The IDEAs Playbook

for ATD Chapters

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome to the IDEAs Playbook!

Many chapters want to incorporate more IDEAs - Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility – into their chapter operations but aren't sure where to start.

This Playbook was put together to help chapters avoid avoiding unintentional exclusion of both prospective and current members, fostering a more welcoming and inclusive environment.

All of the examples in this Playbook are from the ATD Sharing Out Success (SOS), Chapter of the Month (COM), or the Chapter Excellence Awards (CEA) submissions. All of these can be found on the ATD Chapter Leader Community (CLC) website at www.td.org/chapters/clc

Pathways to Advancing IDEAs in Chapter Operations

Goal of this Playbook: To build foundational awareness, start small, and create momentum for long-term change, regardless of topic. In other words, this is not limited to DEIBA efforts, making it truly accessible to all.

For the purpose of this Playbook, we want to acknowledge different approaches to DEIBA work. Here we present two perspectives related to different styles of communication.

Low-context and **high-context** refer to the way communication is understood and conveyed in different cultures. The difference between low-context and high-context communication represents a fundamental distinction in how people share and interpret information across cultures and settings.

Low-context communication is explicit, direct, and relies primarily on words to convey meaning. In this approach:

- Messages are clearly stated with little ambiguity
- Information is primarily conveyed through explicit verbal language
- The speaker/writer is responsible for making the message clear
- Less emphasis is placed on contextual elements like relationships, shared history, or environment
- Communication tends to be more linear and detail-oriented
- Common in cultures like the United States, Germany, and Switzerland

High-context communication is implicit, nuanced, and derives meaning significantly from context. In this approach:

- Messages often contain implicit meaning that must be inferred
- Information is conveyed through non-verbal cues, shared understanding, and contextual elements
- The listener/reader is expected to understand subtleties and "read between the lines"
- Greater emphasis on relationships, hierarchy, and shared cultural knowledge
- Communication tends to be more circular and relationship-focused
- Common in cultures like Japan, China, and many Middle Eastern countries

Practical Differences

Directness: Low-context communicators might say "I disagree with this proposal" while **high-context** communicators might say "This proposal presents some interesting challenges" (implying disagreement).

Explicitness in instructions: Low-context approaches spell out steps clearly, while **high-context** approaches might rely more on demonstration and implicit understanding.

Problem-solving: Low-context cultures often address issues directly, while **high-context** cultures may work through relationship networks and indirect methods.

These differences aren't binary but exist on a spectrum, and individuals can adapt their communication style depending on the situation, even if they have cultural preferences for one approach.

In many cases, a blended approach might be the best solution as it combines the directness and efficiency of low-context communication with the relationship-building and nuance of high-context communication, allowing for clearer messaging while maintaining cultural sensitivity. By strategically employing both styles based on the situation, communicators can achieve clarity without sacrificing relationship development—particularly valuable in diverse workplaces and cross-cultural interactions.

How to Use This Playbook

Select an approach that you are looking to leverage. Read a real example that a chapter has used. Look at the alternative low or high options to see what fits your chapter's needs.

Select an Approach
- Review the Chapter Example, paying particular attention to the following:
  - **Low Context** highlighted text
  - **High Context** highlighted text

Approach 1: Build Awareness & Personal Commitment

Low-Context Approach

- Learn the basics: Explore ATD's IDEAs resources, key terms, and foundational DEIBA concepts.
- Assess personal biases: Take an unconscious bias self-assessment.
- Identify champions & allies: Connect with like-minded chapter members.

High-Context Approach

- Recognize that inclusion efforts start with personal commitment. Develop a deeper understanding of key DEIB principles by reflecting on how your experiences shape your perspective.
- Engage in meaningful conversations with members who have been historically excluded to understand their challenges.
- Join or form an IDEAs-focused discussion group within your chapter to encourage ongoing learning and peer support.

Chapter Example: ATD Greater Las Vegas – Creating an Accessibility Statement

Link: https://atdlasvegas.org/Accessibility

Problem Statement: The Chapter wanted to make a firm commitment to having a strong accessibility statement that included all members.

Current DEI Work: This is a continuation of existing DEI initiatives for the chapter.

