

Intercultural learning in everyday work

Explore how culture, experience, and access shape everyday work—and how your learning can inform a conversation, a decision, or a change.

Begin with a question that matters to you. Follow the path from the foundations, choose a useful starting point, or return whenever you want another perspective.

Building on your IDI experience

If you have an Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) profile and development plan, use the goals you explored in your debrief to choose useful learning here. You can also begin without an assessment. These activities support reflection and practice; they do not assess your orientation or replace your individual development plan.

Begin with curiosity

A useful place to begin when you want shared language for culture, equity, and access. Our experience shapes what feels normal; another person's experience can reveal something we have not noticed.

What you can practice

- Separate an observation from an interpretation in a workplace example.
- Identify one familiar expectation that may not work equally well for everyone.
- Frame a respectful question that leaves room for the person's own explanation.

An everyday example

A colleague pauses before answering. You notice the pause; you do not yet know whether they are considering their words, need more context, or prefer another way to contribute. A question gives you better information than a label.

Try it in your work

Choose a routine interaction. Write what you actually observed, what you initially thought it meant, and a question that could help you understand it. Consider other explanations before deciding what to do.

Reflect: Which part was evidence, and which part came from my own expectations?

Something to carry forward: An observation, more than one plausible explanation, and a question you can use.

Learning and tools to explore

- **Cultural Humility vs. a Checklist** — Curiosity that does not end — and a form that still needs a who, data, and a date.

- **Intercultural Competence without a Score** — UNESCO, Bennett, and the continuum are maps. A quiz in this hub is not.
- **The IDI and other tools: inputs to practice, not the practice itself** — The Intercultural Development Inventory is one proprietary assessment among many tools. It can inform qualified professional practice. It does not define this program, its results are never personnel data, and its protected content is not reproduced here.
- **Using community context without profiling** — A community brief can help you prepare for Minnesota work, but it cannot describe any one person. Use it to ask better questions, check access, and involve the right partners. People within every community have different experiences. Each person is the authority on their own life.

Explore whose perspective could add something to your understanding.

Make room for different experiences

Explore this when a familiar approach seems fair, but people experience it differently. Shared needs and meaningful differences can both matter. Learning about a community offers context; listening helps you understand the individual.

What you can practice

- Explain how the same process can place different burdens on people.
- Identify a perspective missing from a decision and a useful way to invite it.
- Revise an initial interpretation in light of another person's account.

An everyday example

A team offers everyone the same opportunity to speak at a fast-moving meeting. Some colleagues contribute more fully after reading a question or thinking it through. A shared invitation may need more than one way to participate.

Try it in your work

Take one meeting, notice, or service step. Consider who it works well for, who may face a barrier, and whose experience could help you check that understanding. Invite input without asking someone to speak for an entire community.

Reflect: What did I understand differently after considering another perspective?

Something to carry forward: A revised question or participation approach, with the reason for the change.

Learning and tools to explore

- **What Minimization Does in DHS Work** — Sameness-as-fairness is a work habit — not a verdict on you.

- **Acceptance in DHS Work** — Notice difference without ranking it — and without pretending everyone is the same.
- **Planning with partners: who to involve** — Plan who should be involved before the design is settled. Note why their involvement matters, what role they will have, whether they will be paid, and when they will hear how their input was used. Begin with trusted, reviewed partner lists and organizations named by the people affected. Do not choose partners from a quick web search alone.
- **Six commitments for working in partnership** — Equity is everyone's work. Build on the people, standards, and relationships already in place. Center lived experience. Follow the evidence. Build trust over time. Work in partnership.

Try an approach that responds to what you have learned.

Adapt how you communicate

Useful when you want to turn awareness into a more responsive conversation. Adaptation begins with the situation, the person, and the communication task. It includes checking preferences, making access possible, and adjusting after feedback.

What you can practice

- Ask about communication preferences without assuming them from identity.
- Adapt a question, format, or conversation approach to a stated need.
- Check whether the revised approach helped someone understand or contribute.

An everyday example

A service conversation becomes difficult to follow. Rather than speaking louder or repeating the same explanation, you check what would help: a clearer question, a written summary, accessible information, or qualified language support.

Try it in your work

Choose a conversation or explanation you can improve. Ask what would make it easier to follow, adapt one part, and check understanding through the task itself. For interpreter-supported conversations, use the language-access resources.

Reflect: What did the other person's response tell me about the change?

Something to carry forward: A revised explanation or conversation plan and a specific way to check its usefulness.

Learning and tools to explore

- **Intercultural Conflict Styles at a DHS Desk** — Direct, indirect, expressive, restrained — notice the style in the room.
- **Working with an Interpreter** — A professional — not a cousin and not the bilingual coworker from the hall. Speak to the person.

