

## INCLUSIVE BY DESIGN: FIVE KEY STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION & BELONGING

### 1. Center the Intern's Voice and Experience

Ask open-ended questions to learn about the intern's interests, hopes, and goals — and reflect on what shaped *your* own ways of relating and communicating. This helps you connect without assuming the intern will share at the same depth. Honor their social capital and lived experience by co-designing projects based on what they enjoy, what they're curious about, and what feels comfortable. This ensures meaningful contribution from the start and a relationship built on respect rather than expectation.

### 2. Normalize and Model Vulnerability

Go first. Share mistakes you've made, lessons learned, and moments when things didn't go perfectly. This signals that learning is expected — not judged — and creates a safe-to-fail environment. Acknowledge your own assumptions or blind spots without placing that burden on the intern. Modeling repair and accountability strengthens trust and supports two-way feedback.

### 3. Build Intentional Personal Connections

Move beyond task lists in early check-ins. Use the principle: "I don't care what you know until I know that you care." Begin 1:1s with "What do you need to be successful?" or "How are you finding things so far?" before shifting to tasks. Acknowledge non-monetary barriers (commute, technology, schedule conflicts) and co-design solutions. Small efforts early on make belonging real.

### 4. Build Intentional, Not Assumed, Support Networks

Do not assume that someone who "looks or sounds like the intern" will automatically be the safest or most comfortable match. Instead, train your team to identify shared traits, communication styles, strengths, and rapport cues that may support genuine connection. Safety is not inherent — it is cultivated through trust, clarity, and consistency.

If an intern confides in a colleague, that information remains confidential. It is *not* the peer's responsibility — especially not that of a person of color — to manage or fix the situation. The supervisor or host organization takes responsibility for receiving the learning, addressing issues, and making changes. This ensures belonging is a shared organizational effort rather than an identity-based expectation.

### 5. Provide Radical Clarity on "How We Work"

Do not assume familiarity with workplace norms or technology systems. Explain communication channels ("Teams for quick questions; email for formal requests"), calendar expectations ("Here's how to accept an invite"), shared drives, file naming, and basic tools. Radical clarity removes access barriers, reduces anxiety, and supports full participation.



## THE INCLUSIVE ONBOARDING CHECKLIST

### Before Day One

- ☐ Identify and brief the mentor.
- ☐ Reflect on your own upbringing and assumptions to avoid unintentionally expecting personal disclosure from the intern.
- ☐ Prepare a dedicated, well-lit, visible workspace.
- ☐ Set up and test all technical access.
- ☐ Send a positive team introduction email.
- ☐ Provide an orientation packet.
- ☐ Confirm start details clearly.
- ☐ Clarify transportation and logistics.

### Day One

- ☐ Start with connection: share about yourself without assuming reciprocal depth.
- ☐ Explain the safe-to-fail commitment.
- ☐ Conduct a clear technical walkthrough.
- ☐ Introduce peers selected for rapport and strengths, not identity assumptions.
- ☐ Provide early shadowing opportunities.

### First Week

- ☐ Hold frequent 1:1s focused on needs.
- ☐ Facilitate short introductions to key staff.
- ☐ Assign a small, meaningful first project.
- ☐ Connect tasks to the [Portrait of a Graduate](https://ctesonomacounty.org/investments/pathtopurpose/).
- ☐ Invite interns to team meetings.

### First Month – End of Internship

- ☐ Conduct two-way feedback sessions.
- ☐ Normalize debriefing after tasks and events.
- ☐ Provide cross-department exposure.
- ☐ Arrange a leadership-level check-in.