The Results: Accessibility Statement

Thank you for visiting ATD Greater Las Vegas! We are committed to ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities. We are continually improving the user experience of our website, meetings, and communications for everyone and applying the relevant accessibility standards.

We welcome your feedback on the accessibility of the ATD Las Vegas website. Please let us know if you encounter accessibility barriers by emailing our Board directly at info@atdlasvegas.org.

Applying the Low-Context Approach

With **low-context**, accessibility statements should be clear, direct, and provide specific information about accessibility efforts. They should clearly state the commitment to accessibility, outline specific accessibility measures, and offer contact information for inquiries.

Key elements in an accessibility statement for **low-context**:

- **Explicit Commitment:** A clear statement that the organization is committed to making its website/content accessible.
- **Specific Accessibility Measures:** Detailed descriptions of accessibility measures taken or planned, including:
    - **Web Accessibility Conformance Standards:** Mention specific standards like WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).
    - **Accessibility Tools:** Mention any tools used to identify and address accessibility issues.
    - **Types of Accessibility: Specify which aspects of accessibility are addressed (e.g., alt text for images, captions for videos).**
- **Contact Information:** Provide clear contact information (email, phone) for individuals to report accessibility issues or ask questions.
- **Reasonable Steps:** Mention any steps taken to resolve issues and address feedback.
- **Avoid Ambiguity:** Avoid jargon and use simple, direct language that is easily understood.
- **Provide Examples:** If possible, provide specific examples of accessibility improvements.
- **Use Written Communication Effectively**: Make the statement easily accessible in written form, with clear headings and concise paragraphs.

Applying the High-Context Approach

In **high-context** cultures, accessibility statements should emphasize relationships, trust, and indirect communication, using non-verbal cues and shared understanding. Instead of directly listing accessibility features, focus on creating a sense of empathy and understanding for individuals with disabilities.

Key elements in an accessibility statement for **high-context**:

- **Build Empathy and Trust**
    - **Start with a warm greeting:** Acknowledge the audience's presence and value their time.
    - **Focus on shared experiences:** Relate accessibility to the audience's existing knowledge and concerns.
    - **Use indirect language:** Implied messages and non-verbal cues are more important than explicit statements.
- **Emphasize Context and Shared Understanding**
    - **Use storytelling and examples:** Instead of listing technical features, explain how accessibility benefits the community and its members.
    - **Focus on the "why" rather than the "what":** Explain the purpose and value of accessibility rather than just listing features.
    - **Use visuals and non-verbal communication:** Incorporate images, gestures, and body language to convey your message.

- **Foster Collaboration and Feedback**
  - o **Invite questions and discussion:** Create a space for dialogue and ensure the audience feels heard and valued.
  - o **Emphasize teamwork and mutual responsibility:** Highlight how everyone can contribute to creating a more accessible environment.
  - o **Build relationships:** Focus on building trust and rapport with the audience.

Looking at the Greater Las Vegas' Example

We applied the **low-context**, **high-context** principles above to the example from the chapter. Please note that some highlighted text might be both **low-context** and **high-context** at the same time (a blend of both) and that not all text is highlighted. We want to emphasize that, in many cases, leveraging a blend of clear communication and intentional relationship building is a key driver for success in engaging with chapter membership.

Thank you for visiting ATD Greater Las Vegas! **We are committed** to ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities. **We are continually improving the user experience of our website, meetings, and communications for everyone and applying the relevant accessibility standards**.

We welcome your feedback on the accessibility of the ATD Las Vegas website. **Please let us know if you encounter accessibility barriers by emailing our Board directly** at info@atdlasvegas.org.

Approach 2: Evaluate Current Chapter Practices

Low-Context Approach

- Review chapter materials & policies for unintentional barriers.
- Survey members for feedback on inclusion and accessibility.
- Check representation: Assess leadership, speakers, and panelists.

High-Context Approach

- Go beyond a surface-level review of policies—engage members in open discussions about barriers they have experienced.
- Conduct focus groups or interviews to gather qualitative insights on inclusivity and accessibility.
- Examine decision-making processes to ensure diverse perspectives are included in chapter leadership.

