure your meeting location, restrooms, and other needed facilities are accessible to all attendees. A location easy to find makes for prompt arrivals of attendees. Use signage that is clear and legible to all. If the meeting is outside the school, consider locations that are near public transportation and have ample parking.

When publicizing the meeting, consider digital access limitations when sending out fliers electronically and provide printed notice when needed. Ask teachers to include a reminder on the day of the meeting when children write their homework in their agenda planners. Send it out by email and post on the PTA website, Facebook page, and other social media platforms. Ask room parents to reach out to their rosters. Have handouts with all monthly meeting dates at school and PTA events. Assure digital and paper fliers are sent in all spoken languages in your school. When using any electronic translation such as Google Translate, try to have a native speaker proofread the translated flier for accuracy.

Thoughtfully set up the meeting space. All those who attend should be able to have a good view of speakers, screens, etc. so that all attendees are able to see, hear, and engage with each other. Have all handouts and sign-in sheets near the entrance and easily accessible. Consider seating arrangements that make everyone feel equally engaged and significant rather than classroom style or the PTA Board facing the audience. Board members, when possible, can spread throughout the space to mingle and meet other members. When holding a virtual meeting, confirm microphones are placed in locations able to pick up the voice of anyone speaking so those attending virtually can hear them.

For the meeting environment, leaders need to be open-minded, presentable, and approachable, making others feel comfortable. Always realize the significance and responsibilities of leadership roles and how they can impact perceptions and recruitment of members and future leaders. Consider PTA Board members taking turns greeting attendees as they arrive at meetings. Acknowledge new members and attendees as they come in. Name badges make it easier to properly address individuals and to learn their names. Take the time to learn how to pronounce names correctly. Correct pronunciation of names is more than a common courtesy. It is a significant sign of caring and inclusion. Consider having crayons, coloring books, and activities for children accompanying their family members to quietly entertain themselves. Adhere to the meeting agenda, lay the ground rules at the start of the meeting, and treat all with respect and consistency. Allow opportunities on the agenda for feedback and attendee engagement when appropriate, making it clear to all that their suggestions are welcome. Avoid terms that may offend others. When holding a virtual meeting, assign someone to check and address the chat.

If food or beverages are provided, proper sanitary precautions need to be observed. Be sure to take into consideration dietary and religious restrictions as well as food allergies. Provide clear and accessible packaging information and ingredients for those purposes. Serving tables should be accessible to all attendees.

Finally, collect contact information and follow up regarding topics or issues that need to be addressed later. Unless people feel heard, they are unlikely to return to future meetings. Reach out and thank any newcomers. Remember the first time going to a meeting or doing something outside your comfort zone? Make the effort to engage and follow up to create lasting relationships and future leaders!

# ORGANIZE AN INCLUSIVE PTA EVENT

Advertise PTA events through all possible electronic methods, social media, print, mail, and school backpack. Assure event fliers and invitations are translated into all languages spoken in the school community. Avoid communication and participation barriers to ensure that all attendees can participate regardless of their spoken language or physical/mental abilities. Provide clear and transparent explanations of all PTA events and activities, especially to first timers not familiar with the customs of the PTA. The better informed and prepared everyone is, the more comfortable they will feel and the more likely they will return.

Anticipate potential needs that participants might need to attend and take part in the event, such as transportation, directions, time commitment, special accommodations, material, or electronic devices. Support remote platforms providing virtual options such as Zoom and Google Meets when possible. They present great opportunities for families with time restraints and travel or accessibility challenges.

Consider holding certain events at locations other than the school building, taking the event to the people you seek to engage. Alternate locations so everyone can feel important and embraced. Provide calm or quiet spaces if the event has the potential to be loud or filled with excitement. Sensory overload affects many people, young and old. Make sure to advertise that these spaces are available on your communication materials. Consider holding “Sensory Friendly” events like a Bedtime Book Reading family engagement activity or by limiting the number of families who can attend an event and offer more of those events. Utilize icebreakers (see *Icebreakers* later in this section) at the start of events as they present a great tool to put everyone at ease.

Consider inclusive, culturally sensitive, and diverse topics and speakers and invite others to make suggestions for topics they would like to see addressed. Food, beverages, giveaways, and prizes can be utilized as attractive incentives for participation. Families with children are more likely to attend and stay through events that feature fun and engaging activities for children of different ages and abilities.

Your PTA’s DEI Committee can plan a school or district-wide DEI event that promotes diversity and inclusivity through themes, messages, and activities. Celebrate differences! Promote and organize events where all groups can educate others, share information, and advocate for themselves. Connect and collaborate with community-based organizations that share a focus on diversity and inclusion. Engage in active and two-sided dialogue, allowing for opportunities for all stakeholders to express their opinions and needs and those organizing the event, not only speaking, but actively listening and following up.

In addition to families, be sure to invite teachers, school and district administrators, staff, and community partners to PTA events. Building strong connections with all groups assures good relations and positive outcomes for children and families. Organize events that develop positive relationships between teachers and families to help overcome cultural barriers that interfere with active family engagement in children’s education and schools. Plan PTA events that help level the parent/family education field and close the information gap that may hinder family involvement in their child’s education. Events may include family math or science nights, technology, child development topics, and college or career prep and funding, to name a few.

