



## **Civility and a Safe Workplace: Women in Astronomy Workshop**

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Taking the term “Women in Astronomy” in the literal sense, a group of multi-disciplinary, multi-faceted professional women from Space Telescope Science Institute—in engineering, science, outreach, and human resources—collaborated to create and deliver a workshop for the *Women in Astronomy IV* conference in Austin, Texas in June of 2017.

The impetus for developing the workshop arose based on the experience and history of the Institute. Over the past 15 years, the Institute has been on a journey to build a model diverse and inclusive workplace. The Institute identified, developed and implemented many of the best practices and strategies essential for creating such a respectful workplace. The workshop was inspired, in part, by our experiences. It was titled “Concrete Steps to Making Your Workplace More Inclusive” and focused on building awareness of differences and developing practical mechanisms for inclusion.

The 90-minute workshop led discussions in four major areas: the traditional binary gender role of women; race and ethnicity; gender identity and sexual orientation; and disability (mental illness, cognitive, neurodiversity and physical). Each attendee engaged in activities to explore privilege, bias, and identity in these areas. One participant wrote that they liked the way the workshop “covered lots of topics” and “aimed to show connections among the various flavors of oppression.”

In small groups, the participants considered and explored techniques and strategies that might lead to individuals feeling more included in the workplace. Another participant shared that this emphasis on discussion demonstrated that the workshop “listened to everyone’s opinions and

acknowledged their experiences.” Understanding and respecting the variety of individual circumstances that co-exist together at all times is the basis for inclusion. This is nothing new, but as a community, we continue to improve our ability to navigate these intersectionalities.

One finding of interest from the workshop was the variability in workplace climate between organizations. Diversity awareness ranged from organizations that had none (often referred to as “in denial”), to some awareness, with participants expressing cautious optimism at the progress made through diversity training, climate surveys, mentoring programs, and affinity support groups. “It was good to hear that other institutions have similar problems,” wrote one attendee. Another found it useful to hear from “people across all levels in the field.”

Most importantly, the workshop attempted to create an environment where people could speak and question, while acknowledging that they may say the wrong thing. No shame, blame, or guilt is necessary if inclusion is approached with an open mind and a promise to learn and improve in the future. No feedback was more positive than the attendee who wrote that the workshop was “a safe place to have tough, truthful conversations.”

The Institute workshop team included Alessandra Aloisi from the Science Mission Office; Francesca Boffi, Keira Brooks, Samantha Hoffmann, Cristina Oliveira, and Allyssa Riley from the Instruments Division; Sheryl Bruff from Human Resources; Brigitte Hesman and Laretta Nagel from the Operations and Engineering Division; Jessica Kenney and Denise Smith from the Office of Public Outreach; and for motivation and advice, Van Dixon from the Instruments Division. Based on the positive feedback, the workshop team has proposed the workshop for the Winter AAS Meeting at National Harbor in January 2018. Stay tuned in the future for the workshop materials to be available online through AURA.