Chapter Example: ATD West Michigan – Reevaluating Accessibility Practices/Operations

Problem Statement: Make events accessible and inclusive

Current DEI Work: The chapter uses all of Zoom's accessibility features for virtual presentations, and the president (who is a Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies - CPACC) reviews the slides to make sure they are accessible (no flashing gifs, proper font size, etc.) For in-person meetings, they carefully ensure that the space is accessible for mobility by arranging seating for ease of use and movement and that necessary equipment for those with sensory disabilities is available (microphone, large screen, etc.) They have also conducted sessions on accessibility measures at events.

The Results:
The Board continues to review accessibility needs and implements best practices as needed.

Applying the Low-Context Approach

A low-context approach to reevaluating accessibility practices or operations means using a clear, direct, and explicit communication style throughout the process. It minimizes assumptions, avoids relying on shared background knowledge, and ensures that all expectations, procedures, and outcomes are clearly documented and transparent.

- **Clearly Define Accessibility Goals:** "Our goal is to ensure all training materials meet WCAG 2.2 AA standards by Q3." This includes captioning all videos, using alt text on images, and providing accessible slide decks."
- **Avoid vague phrases**: Avoid "Make things more inclusive" without specifying what that means.

- **Use Explicit Evaluation Criteria:**
  - ○ Create checklists or rubrics
  - ○ Share these openly with volunteers, speakers, sponsors, and learners
- **Document All Processes**
  - ○ Provide written guides and SOPs for how accessibility is integrated into operations.
  - ○ Run all documents through an accessibility checker or have an assistive tech user review them.
- **Gather Direct, Structured Feedback**
  - ○ Use surveys with specific, closed-ended questions.
  - ○ Avoid assuming participants will bring up issues unless directly asked.
- **Train Volunteers with Clear Expectations**
- **Audit & Report Transparently**
  - ○ Publish precise audit results.
  - ○ Share action plans and timelines publicly.
- **Hold People Accountable:** Incorporate accessibility metrics into chapter/team KPIs.

Applying the High-Context Approach

A **high-context** approach to reevaluating accessibility practices or operations emphasizes relationships, trust, shared understanding, and nonverbal communication over explicit documentation or directness. In high-context cultures or environments, accessibility practices are shaped through collaboration, lived experience, cultural norms, and mutual respect rather than step-by-step written procedures or rigid checklists.

- **Prioritize Relationships and Community Input**
  - ○ Engage in informal, trust-building conversations with learners, staff, or community members with disabilities.
  - ○ Accessibility feedback may come through personal stories, body language, or shared conversations, not surveys or forms.
- **Rely on Shared Values and Cultural Understanding**
  - ○ Instead of rigid definitions of accessibility, the focus is on what "being inclusive" means within that community's context.
- **Use Observation and Contextual Awareness**
  - ○ The Chapter should watch for nonverbal cues that indicate access barriers (e.g., confusion, withdrawal, hesitance).
  - ○ Adjustments are made in real time based on the perceived needs of the group.
- **Emphasize Informal Knowledge Sharing**
  - ○ Chapter members talk through accessibility practices over lunch, through mentoring, or during community gatherings rather than through formal training sessions.
  - ○ Accessibility knowledge is passed through experiential learning and storytelling.
- **Trust-Based Decision Making**
  - ○ Rather than standardized audits, decisions are often based on intuition, relationships, and what has worked in the past.
  - ○ Because of shared values and history, chapter members trust each other to do the right thing.
- **Feedback Is Subtle and Indirect**

o   Be open to listening between the lines and watch for tone, hesitation, or expressions that signal discomfort or disengagement.

Looking at the ATD West Michigan Example

We applied the **low-context**, **high-context** principles above to the example from the chapter. Please note that some highlighted text might be both **low-context** and **high-context** at the same time (a blend of both) and that not all text is highlighted. We want to emphasize that, in many cases, leveraging a blend of clear communication and intentional relationship building is a key driver for success in engaging with chapter membership.

- A long-time participant **casually mentioned struggling** with navigating the platform during a virtual event, which became a key insight.
- A training program **incorporated traditional knowledge-sharing practices** rather than adhering strictly to digital accessibility guidelines.
- A facilitator notices participants are not engaging with a digital tool and **switches to a more familiar method** without requiring a formal process.
- Chapter members **talk through accessibility practices** over lunch, through mentoring, or during community gatherings rather than through formal training sessions.
- Feedback that contains actionable steps:
  - o   "When we used images without descriptions in our last session, Maria **told me she felt left out**. Now, I always describe visuals out loud."
  - o   "It was **a bit tricky**, but I managed."
  - o   "Maybe next time we can **try a different way**?"

