

PRACTICING RADICAL HOSPITALITY

The term “radical hospitality can be defined as a practice of putting extraordinary effort and emphasis on making people feel welcome. This concept is often referred to as “radical welcome,” and focuses on breaking down barriers that prevent people from participating in an effort, campaign, or community. Overcoming these barriers means accommodating things like scheduling, transportation, and childcare needs, as well as addressing the verbal, environmental, or behavior actions that may result in participants with identities outside of the dominant culture of the effort feeling unwelcome.

Following are ten key practices to consider as you prepare to create an inclusive event environment:

1. **Make your space feel positive and high-energy** with meaningful wall displays, posters, or handmade welcome signs. These should be highly visual in nature and may include multiple languages, as appropriate, to reflect your anticipated audience.
2. **Develop clear and inviting signage** so that people know where to go and aren't confused. You may want to enlist a volunteer who has not been in the space before to provide fresh eyes in following the signs and testing the route.
3. **Always make sure that the space is as clean, well-lit, and comfortable** as possible before participants arrive.
4. **Make sure there is a volunteer or event staffer with the designated job of greeting and welcoming people.** A smile and positive energy, along with a verbal greeting, can help each arriving individual feel an early sense of connection and belonging.
5. **Train all event staff to understand that welcoming people is a priority.** Whether they are making a flip chart or setting up food, staff should stop what they are doing to approach and greet the new participant and then to thank them for their time and attendance.
6. **If serving refreshments, clarify dietary restrictions** with participants on the front end if possible. Clearly label foods that have gluten, meat, dairy, nuts, or other common food allergens.
7. **Demonstrate empathy to all participants.** Many times people are being asked to step far outside their comfort zones. Knowing that staff and meeting leaders will support them helps participants step up and try new things.
8. **Consider the special needs of your participants** and be prepared to accommodate people. For example, this could mean having more comfortable seating or well lit spaces for older participants. It could also mean providing a space for children to play so that their parents can participate in the meeting.
9. **Celebrate success!** This can be in the form of giving conversation partners high-fives or a big, collective round of applause after a round of sharing-out. People like to have fun. If they are enjoying themselves, they will prioritize coming back and staying connected.
10. **Continually summarize and bring participants back to the big picture.** Demonstrate the value of what has been done and articulate that the conversation is going in the desired direction. This will help to keep everyone grounded in the conversation and to feel part of a larger community.