

Ramadan at Work: Best Practices for an Inclusive Work Environment

Dear colleagues,

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. is an organization that values diversity and inclusion. One of our strategic goals is to foster and strengthen social inclusion in our agency. This information sheet on Ramadan is for your service team's kind consideration of how we can support our staff, participants and clients who will be observing Ramadan from May 16 - June 15, 2018. As we all learn more about being culturally inclusive and how to best be respectful and honouring of all the many practices and celebrations of our combined diversity, we have to also remember that *there is much diversity within each practice and celebration*. Also, we have to remain focused on our commitment to service as a whole and ensure that we continue to meet all of our operational requirements.

In particular, the information below provides some thoughts on how we can best support staff, participants and clients who might be fasting long days over the next month. Please feel free to share these ideas for discussion at your upcoming staff team meetings.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar and is observed by many people who are Muslim as a time of reflection, giving, prayer and fasting. Many people who observe Ramadan will fast each day from sunrise to sunset. This can include not eating food, drinking liquids (including water) or smoking. Not everyone fasts, however; it is less common for children, pregnant women and those who are sick and/or elderly.

Some of our staff, clients and participants may be observing the 30 days of fasting, which involves refraining from food and water in daylight hours. This year, the length of Ramadan will be long as Ramadan corresponds to the spring season. It is important to note that *everyone will observe Ramadan in their own way, with some people observing it more strictly and/or interpreting faith practices differently than others*.

When is Ramadan?

The dates of Ramadan change each year. In 2018, Ramadan begins on Wednesday, May 16, 2018. Ramadan lasts for 29-30 days and ends with the celebration of Eid-UI-Fitr, June 15, 2018. Eid is traditionally a three-day holiday of celebration, visiting family and friends, and a gift exchange.

Supporting colleagues, clients and students who are observing Ramadan

Out of respect for colleagues who may be observing Ramadan, the following best practices are recommended for an inclusive work environment. If you notice that a colleague or a client may be observing the fast, please be sensitive to what it entails and how it could impact them.

1. In general, throughout the year, it is an inclusive practice to allocate a space for people to pray. This might not always be possible as space is a premium in our work sites, but something for us all to try to accommodate.
2. Fasting around 17 hours a day – especially on a hot day – is not easy. The long day of fasting might be more challenging for clients attending evening or afternoon classes or workshops.

This information has been compiled collaboratively by the ISIP staff team and adapted from <http://www.hrzone.com/performance/people/ramadan-at-work-hr-best-practice> retrieved on 24 May, 2016.

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Please try to be especially supportive and understanding, as we always are, of the energy levels of our clients later in the day.

3. You could try, if possible, to schedule meetings in the morning while fasting colleagues and/or clients are relatively fresh; those who are fasting may find it tougher toward the end of the day.
4. In general, try to avoid asking a colleague who is fasting to go out for lunch or attend a meeting during lunch where others will be eating. Your colleagues may not mind – as they may be used to other people not observing the fast – but try to be discreet when you are eating nearby a colleague who is fasting.
5. This is a time to be mindful with regards to potlucks or the offering of snack foods. If there is food at a program/class, you may wish to offer to set some aside for a fasting client to take home to eat later when the sun goes down.
6. Try to avoid asking fasting colleagues to commit to evening hours or events whenever possible, as their evenings may be dedicated to prayer, gatherings and eating.
7. Ramadan-observing staff and program participants may request vacation time toward the end of Ramadan if they are observing intense worship practices. Please try to accommodate them if it does not clash with staff contract vacation entitlements or the program curriculum.
8. For those who celebrate Eid, staff who have vacation entitlement/Cultural Heritage Day available may request time off to celebrate. Try to accommodate staff if it does not clash with staff contract vacation entitlement. Instructors and facilitators could speak with participants who celebrate Eid, June 15, 2018, to find a way to ensure that they feel supported.
9. Please encourage colleagues who wish to talk openly about their practices around Ramadan to do so and to feel comfortable with questions from non-fasting colleagues on how to make them feel supported. If colleagues do not wish to talk about their practices, please respect their wishes as well.
10. Please note that just because a colleague may speak Arabic or Farsi, it does not mean that they are Muslim and specifically follow this particular practice or faith.

Please feel free to share your thoughts on this document with your team or supervisor so we can increase our learning about being inclusive in our workplaces.

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