Approach 3: Take Small, Actionable Steps

Low-Context Approach

- Make meetings & events more inclusive: Accessible venues, captions for virtual meetings, and diverse speakers.
- Use inclusive language: Pronoun introductions, bias-free communication.
- Invite & welcome new voices: Reach out to underrepresented groups.

High-Context Approach

- Cultivate a chapter culture that actively encourages diverse participation by setting expectations for inclusive meeting facilitation.
- Develop mentorship programs or networking opportunities for underrepresented members.
- Train chapter leadership on how to navigate difficult conversations around inclusion effectively.

Chapter Example: ATD Greater Philadelphia – Recruiting a Champion to Create a SIG

Problem Statement: ATD Philly serves Philadelphia, the broader Philadelphia suburbs, and Southern NJ. They have identified members within their main urban area interested in expanding their DEI initiatives. They want to create a specific SIG to address this interest that they identified for their chapter.

Current DEI Work: ATD Philly has board commitment and is in the process of developing their own DEI statement for the chapter. Additionally, they include DEI topics/learnings in their board meetings at least 3 times a year to keep themselves relevant to DEI.

The Results (*in progress***):**
The chapter board members support the SIG initiative, but are stretched too thin to recruit a champion and don't know where to start.

Applying the Low-Context Approach

With **low-context**, volunteer recruitment relies on direct, explicit communication and clear expectations. This involves detailed job descriptions, targeted advertising, and clear onboarding procedures.

- **Direct Communication: Low-context** prioritizes direct and explicit communication. Volunteers are given clear instructions and expectations through written job descriptions, online postings, and direct communication from the organization.
- **Clear Job Descriptions:** Well-written job descriptions outlining tasks, responsibilities, and required skills are crucial. This allows potential volunteers to assess if the position aligns with their skills and interests.

- **Targeted Advertising:** Recruitment efforts may target specific demographics or groups likely to be interested in volunteering, such as local universities, community organizations, or social media platforms.
- **Onboarding and Training:** Clear onboarding procedures, training programs, and ongoing support ensure volunteers understand their roles and responsibilities, fostering a positive and productive experience.
- **Example:** A volunteer recruitment flyer for a local food bank in Hillsborough could detail specific tasks like sorting groceries, assisting with distribution, or working with clients, along with the required time commitment and any necessary skills or experience.

Applying the High-Context Approach

With **high-context**, volunteer recruitment often relies on personal relationships and trust-building. Instead of direct advertising, organizations might leverage existing networks and rely on word-of-mouth referrals from trusted individuals or community leaders.

- **Leveraging Networks:** In high-context, organizations might reach out to community leaders, religious figures, or members of professional networks to gain their support in recruiting volunteers. This approach emphasizes the importance of personal connections and endorsements.
- **Word-of-Mouth Recruitment:** Instead of relying solely on formal recruitment materials, organizations might encourage existing volunteers to recruit friends, family, and acquaintances. This builds trust and creates a sense of community within the volunteer group.
- **Building Relationships:** Establishing strong relationships with potential volunteers is crucial. This can involve attending community events, participating in local activities, and building rapport with individuals and organizations within the community.
- **Indirect Communication:** High-context often values indirect communication styles. Instead of directly asking for volunteers, organizations might subtly hint at the need for help and encourage individuals to volunteer based on their understanding of the situation.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** It's essential to be mindful of the cultural norms and values of the target community. For example, some may be more comfortable with indirect requests or prefer to be approached by trusted individuals rather than through general advertisements.

Looking at the ATD Greater Philadelphia Example (*in progress*)

We applied the **low-context**, **high-context** principles above to the example from the chapter. Please note that some highlighted text might be both **low-context** and **high-context** at the same time (a blend of both) and that not all text is highlighted. We want to emphasize that, in many cases, leveraging a blend of clear communication and intentional relationship building is a key driver for success in engaging with chapter membership.

