FOSTERING BELONGING THROUGH INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE REMOTE WORKING PRACTICES

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Fostering Belonging through Inclusive and Accessible Remote Working Practices

While guides to better remote working practices are now widely available (explore <u>The Hybrid & Remote Work Playbook</u>, <u>The Comprehensive Guide to Remote Work</u>, and <u>Resources for companies embracing remote work</u> for leading examples), we want to take a bit of a different approach - how can we ensure that remote working is equitable and inclusive? Equity and inclusion challenges that already exist in non-remote working can be exacerbated or show up in new and different ways when in a virtual context. Organizations must consider the varied and unique needs of their team members, and make intentional choices to ensure that no one is excluded or marginalized during the process.

Creating a standalone guide that details the practices, processes, and resources for remote working in your organization will greatly improve trust and reduce anxiety, confusion, and dysfunction among your team members.

We recommend that you collect some data about your teams' changing needs to learn how to best support them. We have a 5-minute remote working survey that can be embedded into your existing employee engagement platform or that you can utilize on our surveying platform. Reach out to us at <u>hello@feminuity.org</u> to learn more.

With some data in hand, we recommend that you crowdsource with your team members to shape the final document, and also incorporate aspects of these tools and resources in this guide to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices extend to your remote working practice. This resource is not exhaustive - it focuses on the types of jobs that lend themselves to remote work. Continue to adjust your remote working guide as your teams shift, learn, and grow.

VIRTUAL OFFICE 'NORMS'

All workplaces have implicit and explicit norms, standards, and expectations - whether offline or online. Be sure that your remote working culture is sensitive to your team members' diverse experiences and needs.

(1) Set expectations

Setting expectations around communication, collaboration, and productivity are incredibly important for minimizing conflict and confusion.

▶ Consider which of your office norms could translate into the virtual space, and which may need to be modified for inclusion and accessibility.

▶ When setting expectations for your team consider these areas:
Do you expect to communicate or provide feedback to each of your direct reports daily or weekly? Are impromptu telephone calls acceptable? What are the expected email and chat response times? Do you have solutions for technical difficulties during a virtual meeting?

(2) Set boundaries

Remote team members often find it more difficult to unplug than office team members, which can lead to stress, overworking, and burnout. Having defined schedules enables team members to have clear expectations of when they need to be available for work. Be mindful that your team members' remote work schedules might be different than their office work schedules, as they may be balancing work, caregiving responsibilities, or other simultaneous needs. Further, the blending of personal and professional life is more comfortable for some than others, so keep this in mind.

▶ Create a team schedule that clearly articulates when each team member is available for work-related matters. Be sure to respect these schedules by not contacting team members outside of their approved hours.

▶ Establish a norm of communicating in advance when individual schedules need to be shifted from their normal structure. Practice sending a message before impromptu calls, so as to not interrupt workflow or concentration.

▶ If you need time where you are not disturbed, many communication platforms such as Slack allow you to create a status where this request can be made.

▶ Gmail has a "schedule send" option that allows users to delay the sending of emails, so consider using this feature to not disturb people when they are off.

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(3) **Normalize caregiving**

"Caregiving" is often only associated with childcare. However, it is important to expand an understanding of caregiving to include family members of advanced ages, non-immediate family members, partners, and more. For many team members with caregiving roles, their responsibilities are likely increased with more time at "home." As a leader, it is important to normalize caregiving expectations across your teams while they are working virtually.

▶ Host a discussion with your team about "new norms" and how children, family, pets, and more may unintentionally interrupt calls. Let them know this is okay, and consider picking a time so they can introduce them to the team.

▶ Ask team members what they need, and have open and honest conversations about these needs. For example, if an individual requires time to care for a parent, can you ensure that the rest of the team adapts to this schedule?

▶ In the midst of the crisis, Basecamp CEO Jason Fried announced to employees with caregiving responsibilities that they were free to set their own schedule and make their schedules more flexible, even if it meant working less.

