Accessibility: The Forgotten Piece of DEI

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Abstract:

Rutgers' mission includes a dedication to "*teaching that meets the highest standards of excellence, to conducting research that breaks new ground, and to providing services, solutions, and clinical care that help individuals and the local, national, and global communities where they live.*" In order to meet this goal, we must proactively include **ACCESSIBILITY** in our diversity, equity and inclusion efforts **(DEI)**. **Our efforts *are insignificant if people at the table cannot effectively access and use the information and/or space necessary to be an active part of the discussion.*** Although Rutgers' definition of equity includes the word access, experience has shown that accessibility is often an afterthought. For example, event advertisements are often not accessible and rarely do advertisements specify how to request accommodations. **The needs of the disability community must be proactively considered** in the development/planning process of programs, services, solutions, clinical care and purchases. Benchmarking will be used to provide feedback about where/how improvements can be made.

Primary Stakeholders:

All who interact with Rutgers including:
- Students and their families,
- Faculty and Staff,
- Community members,
- University/community collaborators
- Vendors

Key Steps/Activities:
- Identify who will be contacted for benchmarking (universities, community/government agencies);
- Produce relevant survey
- Collect and evaluate survey responses
- Responses will be used to inform next steps,
- Collaborate with DEI and other stake holders on action plan to proactively imbed accessibility into DEI efforts

Effectiveness Measures:
- An increase in University wide proactive accessibility measures
- DEI changed to DEIA to remind University wide constituents that accessibility is an important part of DEI

NOTE: *the addition of "A" is for a reminder to the University community as a whole and not meant to call out DEI offices themselves*

Current Status/Future Directions:

Disability-Negative Associations	Diversity-Positive Associations
Enforced	Willingness
Group with little or no value	Valued Identity
Excluded/Segregated	Included/Integrated
Compliance	Culture
Accommodations	Universal Design

Proposed Timeline:
- Benchmarking completed by end of Fall 2023
- Recommendations proposed by end of Spring 2024
- Assess efforts/changes from June 2024-June 2025

Communication/Engagement:
- Quarterly emailed updates on progress to RBHS Leadership and DEI (university-wide) leadership
- Zoom meetings as necessary