The chapter board members support the SIG initiative, but are stretched too thin to recruit a champion and don't know where to start. Here are some suggestions:

- **Craft a Message with Meaning**
  - Begin with the "why" of the chapter before making the "ask."
  - Leverage existing networks for personal introductions.
  - Emphasize relationships and community identity.

- o Address the specifics of the role, the tasks, and the responsibilities of the position, and weave the "what's in it for me" (WIIFM) into the ask.
- o Consider breaking the position into two if the amount of work is considered too much for one person.
- **Leveraging Networks**
  - o Reach out to chapter members, sponsors, and past board members.
  - o Consider reaching out to community leaders or members of professional networks with similar interests to gain their support in recruiting volunteers.
  - o Encourage existing volunteers to recruit their friends, family, and colleagues. This builds trust and creates a sense of community within the volunteer group.
  - o Consider breaking the role into smaller chunks and assigning it to existing board members or creating a rotation schedule.

Approach 4: Deeper Dive - Leverage the IDEAs Playbook & ATD Resources

Low-Context Approach

- Follow tailored beginner strategies from the IDEAs Playbook.
- Attend DEIB training: Webinars, workshops, or mentorships.
- Share what you learn: Create quick-share guides or chapter discussions.

High-Context Approach

- Adapt the IDEAs Playbook to fit the unique needs of your chapter by integrating real-life examples and case studies.
- Facilitate peer-led discussions on key DEIBA concepts to ensure collective understanding and engagement.
- Use feedback from chapter members to refine DEIBA efforts continuously and keep them relevant.

Chapter Example: ATD Southeastern Wisconsin – Integration DEI Into Monthly Events

Problem Statement: In 2022, to strengthen their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), the Southeastern Wisconsin Chapter developed a strategy to find speakers from underrepresented groups and encourage presenters to connect their topics to DEI. By proactively recruiting speakers from diverse backgrounds, they ensured a greater variety of voices were featured in chapter programming. Furthermore, by reaching out to speakers in advance and asking them to explicitly discuss the DEI implications of their topics during their presentations, they integrated a DEI lens into regular chapter programming throughout the year.

Current DEI Work: The chapter held 14 events that specifically touched on DEI throughout 2021. This was an easy way to increase the frequency and quality of our DEI conversations. We may consider adding a question about how the presenter would make this connection to our presenter submission form.

The Results:

The chapter proactively included DEI conversations in 14 of our events in 2021. While we can't show a direct correlation, our member survey showed that 91% of our members agreed or strongly agreed that they feel welcome at our chapter events.

Applying the Low-Context Approach

A low-context approach to embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) into chapter programming focuses on explicit communication. This might include any of the following:

- **Clear and Direct Communication:** Utilize straightforward language in surveys and reports to ensure all participants understand the questions and findings without ambiguity.
- **Explicit Metrics and Benchmarks:** Employ specific, measurable indicators to assess DEI progress, such as diversity ratios, pay equity, and promotion rates among underrepresented groups.

- **Written Documentation:** Provide comprehensive reports detailing the assessment process, methodologies, and findings, ensuring transparency and accountability.
- **Actionable Feedback:** Offer clear, practical recommendations based on assessment results, facilitating straightforward implementation of DEI initiatives.
- **Inclusive Language:** Ensure that the language used is inclusive and free from jargon, promoting a sense of belonging and encouraging honest participation.

Applying the High-Context Approach

A **high-context** approach to embedding a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) mindset into chapter programming utilizes a shared understanding and relational dynamics.

- **Emphasis on Relationships:** Building and maintaining trust is central. DEI topics may focus on the quality of interpersonal relationships, group cohesion, and the extent to which individuals feel a sense of belonging.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognizing and respecting cultural differences is crucial. Programs can be designed to be culturally appropriate and may involve open-ended questions that allow for nuanced responses.
- **Contextual Understanding:** The assessment process considers the historical, social, and organizational context, acknowledging that experiences of diversity and inclusion are shaped by these factors.

Looking at the ATD Southeastern Wisconsin Example

We applied the **low-context**, **high-context** principles above to the example from the chapter. Please note that some highlighted text might be both **low-context** and **high-context** at the same time (a blend of both) and that not all text is highlighted. We want to emphasize that, in many cases, leveraging a blend of clear communication and intentional relationship building is a key driver for success in engaging with chapter membership.

