

# Neurodiversity in the workplace

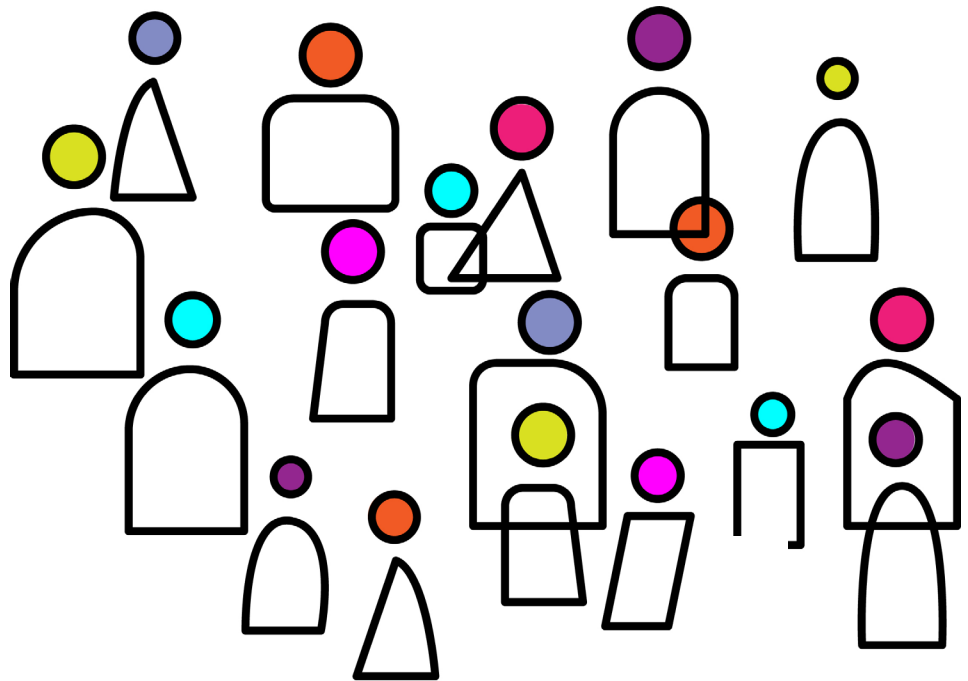
This guide is to foster a neuro-inclusive workplace environment for all CIRES employees. Neurodiversity represents all human experiences with a focus on respect, support, and inclusion for everyone. Ideas in this guide will help you to initiate conversations with your peers, supervisors and direct reports about identifying potential barriers and encouraging flexibility in policies and practices in order for everyone to do their best work.

## What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity recognizes the natural variations in brain structure, chemistry, and function that shape our unique human experiences. There is no “correct” or “incorrect” type of brain, and therefore no right or wrong way to express creativity and process work.

It is important to be aware of the uniqueness of people, no matter how they identify, and that there might be additional challenges to those who identify somewhere along the neurodivergent spectrum. These include but are not limited to differences in communication, managing deadlines, sense of exclusion, organization, and sensory sensitivities. A neuro-inclusive approach involves seeing the value in the unique ways people work best.

Even with unique strengths, those who identify as neurodivergent have invisible disabilities and face challenges that aren't always obvious. Neurodiversity is a positively-connoted word that can be used to signal that all people — whether neurotypical, neurodivergent, or somewhere in between — deserve respect and inclusion.



## Removing barriers with Universal Design

This guide for CIRES employees advocates for a “Universal Design” approach. The term “Universal Design” refers to the purposeful design of physical structures to be accessible to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life. Automatic doors at grocery stores and ramps alongside stairs are examples of universal design. Access to these buildings does not require accommodation.

This principle can be applied in the workplace, when purposeful design of workplace norms removes barriers and allows all employees to do their best work without needing to ask for accommodation.

By following this approach, we believe that all employees will benefit. No one person will be required to reveal invisible disabilities, such as ADHD, dyslexia, and autism, in order to participate fully on their teams. In our recommendations, we center a strengths-based approach which celebrates the unique skill set that each employee brings to their work for CIRES.

All CIRES employees, whether working at the NOAA building or on campus, [can request an accommodation](#) related to disability, religion and creed, or pregnancy and lactation through the CU Boulder ADA Coordinator. Please reach out to this office if an accommodation would support your work at CIRES.

## Supporting new employees

Onboarding provides an opportunity to establish a culture of trust and psychological safety. Any CIRES employee can support the onboarding of a new team member!

- Provide accommodations proactively by offering flexible options to all team members, and share this guide with employees to acknowledge that we strive to have a neuro-inclusive workplace.
- Focus on employee strengths by offering an optional strengths assessment (such as this free tool: Standout Assessment) and a discussion to explore how to apply them to the role.
- Ensure that expectations and group norms are written down and accessible. Make sure to

share your group norms with new team members and commit to revisiting often so that new employees can offer ideas on team culture improvement. CIRES offers a group norms training for any group that meets regularly; contact Becca Edwards for more information ([becca.edwards@colorado.edu](mailto:becca.edwards@colorado.edu)).

- Remember that employees with neurodivergence may not choose to self-disclose. Avoid making assumptions about individuals' needs and capabilities.

## Recommendations for supervisors

- Ensure feedback is timely, clear, and specific. Avoid ambiguities and encourage a two-way dialogue. CIRES offers a training on developing feedback skills that may be helpful.
- Regular interaction fosters psychological safety. Meet with direct reports monthly.
- If you observe behavior that seems different or unexpected, reflect on your personal biases and have a conversation with the employee to better understand the situation.
- If challenges arise or goals are off-track, schedule a collaborative check-in to actively listen and work together on solutions. Follow up with a written summary to ensure alignment.
- For the Annual Summary of Accomplishment process, send an email document with specific questions to reflect on a few days in advance to help employees prepare. Offer the option of a virtual or in-person meeting.

### CITATIONS

[Neurodiversity Resource Group at DU](#) • [Neurodiversity @ Mines](#)  
[Neurodiversity in the Workplace](#)

### GUIDE DESIGN TEAM

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## How to bring neuro-inclusivity to meetings and team processes

- Provide meeting agendas ahead of time. Consider methods of gathering ideas from team members before and after the meeting, on an online agenda or via email, to allow for processing time and increased ability to contribute.
- Establish a consistent place for meeting notes, and allow access to all team members. Add a summary or recap of key points or decisions made during the meeting for those that process information better in writing.
- Give time for participants to process questions or topics before responding. Avoid putting individuals on the spot.
- It is important to support different communication styles and modalities. Consider developing group norms to allow different methods of participation in team processes.
- Engage with CIRES Access and Cultural Innovation trainings to help promote a neuro-inclusive, psychologically safe, and effective work environment for all CIRES employees.