

Creating An Inclusive Office Environment for the Holidays



As a diverse agency representative of many cultures, it is important to thoughtfully consider holiday decor and events. Below are best practices and key considerations to support an environment of inclusivity.

Cultural Celebrations are Valued:

Cultural celebration through holidays and events can be powerful places for sharing of joy and connection. Historically, certain events have been representative of the dominant culture and preferred for expression in workplaces. ODE wants to be a place of celebration and connection and to do so in a way that cherishes and pays attention to the cultural preferences, joys, and limitations of any employee or visitor. The following guidelines are in support of this direction.

Best Practices in the Workplace:

Individual expression is welcomed in your private workspace. Holiday decor in your private workspace should be displayed in such a way that staff clearly understand it is expressive of your personal values and not the values of the agency. All displays should be consistent with DAS policies on [discrimination and harassment free workplaces](#) and [holiday decorations and lights](#).

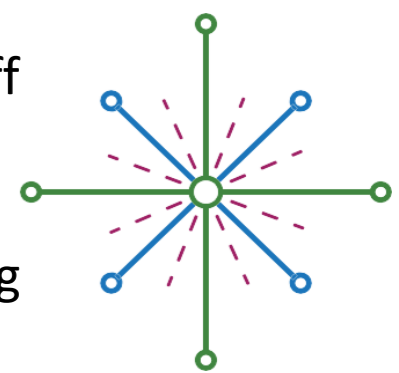
Ensure that holiday decorations in shared and public spaces are seasonal and not specific to a particular religion. Seasonal examples include autumn leaves, pumpkins, snowflakes, lights, bells, candy canes and seasonal wreaths.

Office celebrations and traditions (such as gift exchanges or costume contests) must be optional, neutral and inclusive. Costumes must be workplace appropriate.

Some have asked about decorated trees in the workplace. Courts have ruled that trees with decorations such as lights are secular in nature and can be displayed by government entities. DAS policy also allows for decorative trees during the month of December. Some may view Christmas trees as religious symbols, and for this reason ODE will be applying an equity, diversity and inclusion lens and may decide to be more sensitive than the law and DAS rulings.

Inclusive Language:

- ODE has a diverse staff that observe different holiday traditions. When wishing colleagues an enjoyable time off over the holidays, remember to say "happy holidays" or "have a great vacation."
- Inclusive questions would be "What traditions are you looking forward to this season?" or "Are you doing anything special this weekend?"



Questions to Consider Relating to Office Activities:

- Does this activity bring joy for **everyone**?
- Does this activity serve the goals of our unit/team and align with the mission of our agency?
- Which staff, stakeholders or guests does this activity or tradition positively or negatively affect? Does it present a balance of information about cultures and religions without the promotion of one over others? Will any staff, stakeholders or guests be made to feel like an outsider or not a welcomed participant in the activity or tradition? And/or does it ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences?
- What other possibilities were explored?

Together, it is up to us to create a strong community where every perspective is invited and celebrated. We count on each other to live in the value of inclusivity!



Please contact Human Resources staff, a union representative, Chief of Staff Cindy Hunt or Deputy Director Carmen Xiomara Urbina with questions.