The chapter updated its speaker submission form that asked potential speakers to **address the following** about their presentation (as applicable):

- Can these tools/techniques/ideas help uncover barriers to diversity, equity, or inclusion?
- How have organizations used these tools/techniques/ideas to improve diversity, equity, or inclusion?
- **Do these tools/techniques/ideas have different impacts on different employee/customer/provider populations?**
- Are there possible unintended consequences to diversity/equity/inclusion efforts if these tools/techniques/ideas are not used thoughtfully?
- If the speaker cannot identify connections to their specific topic, identify an area of the capability model that connects with their topic and suggest some DEI questions based on the capability model area.
- If applicable, ask the speaker to add a section to their presentation to identify those DEI connections explicitly **and provide some examples or suggestions**.

While a direct correlation wasn't possible, our **member survey showed that 91% of our members agreed or strongly agreed** that they feel welcome at our chapter events.

Approach 5: Measure & Celebrate Progress

Low-Context Approach

- Track small wins: Document improvements in inclusivity.
- Recognize efforts: Celebrate contributions to DEIBA progress.
- Plan for next steps: Transition to intermediate strategies.

High-Context Approach

- Establish key metrics to track progress, such as member engagement rates and diverse leadership representation.
- Create an annual DEIBA report summarizing successes, challenges, and areas for growth.
- Use storytelling and testimonials to highlight how inclusion efforts have positively impacted members.

Chapter Example: ATD NYC – Expanding Membership Levels

Problem Statement: Since 2020, NYC has wanted to create new ways to expand offerings for their members who were students in transition and are expanding to retired and underserved industries.

Current DEI Work: Due to fluctuations in the market and workforce, it seems prudent to reevaluate membership levels to be more accommodating of those who were in transition, students, or begin the retirement process.

The Results:

The Chapter Board engaged in meaningful conversations with members who had been historically excluded to understand their challenges. These members included populations of former members who were retired, in-transition, students, or who were in the military (former or current), and in the non-profit space.

Their concerns led the Board to consider restructuring their membership levels to better accommodate these populations. As you can see from the table below, the reimagined membership levels shifted the number of members in a way that was mor sustainable for both the individuals and the chapter.

2021 -2025 Member Levels	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 *
Individual	144	105	131	138	127
Courtesy	36	33	3	3	2
Past President	17	15	14	16	15
Student	14	10	13	15	17
In Transition	1	1	9	14	10
Healthcare, Military, Non-Profit	0	0	5	9	10
Retired	2	2	4	3	2
Individual 3-Yr	0	0	3	3	3
Corporate	2	0	4	1	1
Individual (YP)	1	4	0	1	1
Other	1	0	7	2	2
Total	218	170	193	205	190 *

Applying the Low-Context Approach

With **low-context**, a membership rate list would be created using clear, explicit language and a direct, straightforward approach. The list would likely be designed for easy readability and understanding, focusing on providing specific information about membership levels and associated costs.

- **Clear and Concise Language:** Use straightforward language that is easy to understand. Avoid jargon or ambiguous phrases. Emphasize direct communication and avoid relying on unspoken cues or subtle hints.
- **Explicit Information:** Clearly state the membership levels (e.g., Basic, Premium, Elite) and provide specific details about the benefits and features associated with each level. List the cost for each membership level, including any recurring fees or one-time charges.
- **Structured Format:** Organize the list clearly and logically, possibly using tables or lists to present the information. Use headings, subheadings, and bullet points to make the list easy to scan and navigate.
- **Direct Communication:** Avoid ambiguity and ensure all information is presented clearly and unambiguously. Focus on direct communication and avoid relying on unspoken assumptions or cultural nuances.
- **Visual Clarity:** Use a visually appealing design that is easy to read. Consider using a clean font, sufficient spacing, and clear headings to enhance readability.

Applying the High-Context Approach

With **high-context**, creating a membership rate list would involve subtle communication and building relationships before explicitly stating membership rates. This might involve informal

discussions, references from trusted individuals, and focusing on long-term connections rather than immediate deals.