We know that fathers are 3x more engaged than the generation prior. We also know that we are the sandwich generation (taking care of parents and children at the same time). However, caregiving remains stigmatized for many men in relation to their careers. In order to normalize this, especially as a male leader, I set my OOO (Out-of-Office) auto-response to highlight the times that I have caregiving responsibilities. Plus, we always ask to see dogs and babies on our calls.

Jake Stika, Executive Director Next Gen Men & Equity Leaders

4 Be mindful of time differences

If you have team members who work across time zones it can be tricky to coordinate and accommodate working schedules. Doing so, however, helps to ensure that team members are not left out from critical activities and decision-making that should involve the whole team.

▶ At Feminuity we host our daily team sync at 10:30 EST to accommodate the different time zones on our team.

▶ Slack lists each team member's time zone and the person's current local time whenever you click their name.

▶ Consider making a time zone guide listing relevant time zones to be referred to when selecting meeting times.

▶ The World Clock Meeting Planner makes time scheduling straightforward. You pick the cities where everyone lives and it tells you the most ideal times.

▶ Delay decision-making until you've heard from everyone across all time zones who should be involved.

▶ If you occasionally need to ask a team member to join a meeting outside of their normal working hours, try skipping video. It's much easier to jump on and participate if they aren't expected to be "camera-ready."

5 Prioritize health, safety, and wellness

When working in remote teams, it may be harder to notice when a team member is struggling with mental health such as increased anxiety and/or depression, wellness, and/or domestic violence. Leaders must remain mindful of these possibilities and provide resources to ensure team members can access the help they need.

▶ Improve your awareness of how to respond to domestic violence in your workplace, should a team member ever disclose their situation to you.

▶ Develop a resource package for safety and wellness in the workplace that includes domestic violence (try The Dandelion Initiative), mental health (try The Well-Being Playbook), and others as reminders for your people on how to access help.

▶ Consider partnering with a wellness app such as Headspace to offer mindfulness and meditation resources to employees.

▶ Learn more about how to manage anxiety and build resilience across your organization. During times of crisis, anxiety and depression can be heightened, so leaders must actively educate team members on safety and responsibility related to alcohol and cannabis consumption at home.

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6 Provide tools and resources

Not all team members will have equal and equitable knowledge of, and access to, tools and resources to work from home. This means you may have to get creative with budgets and methods to provide support.

▶ We cannot assume that everyone is familiar with the latest technology and tools, or that everyone has the same needs. Have your IT team check-in with people on their equipment needs, their understanding of the tools, and cyber-security needs.

▶ Consider providing a technology stipend so team members can purchase materials and tools they need. For example, Shopify has provided employees with $1000 to set up a home office.

▶ You can also consider subsidizing home Internet services, loaning equipment (such as office laptops, webcams, or ergonomic chairs), or distributing blue light blocking glasses to make remote work more accessible.

▶ If you had previously provided team members with food, beverages, or snacks, find ways to continue this to support their food security. For example, Buildout is continuing to offer a daily $12.50 lunch credit to team members who may have counted on in-office lunches.

"As a person with a disability (I am legally blind), when we first went fully remote earlier this month, I was scared about being unable to do my job, show impact or support my colleagues, as my accommodations would not be in place. To have these worries on top of our collective fears in this new global reality felt especially daunting. I have had the support of my lead, our Disability specialist, and Wellness team at Shopify to help me get a virtual workplace accessibility assessment and the required accommodations in place in my home. But I recognize I am privileged: I work for an organization committed to accessibility with the resources to act on this commitment. I know that in the current context, not everyone enjoys the same experience."

Prasanna Ranganathan
Diversity and Belonging Lead at Shopify

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

When moving from in-person work structures to virtual ones, accessibility and inclusion within communications formats need to be addressed and adjusted. We must be intentional when participating in virtual meetings to include all team members and their diverse needs.