# ICEBREAKERS

An easy way to promote inclusion at PTA meetings is to encourage members to interact with each other. Including an icebreaker at PTA meetings is a fun way to get people acquainted and to feel included. It's a great way to start meetings, encouraging engagement and meaningful introductions before diving into business. To pick an icebreaker, ask what the *main goal* is with the ice breaker. Determine if the goal is to help people get to know each other better, to inspire some fun competition, or to have people learn something new. Consider how the ice breaker is *inclusive*. Keep in mind that participants might have different abilities, interests, and beliefs. Make sure it is accessible and does not exclude anyone from actively participating. Think about how the ice breaker is *interactive*. Ice breakers are a great way to help people mingle and step out of their comfort zone. Plan an ice breaker that helps participants spark new connections and relationships. Here are some suggestions:

**What Do You Love:** Each person states one thing that is non-PTA related that they love. Then others who also love the same thing raise their hands or otherwise gesture.

**Culture Club:** Participants break into small groups and pick three areas of their families' cultural values from a list that includes traditional food, typical dress, acceptable/unacceptable appearance, history, traditions, holidays, and a source of pride or taboo topics. Each person shares their answers.

**Meet Someone New:** Each person shares what month they were born and finds someone born the same month that they don't know well. What's one other thing they have in common?

**Name Tag:** Use this as an initial get-acquainted exercise. As each participant enters the meeting room, they can sign their name as usual, but then give them a different person's name tag. They should seek one another out and introduce themselves to other participants.

**Name Game:** Everyone's name carries history, fun anecdotes, or familial values. Ask each attendee to introduce themselves and then talk about how they got their name or the history behind it. Perhaps they are named after someone specific or maybe their last name means something in an ancestral language.

**Just By Looking at Me:** This activity allows participants to disclose some personal information that others may not know. The goal is to demonstrate that there is much more to a person than meets the eye. Form a circle with chairs if able. Pass around the following script on paper: "My name is \_\_\_ and I am from \_\_\_. One thing you cannot tell just by looking at me is \_\_\_." Demonstrate the prompt first by modeling the exercise. Ask participants to take turns reading the above statement after filling in the blanks about themselves.

**Trivia Game** is a way to spark fun competition between participants while also providing an opportunity to learn something new. Create a list of 15-20 interesting and fun facts related to a theme. Choose the format to host your trivia game such as an online trivia platform for a gameshow effect or take a more traditional approach by using paper or whiteboards. Both options could work in a virtual or in-person setting.

**Guess Who** helps to get to know people in the room through interesting facts without having participants introduce themselves. Have each participant write one or two facts about themselves, either on a piece of paper or have them submit anonymously via email or a google form prior to the meeting. Someone reads the first fact and then participants guess whose interesting fact is being read aloud. Once the correct person is identified, they can elaborate on their fact and then read the next one. Repeat process until all facts are read.

# DEI RESOURCES

The world of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is vast and ever-changing. National PTA has excellent materials and resources for your use. Find these resources and more at [PTA.org/home/run-your-pta/Diversity-Equity-Inclusion](https://pta.org/home/run-your-pta/Diversity-Equity-Inclusion) where all documents are also available in Spanish.

Commitment to DEI:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dei-brief-final-072720.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dei-brief-final-072720.pdf)

Local Leader DEI Guidance:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/2020/diversity/dei-guide-for-pta-local-leaders.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/2020/diversity/dei-guide-for-pta-local-leaders.pdf)

How to Welcome Diverse Perspectives Into Your PTA:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/diversity-outreach-2-pager\\_v3.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/diversity-outreach-2-pager_v3.pdf)

DEI Frequently Asked Questions:

[PTA.org/home/run-your-pta/Diversity-Equity-Inclusion/leadership-tips-and-tools/Diversity-and-Inclusion-Initiatives-Frequently-Asked-Questions](https://pta.org/home/run-your-pta/Diversity-Equity-Inclusion/leadership-tips-and-tools/Diversity-and-Inclusion-Initiatives-Frequently-Asked-Questions)

DEI Community Profile Template:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dei-community-profile-template-final.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dei-community-profile-template-final.pdf)

Enhancing DEI Facilitator's Guide:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/enhancing-dei-facilitator's-guide-final.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/enhancing-dei-facilitator's-guide-final.pdf)

DEI Action Plan Template:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dei-action-plan-template-final.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/dei-action-plan-template-final.pdf)

Inclusive Holiday Planning:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/diversity/inclusive-holiday-programming.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/diversity/inclusive-holiday-programming.pdf)

Inclusive Communication During the Holidays:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/diversity/inclusive-communication-during-the-holidays.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/diversity/inclusive-communication-during-the-holidays.pdf)

Inclusive Curriculum in K-12 Schools:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/files/advocacy/position-statements/inclusive-curriculum-in-k-12-schools-ps.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/files/advocacy/position-statements/inclusive-curriculum-in-k-12-schools-ps.pdf)

LGBTQ Glossary:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/2020/diversity/lgbtq-glossary.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/2020/diversity/lgbtq-glossary.pdf)

How to Talk About Race and Justice in America:

[PTA.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/how-to-talk-about-race-justice-in-americaaa2a48f1aa3e63899f67ff00009b2bd9.pdf](https://pta.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/how-to-talk-about-race-justice-in-americaaa2a48f1aa3e63899f67ff00009b2bd9.pdf)