- **Emphasis on Relationships:** High-context cultures prioritize building relationships and trust before diving into specific details like membership rates. The initial focus would be establishing a connection and understanding the potential member's needs and values.
- **Subtle Communication:** Instead of directly stating membership rates, a high-context approach might involve hinting at the benefits of membership, highlighting the value it provides, and subtly suggesting the potential investment.
- **Indirect Language:** Direct financial figures might be avoided, and the focus would be on conveying the overall benefits of membership, perhaps using metaphors or analogies to illustrate the value.
- **Nonverbal Cues:** Nonverbal communication, such as body language and tone of voice, would be crucial in conveying the message and establishing trust.
- **Contextual Understanding:** The context of the conversation, the setting, and the relationship between the parties would all influence how the membership rates are communicated.
- **Personalized Approach:** Instead of a generic membership rate list, a high-context approach would tailor the message to each individual's unique circumstances and needs.

Looking at the ATD NYC Example

We applied the **low-context**, **high-context** principles above to the example from the chapter. Please note that some highlighted text might be both **low-context** and **high-context** at the same time (a blend of both) and that not all text is highlighted. We want to emphasize that, in many cases, leveraging a blend of clear communication and intentional relationship building is a key driver for success in engaging with chapter membership.

The chapter Board **engaged in meaningful conversations with members** who had been historically excluded **to understand their challenges**. These members included populations of former members who were retired, in-transition, students, or who were in the military (former or current), and in the non-profit space.

Their concerns led the Board to consider restructuring their membership levels to better accommodate these populations. As you can see from the table below, **the reimagined membership levels shifted the number of members** in a way that was more sustainable for both the individuals and the chapter.

The chapter **created new membership levels, pricing, and detailed explanations** of their revised membership levels.

Membership Level	Benefits	Annual Cost
Individual	Access to all content, events for 1 year	$125
Individual 2-Year	Access to all content, events for 2 years, 10% discount	$225
Individual 3-Year	Access to all content, events for 3 years, 15% discount	$320
Healthcare, Military or Non-Profit	Access to all content, events for 1 year If you are an employee within the healthcare, military or non-profit sectors we invite you to join at a discounted rate. Military includes active, reserve or guard member, have an honorable discharge,	$100

Membership Level	Benefits	Annual Cost
	are retired from or a veteran of one the the US uniformed services. Please upload your ID or proof of employment as part of your registration or renewal.	
In Transition	Access to all content, events for 6 months In recognition of the current economic times, ATD NYC is offering a discounted Chapter membership rate for talent development professionals in job transition. Those who are currently unemployed are eligible to join ATD NYC or renew their current Chapter membership at a one-time rate of $50 for a 6-month membership.	$50
Student Membership	Access to all content, events for 1 year Annual membership for students of undergraduate or graduate programs, not to exceed 5 years unless approved by the Board. To be eligible, you must upload one of the following at initial onboarding and each renewal cycle: Photo of your dated student ID; Letter from a professor or academic advisor; Letter from Residency Coordinator or Program Director	$50
Retired	Access to all content, events for 1 year Annual membership to the ATD NYC Chapter for those who are retired from the Talent Development professional or are 65 years of age or older and still want to be active in the Talent Development community.	$35
Corporate Membership	Access to all content, events for 1 year Corporate Member rates apply when 3 or more employees of the same company join the chapter at the same time. This results in a reduced rate of $100/member (+$100 for each additional member over 3). Requests for 10+ Corporate Membership may be eligible for a further discount.	$300

Approach 6: Sustain Momentum & Overcome Challenges

Low-Context Approach

- Expect resistance: Change takes time—stay committed and patient.
- Lean on allies: Engage leadership and members to build collective accountability.
- Maintain momentum: Set regular check-ins to review progress and adjust strategies.

High-Context Approach

- Normalize discomfort: DEIBA conversations may challenge long-held perspectives but are necessary for growth.
- Develop strategies for handling pushback: Equip members with tools for responding to resistance constructively.
- Encourage long-term engagement: Integrate DEIBA initiatives into the chapter's strategic goals rather than viewing them as separate efforts.

Chapter Example: ATD Florida Suncoast Chapter – Building a New Community

Problem Statement: In January 2025, the Society for Technical Communications filed for bankruptcy in CA (Chapter 7). The Florida Chapter and two separate SIGs lost everything (dues, platforms, budget, intellectual property, systems, etc., with no advanced notice. They needed a home. Since "technical communication" is part of the TD Competency Model, our chapter offered them a SIG to keep the community together and integrate into our chapter.