1 Turn on video when possible

Encourage everyone to turn on their cameras whenever possible during virtual meetings. This helps with nonverbal cues, such as when someone raises their hand, unmutes themselves, or attempts to speak. Turning on video has a variety of benefits such as combating isolation, providing a sense of community, and the opportunity to lip-read.

▶ On video conferencing platforms, such as Google Hangouts or Zoom (read about others in the Best video conferencing software in 2021), display people in gallery view so you can see everyone equally, not just the person currently speaking.

▶ Check out Crescendo's Online Written and Spoken Communication Guide.

▶ Set the camera at eye level while keeping your webcam far enough away to show your hands and torso. This will make the conversation feel more open and inclusive.

▶ If the bandwidth is impacted by group video calling, consider using videos for calls of ten people or fewer, and have only the speaker turn their camera on.

"Remote working models prove that all work can be made accessible to everyone, and they prove that disabled people can be productive even if they are not in an office. Leaders should strive to make remote work the norm from now on for disabled and immune-compromised individuals, without question. Also, leaders should work closely with disabled team members during the creation of remote work strategies because disabled people are, and have always been, experts in this particular area."

Andrew Gurza, Disability Awareness Consultant
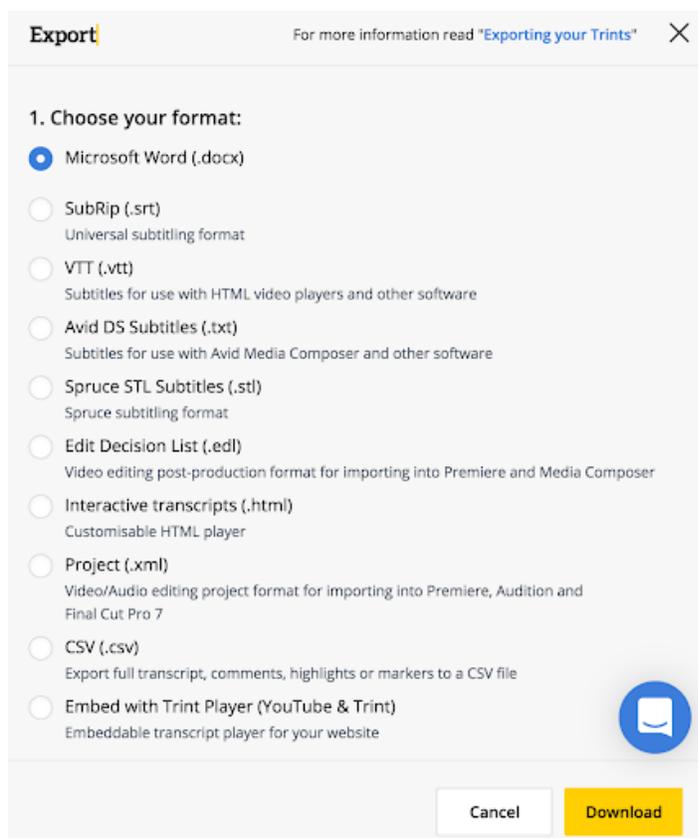
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2 Establish virtual "housekeeping"

It's important to have a process to ensure that tasks are shared equitably across the team. Whether it's note-taking, preparing an agenda, or turning on or typing up on Closed Captioning, too often it is women and racialized folks who end doing more of these extra tasks.

▶ Develop a process to rotate tasks.

▶ For meeting notes, determine where they will be posted afterwards. Consider using a cloud tool—such as Google Docs—so the notes are in a shared space and any edits can be seen live.

▶ Or, record meetings to be watched and referred to at a later date, some also provide a transcript of the meeting.

▶ If the platform you are using has a closed captioning feature, make someone responsible for turning it on. Or consider having a participant other than the note taker provide captions in real-time to the best of their ability. Many platforms, such as Zoom, have the ability to assign this role and give permission.

