

The Inclusion-of-All-Talent Framework

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The Inclusion-of-All-Talent framework is grounded in a simple premise: “Talent is universal; opportunity is not.”¹ It supports strategic action by education and research leaders who strive in this fast-developing and politicized period to fulfill their institutional or organizational mission and advance the purpose of federal non-discrimination laws. That requires assuring that “equal opportunity for all” reflects more than a “parchment promise.”²

The framework’s objective is to lawfully recognize all promise and include all talent in education and research, in both words and deeds. Without conditioning benefits on individuals’ race, ethnicity, sex, or gender status, institutional and organizational leaders can use the framework intentionally to support three commitments:

- removing all significant unfair barriers to access and opportunity for everyone affected,
- continuing to provide opportunities for those who are already thriving to keep realizing their potential, and, to those ends,
- identifying and fairly recognizing all individuals’ promise, including when they are competing for benefits and opportunities.

This resource includes an overview of the framework (Section I) and model language (Section II) that leaders can adapt to develop their own version of the first pillar of the framework: a broadly resonant and authentic *narrative* that can serve as the anchor for taking aligned, lawful actions to increase inclusion. The model language should be used as a customizable template to help describe institution- or organization-specific inclusive *missions* in a range of *contexts*.

The framework and model language are companion resources to EducationCounsel’s [Wise Courage](#) (2025) and [Navigating the Post SFFA Federal Landscape](#) (2024; 2026 update in process). Those papers provide more detailed guidance with examples of many lawful and wise actions that remain legally available to help advance inclusive policies, systems, and programs.*

* This inclusive framework was developed with the generous support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Neither the framework nor the model language constitutes legal advice, and its receipt does not constitute an attorney-client relationship.

I. THE INCLUSION-OF-ALL-TALENT FRAMEWORK

The framework can help assure that *all talent can thrive*—supporting both those who may not have been well served by an institution’s or organization’s systems, policies, and programs in the past or presently *and* those who are already well served and thriving. It seeks to help make the promise of excellence real for all. The framework primarily focuses inward on what a particular institution or organization can do and is doing to advance its inclusive mission—according to its own data and within its own context.

The framework comprises the following three pillars for inclusive institutional or organizational missions and related actions:

1. The institution or organization should have a **narrative** that explains its mission and identifies core, comprehensively inclusive aims aligned with that mission.
 - The narrative should explain the value of what a specific institution or organization and its programs seek to contribute to educational, economic, and other outcomes. It should include the ways in which the benefits of pursuing this mission will flow to internal stakeholders, relevant fields or disciplines, and the national higher education and research endeavor.
 - The narrative should also include definitions of key concepts to help explain the institution/organization-wide inclusive mission, or its adaptation to the mission of a particular policy, system, or program. In so doing, the language should remain attentive to relevant federal, state, and institutional/organizational parameters, whether legal and/or political.
2. The institution or organization should develop a policy, system, or program **design** on paper and in practice that is in fact inclusive—*i.e.*, a design, put into practice, that assures that all individual educational, research, and employment benefits or opportunities at the institution or organization are accessible to and effective for all talent.³
 - This requires a design and practice that reflect and advance a comprehensive commitment to remove unfair barriers and serve all individuals well, including those who are—and those who are not—already well-served, so that all can realize their promise.
 - This also generally requires that the design and practice do not consider individuals’ race, ethnicity, sex, or gender status (*i.e.*, group membership for its own sake) when conferring benefits and opportunities.⁴
3. The institution or organization should engage in ongoing strategic **review and refinement** of policies, systems, and programs at the institution/organization—using institution/organization-specific disaggregated data and experience-related evidence—to (i) identify all significant unfair barriers to access, opportunity, and recognition of individual promise for some, (ii) understand what has well-served others and enabled them to thrive, and (iii) use lawful means to remove barriers and refine systems, policies, and programs to better provide fair access, opportunities, and recognition of promise for *all* talent *at or applying to* the institution/organization.

II. MODEL LANGUAGE FOR MISSION AND CONTEXT

To help develop the first element of the framework, institutions and organizations can use the model language provided below to draft (or revise) the mission and context description for a policy, system, or program. The language is adaptable for a broad range of institutions, organizations, and States.

A well-crafted mission and context description provides a clear and comprehensive anchor for creating and/or refining policies, systems, and programs that effectively and lawfully include all talent. Word choices, definitions, and core elements should reflect sensitivity to an institution's or organization's relevant contexts and legal realities. Critically, the language must be authentic and align with actions designed to lawfully achieve the mission.

