

# Religious Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

## THREE THINGS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS RESOURCE:

1. A summary of the CODE Workshop: Religious Inclusion
2. Top 5 ways to ensure religious inclusion
3. A template for Flexible Holidays Policy & an Onboarding Questionnaire

## Religious Inclusion CODE Workshop Summary

Many workplace DEI strategies and statements leave out any mention of religion. With Canada having one of the highest immigration rates per population of any country in the world, religious inclusion needs to be top of mind. As of 2021, there were more than 8 million newcomers with permanent residence living in Canada - roughly 21.5% of the total Canadian population. (*Statista Research Department, 2022*)

Newcomers bring diverse religions, perspectives and lived experiences to Canada and to the workplace. An international data project estimates that by 2050, globally, the number of religiously affiliated people will increase by 2.3 billion compared to an increase of 0.1 billion religiously unaffiliated people. (*Pew Research Center*)

This points to the world, our marketplaces, and workplaces becoming more religiously diverse.

### Why is it important to include religious diversity and inclusion in the workplace?

A study of DEI statements of Fortune 500 companies by the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation (RFBF) found that religion is only mentioned 43% of the time, compared to racial diversity on 95% of landing pages. (*Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Index, 2022*) Research by RFBF also shows that companies that include religion in their DEI strategies and pursue faith-friendly work environments do much better in their inclusion efforts than businesses that don't.

The business case for well-rounded inclusion efforts is clear, and the research is sound. Companies that ensure inclusion and equity have better employee engagement, client retention, access to new markets, and potential for expansion and produce better financial performance. (*Deloitte*) Faith is an essential aspect of a person's life, and since our lives don't end when we walk into work,

employees don't leave behind their faith. Therefore, disregarding your religious employees' needs is a liability and limits inclusion efforts.

## Who is responsible for building an inclusive and welcoming workplace?

Is it the government that makes laws to protect our rights? Is it the management team responsible for creating a culture of inclusion or middle managers for implementing DEI strategies? Or is it every employee, no matter their title? The answer is **everyone**. It is the responsibility of every person in a workplace to contribute to an inclusive workplace through their practices and allyship.

## Top 5 Ways to Ensure Religious Inclusion

### 1. Cultural literacy and continuous learning

Cultural literacy is knowledge of traditions, cultures and practices of people from other cultures than our own. Being culturally literate can help us understand and relate to people from diverse backgrounds, reducing any bias or prejudice that might appear due to ignorance. Cultural literacy also encourages and embraces differences and allows for positive interactions with diversity. It is not possible to become culturally literate without embodying a practice of continuous learning.

Adopting a multicultural calendar is a win-win way to ensure continuous learning and recognize different cultural and religious holidays. Referring to a multicultural calendar regularly allows employees in the workplace to continuously learn about upcoming cultural holidays and their significance and provides acknowledgement to those who celebrate these days. To learn more about the importance of celebrating all significant days, read more about the Celebrate Everything campaign by Dr. Abdulrehman. In addition, you can find a great multicultural calendar by the [Toronto Film School](#).

### 2. Flexible holiday or leave policy

Consider creating and implementing policies that allow staff to take paid time off to partake and celebrate religiously significant days. This flexibility is advantageous to a team since it builds trust that people can take time off

they need to efficiently balance their life and work without it impacting their productivity. This trust and flexibility have often shown an increase in workplace productivity, employee engagement and retention. A flexible leave policy differs from PTO in that it does not carry over to the following year, and employees can take a paid day off for religious or spiritual observances.

### 3. Make Your Events Inclusive (Internal and External)

Get input from employees when scheduling events, ordering food, finding a venue, and deciding on the type of gifts you are providing to event attendees. Having an event planning committee with diverse members is another great way to get differing perspectives on the event to ensure inclusion.

When scheduling an event, reflect on whether it falls on a religious holiday and if it will exclude specific employees who participate in celebrating their religious holiday and might be unable to attend. When ordering food, ensure that there are available halal or kosher food options, thereby including people whose religion might influence what they can eat. Finally, avoid gifting alcohol or food products since some beliefs don't allow for the consumption of alcohol or certain types of food. Instead, choose thoughtful gifts that everyone can enjoy regardless of their religion.

To better understand these measures and to proactively make them available, it is vital to ensure that your team has access to educational opportunities on different religious holidays and cultures to reduce conflict and misunderstandings.

### 4. Onboard for Success

Onboarding is often a vital but forgotten part of the recruitment process. When onboarding a new employee, this is the perfect time

to get to know your new team member and understand if they require any accommodations, if they celebrate any religious holidays, have any special dietary needs and how you can ensure the workplace is an inclusive space where they can thrive. During this onboarding meeting, take this time to review formal and informal norms, ask for their input, and make them feel welcome.

### 5. Spiritual and religious spaces

Some people's religion or spiritual practices might require praying or meditating during the workday. For example, Muslims offer their five daily obligatory prayers as an important part of their faith. Creating or assigning a quiet room where people can come to pray or meditate allows employees to participate in their practices uninterrupted. This room can be a quiet, private part of the building, with a few benches and shelves, pillows to sit or kneel on and equipment like a hand or foot washing space. When in doubt, you can always engage your employees to understand any specific needs they might have for prayer or quiet room. Include this space in your employee handbook and let new staff know it exists during onboarding. Set the tone that all employees can use this room as a quiet space for reflection and prayer, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Change requires much courage. It might feel uncomfortable to talk about religion in the workplace or to adopt a flexible leave policy, but learning happens through difficult but necessary conversations. Know that research repeatedly shows that these workplace initiatives positively impact your team and increase your organizational performance. Participate in continuous learning, engage your team in open conversations, and stay connected with CODE for ongoing support as we shift towards inclusive and equitable workplaces.

## TEMPLATES

### EXAMPLE OF A FLEXIBLE HOLIDAY LEAVE POLICY:

As an employee of (*insert name of organization*), you are eligible for paid time off under the Flexible Paid Time Off Policy. Under this Policy, an employee may take compensated time off as needed, so long as your manager approves the requested time off in advance. Under this Policy, an employee does not earn or accrue PTO hours in advance of taking compensated time off. Therefore no payment is made for PTO upon the termination of employment.

(*Insert the name of the organization*) is proud to implement this Policy to encourage all employees to take time off they need to celebrate any religious or cultural holidays they participate in.

Employees agree to avoid abusing this Policy in a manner that might negatively impact business operations, to communicate and collaborate with their team to make necessary arrangements during their time off, and to notify their managers of their time off in advance.

[Adapted from: Law Insider](#)

### EXAMPLE OF AN ONBOARDING QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. Please think about your needs at work - are there any possible accommodations we can make that would make the workplace more accessible and amiable to your priorities?
2. Is there anything you want us to know about your cultural or spiritual background?
3. Do you observe any cultural or religious days that you would like us to know about, and what can we do to support you during these days?
4. Are there any dietary needs you have?
5. Are there any religious or cultural practices you participate in that you would like us to know about?
6. How can we ensure a workplace where you feel welcomed, included, and respected?
7. Is there anything else about you that you would like us to know?

[Adapted from: Volunteering Resource Hub](#)

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact Kayla Buehler at [kbuehler@winnipeg-chamber.com](mailto:kbuehler@winnipeg-chamber.com).

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