▶ Trint is a software that generates transcripts from audio and video files, which makes it great for meetings. It also polishes transcripts to make audio and video files searchable and puts captions on videos. Using this tool can make note-taking obsolete. You can also download your transcript in a format to make adding captions to a video recording very easy afterwards.

> **"With the technology available today, there is no excuse not to have accessible content in your video recordings."**
>
> **Jordan Monaghan, Managing Director, Angle Media**

Export | For more information read "Exporting your Trints" ✕

1. Choose your format:

● Microsoft Word (.docx)

○ SubRip (.srt)
Universal subtitling format

○ VTT (.vtt)
Subtitles for use with HTML video players and other software

○ Avid DS Subtitles (.txt)
Subtitles for use with Avid Media Composer and other software

○ Spruce STL Subtitles (.stl)
Spruce subtitling format

○ Edit Decision List (.edl)
Video editing post-production format for importing into Premiere and Media Composer

○ Interactive transcripts (.html)
Customisable HTML player

○ Project (.xml)
Video/Audio editing project format for importing into Premiere, Audition and Final Cut Pro 7

○ CSV (.csv)
Export full transcript, comments, highlights or markers to a CSV file

○ Embed with Trint Player (YouTube & Trint)
Embeddable transcript player for your website

Cancel | Download

3 Share pronouns and get names right

Pronouns are one way we express gender and how others perceive our gender. We cannot always know what someone's pronouns are by looking at them. Sharing pronouns helps alleviate potential misgendering, and normalizes sharing gender identities. Learn the spelling and pronunciation of team member's names. When encouraging people to bring their entire selves to our communities and workplaces, putting in the effort to learn names helps make people feel respected and included.

▶ When having virtual meetings with team members across the organization, share your pronouns when doing introductions, and ask others to do the same if they are comfortable.

4 Share updates

Research shows that beginning meetings with a non-work group activity or discussion improves performance on virtual group tasks. Before diving into work-related discussions, give folks an opportunity to share updates.

▶ Budget 10 minutes at the beginning of video calls to allow people to socialize, share their weekend plans and participate in any conversations that naturally occur in a physical meeting space.

▶ Ask for one-word check-ins. At Feminuity, each member of our team shares one word about how they are feeling/doing at the beginning of our first meeting of the day.

▶ You can also provide a prompt for team members to respond to. Prompts could include: Share a GIF that describes how you are feeling today. What is your most-used emoji? What's something that surprised you today?

▶ Also, some teams are sharing a view from their workspace, or are sharing their remote working set up with their team.

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⑤ **Prioritize one-on-ones**

As a manager, you may already hold one-on-ones, but with remote teams, they are more important than ever before. If you already do these, great, keep it up, but if you don't, now is the time to start. This time is an opportunity for your team to discuss life outside of work, challenges of working from home, or any other concerns they might not feel comfortable sharing during the larger group meetings. This is an important part of checking in on your workforce and making sure they feel valued and heard despite the distance.

▶ Block off designated time in your calendar, and schedule one-on-ones with your direct reports on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Open up some time for these to happen as needed (i.e. on-demand).

▶ Check out 4 Tips for Successful Remote 1-1s.

▶ Check out 24 great one-on-one meeting questions.

"Food, shelter, clothing, income, and health care are the required basics at this time, so I do not want to minimize these needs. I do, however, believe there is a need to maintain the connectedness that we get from being part of a community -- whether it is by going to a workplace, playing sports, attending a place of worship, or just spending time with friends. There is now an immense opportunity to re-evaluate our core values as people -- to reassess what is important to us and how we spend our time. A harsh reset like this moves us from comfort to a focus on what is truly important, and leaders can play a significant role in this process."

Danny Guillory, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Dropbox

VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

With remote working, it can sometimes be challenging to feel like part of a team. Casual office small talk, working in common spaces, or opportunities to celebrate big and small wins must be actively cultivated in the virtual space.