In multiple places throughout the model language, bracketed and bolded instructions indicate where to add specifics about an institution or organization (and, when relevant, a department or program), including relevant internal data. Legally appropriate application of this framework depends on data and evidence *specific* to the barriers identified at a particular institution or organization, both entity-wide and within its relevant discipline-focused units. That is because the same barriers that exist generally in society or within an entire discipline may or may not exist—in the same way, to the same extent, or at all—at a particular institution or organization.⁵ To be clear, however, it *is* appropriate and important to collect and analyze general population or field data as part of mission-advancing research, teaching, and studies about barriers in education, careers, or disciplines for the purpose of disseminating knowledge about the existence and resolution of unfair barriers in society.⁶

[ADD HEADING RE: PROGRAM MISSION AND CONTEXT DESCRIPTION]

[Add entity name]'s commitment to support fair access and opportunity for all **[add as relevant: graduate and undergraduate students, post-docs, faculty, and researchers]** in **[add relevant fields]** fields requires providing those who are already well-served and thriving the opportunity to continue to thrive; eliminating the significant unfair barriers that have impeded others; and assuring fair access, opportunities, and recognition of individual promise for everyone. Science and law affirm that people of all races, ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic, religious, viewpoint, experiences, and other backgrounds are individually unique and that no group is inherently superior. So, when we see significant disparities in educational and career experience by group, we must identify the root causes and—with attention to relative severity—effectively remove unfair barriers and enable all talent to thrive.

National statistics show that Black, Indigenous, and Latine individuals, women, and those who are first in their family to attend or graduate from college or come from low wealth/under-resourced school backgrounds (including some rural and urban areas), are affected by particularly high barriers in **[insert: STEMM fields or add or substitute fields and adjust for relevant fields and their national data—including men in some fields, levels and kinds of higher education]**.⁷ Our own **[choose: institutional [or] organizational]** data in **[add fields]** reflect **[add, as applicable: these and other trends]**. Our collective initiatives demonstrate a commitment, through meaningful action, to work toward addressing all significant, unfair, group-based barriers in these fields in **[add as relevant: graduate and undergraduate education and employment]** within our own context. We seek to expand the pool of resources available toward that aim. We pursue our efforts within all relevant

legal parameters and without considering any individual's racial/ethnic or sex/gender group membership when selecting people to participate in our programs or receive benefits.

[If you have a strong record of elevating program leaders' understanding of relevant federal and state non-discrimination law and the expectation that they will adhere to it in all their professional activities, briefly state that here or separately, along with the training/other internal and external programs/resources that you've made available.]

[Add the program description, including selection process and criteria, after aligning program design with this Inclusion-of-All-Talent framework.]

MODEL LANGUAGE FOR DEFINITIONS

These definitions are intended to be included in a footnote to the heading of the Program Mission and Context Description or in an appendix. If in an appendix, reference the appendix at the end of the main document (e.g., "See relevant definitions in the Appendix.").

In this document and **[name]**'s inclusive initiatives:

- **Inclusion**⁸ reflects a recognition of the differences in individuals' access and opportunities and means assuring that those who are already well-served and thriving have the opportunity to continue to thrive, while all significant, unfair, group-based barriers that have impeded others are removed so that everyone's individually assessed promise is recognized and all talent is assured fair access, opportunity, and recognition of their promise. Evaluating the relative severity of barriers is also important to determine the appropriate lawful approach to take (including any resource needs) to effectively eliminate barriers at each severity level, as needed to achieve inclusion of all talent.
- **Significant group-based barriers** refer to barriers that, our own entity-specific data show affect access, opportunity, experience, and recognition of promise for a significant portion of talented individuals of certain societal identities, experiences, backgrounds, and/or perspectives, such as (when shown by our entity-specific data) socioeconomic/wealth or first-generation status, some rural or urban backgrounds, disability, or some religions, races, ethnicities, genders, or ideologies. Such societal identities, experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives are relevant for the purpose of *identifying* the significant unfair barriers that impede providing fair access and opportunity for everyone.⁹

[For those organizations that call out "diversity" interests in their missions, include:

Diversity of experiences, backgrounds, identities, and perspectives is a natural outcome of *effective* and *fair* inclusion because individuals are unique and no person is inherently superior to others based on their societally-determined group. But removing all significant, unfair, group-based barriers for inclusion requires *intentionality*¹⁰ to enable individuals of all experiences, backgrounds, identities, and perspectives to fairly access, be considered for, and experience opportunities and benefits. Diverse learning and work environments are beneficial for everyone and the enterprise.^{11]}

ENDNOTES

All of the following endnotes are intended to provide information to consider when learning about the Inclusion-of-All-Talent framework and model language or when designing or refining a policy or program to align with the framework. Some of the endnotes are further intended to be actually included as endnotes or footnotes in an institution's or organization's customized description. This latter subset of the endnotes is introduced below with **"MODEL LANGUAGE TO USE OR ADAPT IN A NOTE:"** to distinguish them.

¹ While this concept is broadly used and expressed in a variety of ways, one source is Rye Barcott's *It Happened on the Way to War: A Marine's Path to Peace* (Bloomsbury USA, 2011).

² *Allen v. Milligan*, 599 U.S. 1, 10 (2023); see also [Wise Courage](#) (EducationCounsel, 2025) (*Wise Courage*); [Navigating the Post SFFA Federal Landscape](#) (EducationCounsel, 2024; 2026 update in process) (*Navigating Post SFFA*).

