



Designing Equitable Training and Outreach Programs: A Universal Design Framework for Safety and Inclusion

Grace Albertson; Field Inclusive, Inc.; info@fieldinclusive.org

Funding Provided By: The Conservation Nation Chrysalis Fund Internship Program



The Need for Intentional Inclusion

Traditional Training

Often excludes participants due to barriers such as language, mobility, culture, identity, or safety, which disproportionately affect individuals from marginalized communities.

vs

Universal Design

Shifts inclusion from a reactive model (accommodations upon request) to a proactive planning approach that anticipates barriers and embeds equity from the start.

Core Objectives for Participants

By engaging with this framework, participants will be able to:

1. Define equity within training and outreach contexts
2. Identify structural, cultural, and safety-related barriers
3. Apply Universal Design principles to program redesign
4. Evaluate programs through an equity and safety lens

Case Study

A university department organizes a “Coastal Discovery Day” for high school students to encourage interest in marine biology. The organizers, assuming everyone in the group is able-bodied, choose a remote beach known for its diverse tidal pools but reachable only via a steep, unpaved trail. One student who uses a mobility device is unable to navigate the rugged trail and is left sitting in the van with a chaperone while the rest of the group explores the pools.



Fig. 1. A mobility device user encounters an inaccessible landscape. (7)

Universal Design Framework:

- **Inclusive Risk Assessment:** Consider physical access (e.g., steep or uneven terrain) during planning (6).
- **Site Scouting:** Check sites in advance to ensure they work for varied mobility levels (6).
- **Enabling Approach:** Anticipate needs and build in supports ahead of time (2).
- **Transparent Communication:** Share physical requirements early so participants can request accommodations (1).
- **Universal Design & Alternatives:** Use alternative sites when needed to meet learning goals safely (6).

Actionable Strategies for Program Redesign

Inclusive Planning and Risk Assessment

- **Holistic Risk Management:** Address physical risks *and* social harms (e.g., discrimination, harassment; 3).
- **Cultural Safety Assessment:** Consider local laws, norms, and histories that may affect participant safety (6).
- **Financial Barrier Removal:** Cover participation costs beyond normal living expenses when possible (4).
- **Group Dynamics:** Anticipate identity- and rank-based power imbalances and plan to reduce them (6).

Accessible Communication and Logistics

- **Informed Participation:** Share risks, expectations, and protocols early; provide private ways to raise concerns (1).
- **Flexible Access & Materials:** Use virtual tools (e.g., 3D models, GIS) to reduce physical barriers (2).
- **Multisensory Delivery:** Offer materials in multiple languages and formats (print, audio, visual; 3).
- **Communication Pathways:** Provide redundant, private options for communication and reporting (1, 6).

Behavioral Expectations and Training

- **Code of Conduct:** Establish clear behavior expectations and consequences; prohibit all forms of harassment and discrimination (1).
- **Training & Intervention:** Provide training on anti-harassment, bias, and bystander intervention (e.g., the 5D method; 1, 5).
- **Reporting Mechanisms:** Offer multiple, confidential ways to report misconduct safely (6).
- **Leadership Responsibility:** Leaders must enforce conduct policies and respond promptly and transparently to reports.

Key Takeaway

Design for equity and whole-person safety from the start — Universal Design benefits everyone.

Sources & Resources

