

Developing and Implementing a Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at an International Research Center in an Arctic University to Build Trusting, Caring and Professional Relationships Across International Research Communities

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Abstract

The stated mission of the International Arctic Research Center (IARC) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) is "to foster Arctic research to help the nation and the world understand, prepare for, and adapt to the pan-Arctic impacts of climate change." IARC's work and collaborations are everywhere in the Arctic and beyond. One of IARC's core values is actively cultivating an environment of diversity and inclusion where all individuals and groups feel welcomed and are heard. Through the work of the IARC Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, we affirm that our different experiences, expertise, and ways of knowing are our strength, fostering diverse thoughts and ideas. Collaborative science and administrative support by people from diverse backgrounds and knowledge systems helps IARC build a professional culture of inclusion, listening, caring and respect. We face challenges in DEI work and are actively addressing them. For example, in addressing the challenge of time constraints by the all-volunteer membership, a DEI coordinator position to spearhead our efforts is being created and funding sought. We highlight efforts from the IARC Diversity and Inclusivity Working Group to cultivate a culture of inclusion, equity and access: 1) collaboratively developing an institutional diversity and inclusivity statement and land acknowledgement statement, 2) creating safe spaces for conversation and action through open biweekly working group meetings and discussions, 3) elevating awareness through relevant workshops, trainings and discussions, 4) collectively incorporating diversity and inclusion values into the IARC strategic plan, 5) making presentations and documents accessible, and 6) actively collaborating on inclusion efforts within UAF, Alaska and beyond. We welcome new members with their ideas and perspectives to the working group. At IARC, we recognize that inclusion is an ongoing process that has to be woven into all that we do in research, education and outreach.

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Introduction

The stated purpose of the International Arctic Research Center (IARC) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) is “Understanding the Arctic to make a difference,” with the following core research values: 1) useful & actionable, 2) deep understanding, 3) grounded in place, 4) inclusive & diverse, 5) innovative & skillful, 6) collaborative.



This photo was taken by Sarah Betcher as part of [the Ikaagvik Sikukun project](#) in Qikiktagruk (Kotzebue) on the traditional territory of the Inupiat (1).

IARC is committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all of its forms. We define diversity as the presence of people with different backgrounds, races, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, beliefs, religions, marital status, and socio-economic status in our organization; and inclusivity as an approach where we respect, welcome, encourage, and engage diverse perspectives.

IARC's pursuit of equity consists of promoting ethical and balanced research practices that ensure the benefits of science and education accrue to the communities we work with. Equity differs from equality as a guiding principle by recognizing that the diverse circumstances and histories of individuals and communities necessitate diverse strategies and resources to achieve community-determined outcomes.

“Asiyekujua hakuthamini”

One who does not know you, does not value you.

~ Swahili Sayings from Zanzibar 1 (2)

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion



Climate Change in My Community course - for educators, community members and youth leaders, as part of [the Arctic and Earth SIGNS \(STEM Integration of GLOBE and NASA\) project](#). This photo was taken by Robin Ellis at the International Arctic Research Center, UAF's Troth Yeddha' Campus on the traditional lands of the Lower Tanana Dené. (3)

One of IARC's core values is actively cultivating an environment of diversity and inclusion where all individuals and groups feel welcomed and heard. Through the work of the IARC Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (IARC D&I WG), we affirm that our different experiences, expertise, and ways of knowing are our strength, fostering diverse thoughts and ideas.



Elders share the diverse Alaska Native languages and cultures of their homelands with Learning from K'eeh (birch) summer campers. This photo was taken by Nicole James.

Diversity helps build a professional culture of inclusion, caring, and respect.

Team diversity and interpersonal skills (social sensitivity and emotional engagement) can influence research outcomes by affecting important aspects of team function including communication patterns, problem solving, and group creativity (4,5,6).

Activities & Outcomes

Recent efforts of the Diversity and Inclusivity Working Group within IARC to cultivate diversity, equity, inclusion, and access include:

1. Develop [IARC's Statement on Diversity and Inclusivity](#) (7)
2. Organize/collaborate on trainings and events including
 - Breaking the Prejudice Habit workshop
 - Difficult Dialogues workshop funded by Alaska Climate Adaptation Science Center (AK CASC)
 - Land Acknowledgment workshop(s) by Melissa Shaginoff (8)
3. Integrate diversity and inclusion as a core value into the IARC Strategic planning process
4. Develop [an IARC Land Acknowledgment statement](#) (7)



This photo was taken by Mike DeLue during Difficult Dialogues training at the IARC.

5. Create spaces for making diversity a visible priority
 - monthly formal working group meeting
 - monthly reading and discussion group (9)
 - instructional design integrates DEI thinking in course environment and pedagogy
 - diversity minute in monthly all-IARC meetings
 - diversity items in the IARC newsletter
 - IARC D&I shared drive with resource library, working group documents and relevant DEI presentations (10)
6. Actively address challenges faced in DEI work
 - address the challenge of time constraints by the all-volunteer membership
 - create a DEI coordinator position and seeking leadership approval and funding
 - address equity in our work

Traits to Exercise

We envision actively collaborating with the broader University of Alaska community and beyond in its efforts to foster a culture of respect, diversity, equity, inclusion, and caring. We will accomplish this by exercising an open mind, engaging respectfully, focusing on team goals not individual, building trust, welcoming new ideas and perspectives, and embracing change.



This photo was taken by Alexandra Ravelo, a Girls on Ice Alaska 2021 instructor. [Inspiring Girls Expeditions](#) runs Girls on Ice Alaska on Gulkana Glacier, located on Ahnna lands and whose Ahnna name is C'ulc'ena' Luu' (11).

Everyone is welcome to the IARC D&I working group. At IARC, we recognize that inclusion is an ongoing process that has to be woven into all that we do in research, education and outreach.

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Land Acknowledgment

Everywhere we live and work is on Native land. IARC is located on UAF's Troth Yeddha' campus, the traditional homelands of the Dené People of the lower Tanana River. We recognize, appreciate, and honor Indigenous peoples and their past, present, and future land stewardship. We are committed to building long-term reciprocal relationships with Indigenous organizations, knowledge holders and community members to create relevant information and to take action in support of their sovereignty and self-determination.

IARC's Land Acknowledgement is a living document and evolving as we grow and learn together on this journey.