³ See, e.g., *Wise Courage*; *Navigating Post SFFA*.

⁴ A limited exception may apply in a particular case if identity-conscious action is necessary under law to remedy an institution's or organization's *own* discrimination with continuing effects. *Id.*

⁵ At the time of this document's publication, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has proposed an overhaul of federal financial assistance administration and financial controls that includes provisions related to the collection and use of this type of data. See [Overview & FAQs of OMB's Proposed Regulations on Federal Financial Assistance](#) (EducationCounsel, 2026). Although the proposed language lacks clarity, a revised 2 C.F.R. § 200.218 would prohibit the use of federal funds awarded via grants and cooperative agreements for "disparate-impact studies, disparate impact litigation, and related activities." Even if OMB and other federal agencies adopt final regulations that track the language as proposed, it would still be lawful to collect, analyze, and make appropriate use of institution-specific data to identify barriers and remove them via lawful means. In such a scenario, however, institutions and organizations may need to use non-federal funding to support such work, unless and until the scope of the prohibition is further clarified or even successfully challenged in court.

⁶ While the current federal administration and some states have advanced policies that seek to eliminate or discourage efforts to collect disparity data that can identify unfairness on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, and gender, the First Amendment generally protects the collection and analysis of population and field data relevant to the subject matter content for a research or education program. See, e.g., *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967); *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234, 250, 263 (1957).

⁷ **MODEL LANGUAGE TO USE OR ADAPT IN A NOTE:** For example, see [Science & Engineering Indicators 2024](#) and [Vision 2030](#), both by the National Science Board. See also [Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Student](#), U.S. Department of Education Office For Civil Rights (2021); *Diversity and STEM: Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering*, National Science Foundation (2023) (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, NSF 23-315) (no longer available on NSF's website). National data also show that men are increasingly falling behind in higher education outcomes, particularly in some fields. See, e.g., <https://www.menincollege.org/>. Intersecting identities facing barriers can exacerbate effects. **[Supplement or substitute for relevant fields and research.]**

⁸ Fairly including all talent, when pursued with intentionality and within all lawful bounds, contributes to "equitable opportunity" for everyone. Some institutions and organizations that are able to under state law may want to define "inclusion and equitable opportunity" instead of just "inclusion" and also reference the broader phrase in their versions of the model language for program mission and context. With or without explicit references to equitable opportunity, though, lawful inclusion of all talent is about a commitment of fairness to those who are thriving and those who have faced unfair barriers, so that *all talent* can realize their promise.

⁹ **MODEL LANGUAGE TO USE OR ADAPT IN A NOTE:** To be clear, *[insert name]* does not use a person’s societally-determined group membership to determine who receives a benefit or can participate in our initiatives. However, the mission-related *competencies, knowledge, character, or interests* that a particular person has gained from their own lived experiences of many kinds may be *individually* considered (not assumed based on societal inequities)—even if, for some, that experience relates to their societally-determined group membership. That approach is endorsed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, 600 U.S. 181 (2023).

¹⁰ **MODEL LANGUAGE TO USE OR ADAPT IN A NOTE:** As defined by a National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report, *intentionality* drives the creation of policies, programs, and practices that are tailored to recognize and address individuals’ differences across multiple dimensions—academic, financial, and social. To assess someone’s promise with that level of intentionality, institutions and organizations must be mindful of the person’s opportunities and barriers, as well as how they took advantage of the former and/or navigated the latter. Intentionality takes into account individuals’ needs, as well as their strengths and attributes. Individuals are not viewed as problems to fix but talent to cultivate. See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. *Minority Serving Institutions: America’s Underutilized Resource for Strengthening the STEM Workforce*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25257>. The concept of intentionality can be and is applied to *all* talent in our initiatives.

¹¹ **MODEL LANGUAGE TO USE OR ADAPT IN A NOTE:** See, e.g., Darling-Hammond, L. & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Educating_Whole_Child_REPORT.pdf; Bowman, N. A. (2010). College Diversity Experiences and Cognitive Development: A Meta-Analysis, *Review of Educational Research*, 80(1), 4-33. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654309352495>; Gurin, P., Dey, E. L., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes, *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(3), 330-366. https://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/Article_-_Diversity_and_Higher_Education%5B1%5D.pdf; National Academy of Education. (2024). *Evaluating and Improving Teacher Preparation Programs*. K. M. Zeichner, L. Darling-Hammond, A. I. Berman, D. Dong, & G. Sykes (Eds.). National Academy of Education. https://naeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Evaluating_and_Improving_Teacher_Preparation_Programs.pdf; Carver-Thomas, D., Leung-Gagné, M., & Garcia, E. (2025). *Supporting and Sustaining a Diverse Teacher Workforce*, Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/diverse-teacher-workforce-report>; see also National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Indicators for Monitoring Undergraduate STEM Education*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24943>; American Association for the Advancement of Science, *Diversity and the Law* (2024) ([Research Chart 1](#)) (EducationCounsel).