

# CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

## Definition

An inclusive environment is one in which members feel respected by and connected to one another. All members contribute to the formation of the group's goals and to the realization of those goals. Inclusivity moves us away from simply the physical integration of people to the integration of people's experiences, knowledge and perspectives.

## Characteristics of an inclusive environment

- Differences along all cultural dimensions are recognized and valued
- The multiplicity of ways that people learn, know and communicate are respected
- Progress and change are seen in a positive light
- Open and honest discussion between members is encouraged
- Policies and activities which promote understanding and appreciation of other community members are encouraged
- The "unwritten rules" of the community are understood by all members
- Flexibility is demonstrated to accommodate differing needs and preferences

## Benefits of an inclusive environment

- Increased satisfaction and retention of members
- Access to greater human resources and skills
- Opportunity to gain from multiple perspectives when problem solving
- Opportunity for synergy (Synergy is the combined action or operation as defined in *Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary*)

## Principles of inclusive leadership

- Each person brings to the group a unique perspective which is influenced by his or her own unique cultural identity.
- Each person's cultural identity is multifaceted. It is the intersection of all facets that make up who they are.
- People learn, know and communicate in a multiplicity of ways.
- Treating everyone "equally" does not necessarily mean treating them the "same." Accommodating individual needs may mean treating a person differently to treat them equally.

## Skills of inclusive leadership

- The willingness to take risks
- Cultural self-awareness
- The ability to separate individuals from stereotypes
- Attentive listening skills
- The ability to view cultural differences as an asset not a barrier