① Foster team bonding

Loneliness is a real concern for remote team members. You can combat social isolation with experiences of team bonding.

▶ Set up a virtual "Water Cooler."
This is a 15-minute window for colleagues to connect and talk about nothing in particular. These moments help develop rapport and build a sense of belonging amongst team members that you may not always work directly with.

▶ Set up a system for "Weekly Wins"
This is where all team members hop on a video call and take turns recognizing each other's accomplishments (no matter how small). Consider also using this time to discuss key team misses and collectively learn from these mistakes.

▶ Get everyone to make their own "Wild Card."
This is an internal shared document where team members can share fun and random facts about themselves. Alternatively, create a designated Slack channel, group chat, or email thread where team members are encouraged to share items from their lives (photos, life updates, events, etc.) on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

② Acknowledge the team

Recognition of meaningful work goes a long way. This simple act greatly boosts feelings of belonging and engagement in the workplace.

▶ Publicly acknowledge when a team member does an exceptional job, and acknowledge their perseverance and hard work during these difficult times. Whether during a team meeting or over a virtual chat system (such as Slack or email).

▶ Don't forget to celebrate. Celebrate milestones such as birthdays or work anniversaries if those are right for your team.

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"A leader's level of psychological resilience relates to their ability to mentally and emotionally cope with a crisis, and this directly impacts how well supported and included their teams feel during times of transition. Globally there are millions of remote workers who are adjusting to a "new normal," and this is a unique opportunity for organizations to support their people leaders to ensure that every team member has access to the support and tools they need to continue contributing in a meaningful and productive way. I believe if leaders can focus on putting people first, companies will build a more innovative and creative team, one where everyone feels like they belong."

Karlyn Percil, CEO KDPM Consulting Group INC & Creator of The WEll-Being Playbook

3. Create virtual coworking opportunities

Virtual coworking is useful for people on your team who are extroverts or who benefit from working alongside other team members.

▶ Try keeping an open video call, so team members can opt into a focused environment.

4. Establish inclusive team communications

The casual environment of a platform like WhatsApp might make it easy to forget it's still a professional setting. Take purposeful steps to educate your teams on how to use your chosen communications platforms, and develop codes of conduct to ensure the virtual spaces remain free of harassment and discrimination.

▶ Read our Quick Guide To Inclusive Emoji Use to ensure virtual chats are fun and safe.

▶ Sometimes our use of GIFs and certain slang terms can perpetuate stereotypes against marginalized groups. Learn more about how to prevent this by reading Using BVE as a Non-Black Person Is Appropriation.

▶ Be aware of siloed communications. Create channels for multiple team members to stay informed (e.g. public channels on Slack or groups that involve all project team members) and encourage the use of public channels rather than one-on-one direct messages when discussing work matters that should involve others.

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(5) **Continue DEI learning**

Learning is not limited to the office. It is more critical now—than perhaps ever before—to continue DEI education that engages team members to think critically and reflect deeply. Keeping DEI top of mind can encourage team members to be intentional about equity and inclusion when interacting with team members virtually and when engaging with customers, clients, and the world around them.

▶ Consider sharing a DEI-related word or theme of the day, week, or month. As a starting point, to support your team in speaking out against various forms of discrimination or social inequity that arise during times of crisis, consider words such as "racism" and "xenophobia" as well as "privilege." This can help your team understand how being able to work remotely as opposed to being out in the field in times of crisis is a privilege.

▶ Check out our various resources.

"We can make remote working models more accessible and inclusive by inviting everyone to outline what they need to do their work and thrive. Uncertainty feels like the only thing we can be certain of right now, but by allowing people to share, we can build empathy and foster understanding that lasts beyond this moment and forever transforms our approach to well-being and work."

Prasanna Ranganathan, Diversity and Belonging Lead at Shopify

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