- **Disability and Language Together** — Two gates, and a person can need both — not a culture capsule.
- **Working with a spoken-language interpreter** — Book the right language and dialect, and brief the interpreter before the conversation. Speak to the person, use short sentences, and check understanding. Do not use a family member, a child, or a bilingual colleague pulled from their job as an interpreter.
- **Language access checklist** — Start by identifying the languages people need and the vital documents that require translation and human review. Make a qualified interpreter available at first contact, and make each request specific about language, dialect, requested gender match, and meeting format.

Look at the process around the conversation as well as your own approach.

Carry learning into a decision

Begin here when a policy, service, workplace practice, or resource decision is open to change. Connect what people experience with the rules, steps, and choices that shape those experiences. Consider alternatives with the people affected.

What you can practice

- Identify a decision that could change an access or participation barrier.
- Compare alternatives using evidence and the perspectives of affected people.
- Describe a practical change, the responsibility needed, and what would indicate it helped.

An everyday example

People repeatedly struggle with a renewal notice. A clearer explanation may help, but the team also examines the documentation burden, available formats, and steps required to respond. The improvement may involve both communication and process.

Try it in your work

Use the Equity Analysis Toolkit companion to examine a current decision. Describe the barrier, compare options, identify who can shape the choice, and agree how its effects could be checked. Use the original policy and toolkit for applicable requirements.

Reflect: Did the proposed change address the source of the barrier, and whose knowledge shaped it?

Something to carry forward: A reasoned option or draft analysis that names the change, available evidence, and questions still open.

Learning and tools to explore

- **From Noticing to Shifting** — After noticing — change the form, the hire, or the meeting.
- **DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit** — Teach the toolkit, then use it — on a real policy, budget, hire, or IT change before the decision is locked.

- **Equity impact questions for policy, budget, technology, and procurement** — Use this short question set for high-stakes decisions. Consider which authority and rights apply, who benefits, who carries the burden, which assumptions shape the outcome, what can change, and what must stay with the responsible official.
- **Questions about the steps, time, and effort a process requires** — Look at the process from the person's point of view. Count the steps, documents, trips, and hours away from work. Notice when a deadline, mailed notice, or login becomes a barrier. At each step, make sure a person can reach staff for help without using the online option.
- **Building equity into an idea while it takes shape** — Equity is easier to shape while an idea is still taking form. Before the design is settled, name who it is for, who may carry the burden, and which access needs may have been assumed. Also name who should be involved, who is responsible for the decision, and when the work will be reviewed.

After a change is tried, revisit what happened with the people affected.

Learn from what happens next

Return here after trying an idea, or when you want another perspective. A useful reflection connects what you intended, what actually happened, and what you will keep or change. Conversation with a willing colleague can deepen that learning.

What you can practice

- Distinguish a completed activity from an observed change in the work.
- Describe feedback or an observation without overstating what it proves.
- Choose a specific adjustment or a question for further learning.

An everyday example

You offered a written way to contribute before a meeting. More ideas arrived, but that alone does not establish that people had more influence. You also examine which ideas shaped the decision and invite feedback about the experience.

Try it in your work

Return to your practice note. Describe what you tried, what you observed, and what remains uncertain. Keep a useful change, adjust it, or seek another perspective. Bring a question to a peer conversation or Learning Lab if that would help.

Reflect: What would I repeat, what would I change, and what do I still need to understand?

Something to carry forward: A brief account of application, feedback or observations, and a next adjustment.

Learning and tools to explore

- **Critical Incidents in the Work** — When a workday surprises you — notice, change a channel, or use a formal door.
- **Outcomes, Not Intentions** — A disparity is an observation. Discrimination is a claim. Good intentions are not the test.
- **A final review for your working plan** — A useful working plan names who is responsible, when it will be reviewed, which access needs you considered, who you involved, and what you chose not to assume. Completing the boxes matters only when the follow-up is clear.
- **Session plan: purpose, activity, practical use, and access** — Plan the session around what participants will be able to use afterward. Set one clear learning goal, use an activity based on their work, offer something useful to take with them, and arrange access in advance.
- **Facilitation that participants can use in their work** — A useful session helps participants make a meaningful change in their own work. Begin with what they should leave able to do, keep presentations focused, and give them substantial time to practice with real materials.

Revisit any part of this path as your work and questions change.

Keep the learning connected

A question may lead to reading, a practical tool, a conversation, or a change in your work. These spaces offer different kinds of support.

- **Program orientation** — program page /orientation
- **Minnesota Communities** — program page /minnesota-communities
- **Equity Analysis Toolkit** — program page /learn/equity-toolkit
- **Guided practice** — program page /practice
- **Learning for your work** — program page /my-work/explore
- **Amplify Equity** — program page /one-dsd/amplify
- **One DSD Team** — program page /one-dsd/team
- **Learning Lab** — program page /one-dsd/team/learning-lab
- **DEIA leadership and growth in DSD** — program page /one-dsd/leadership