Current DEI Work: Florida Suncoast is a medium chapter that focuses primarily on the trainers, instructional designers, training supervisors & managers, and independent consultants, almost all of whom are within a narrow scope of job families within Talent Development. While DEI efforts to engage with different populations have met with mixed success, diversity of thought has been a growth area.

The Results (*in progress*)**:**
ATD Florida Suncoast created a TechComm SIG as a community for any "displaced" former members of STC (whether the former local FL chapter, the former National organization, or any of the former SIGs or COEs). They were invited to join as a "trial member" to get to know the chapter, ATD, and begin to participate. These trial members would only be asked to become paying members in June, and the assumption was that they'd see the value of joining. As of May 12th, we have converted 8 trial members (4 regular & 4 students).

2025 Member Levels	Jan 2025	May 2025*
Regular Member	90	124
Student Member	5	10
TechComm Trial Member	0	12

Applying the Low-Context Approach

With **low-context,** adding a new community involves clear, direct communication and explicit rules, often relying on written documents and contracts to ensure understanding and enforce agreements.

- **Direct and Explicit:** Communication is focused on conveying information clearly and directly, with minimal reliance on nonverbal cues or implicit understandings.
- **Written Documentation:** Written agreements, contracts, and detailed instructions are highly valued to ensure clarity and prevent misunderstandings.
- **Action-Oriented:** Focus is on implementing plans and achieving specific goals, with a preference for facts, logic, and explicit decisions.

Applying the High-Context Approach

With **high-context**, adding a new community would involve a nuanced approach that prioritizes relationships, shared understandings, and non-verbal communication. Instead of direct, explicit communication, a community leader might emphasize shared history, cultural values, and building trust before introducing a new initiative or program.

- **Emphasis on Relationships and Trust:**
  - With high-context, building strong interpersonal relationships is crucial for effective communication and collaboration.
  - A leader might start by fostering personal connections with community members through informal gatherings, visits, or even just taking the time to get to know individuals.
  - This approach helps establish a foundation of trust, essential for introducing new ideas or programs.
- **Focus on Shared Values and Cultural Context:**
  - Understanding the community's cultural values and shared experiences is essential.
  - A leader might introduce a new idea by connecting it to existing practices, traditions, or beliefs.
  - This approach helps ensure that the new idea is not perceived as disruptive or foreign but as something that aligns with the community's existing framework.
- **Collaboration and Community Involvement:**
  - Values collaboration and community involvement in decision-making.
  - A leader might invite community members to participate in discussions, planning meetings, or even implementing the new initiative.
  - This approach fosters a sense of ownership and helps ensure the new initiative is tailored to the community's needs and priorities.
- **Patience and Respect for Tradition:**
  - Adding a new community requires patience and respect for existing traditions and norms.
  - A leader should be prepared to take time to build relationships, establish trust, and understand the community's perspective before introducing new ideas.
  - It's also important to be mindful of cultural sensitivities and avoid any actions perceived as disrespectful or insensitive.

Looking at the ATD Florida Suncoast Example (*in progress***)**

We applied the **low-context**, **high-context** principles above to the example from the chapter. Please note that some highlighted text might be both **low-context** and **high-context** at the same time (a blend of both) and that not all text is highlighted. We want to emphasize that, in many cases, leveraging a blend of clear communication and intentional relationship building is a key driver for success in engaging with chapter membership.

First, the Board looked at ATD's Competency Model to ensure that what was offered to former STC members had a degree of overlap that could be accommodated. Those familiar with the older models might remember a skill group that included "technical communications," now listed under each of the three capabilities: Personal, Professional, and Organizational.

Second, as a chapter, there were no restrictions on a chapter's ability to create and manage Special Interest Groups. All chapters have a great deal of autonomy and self-determination. Whether a TechCom subgroup is a SIG or a GIG, the chapter used a SIG model to avoid any "ties" to a specific location.

Third, the Board took a long, hard look at our existing chapter operations and budget, ensuring the infrastructure was there to support this. As a healthy chapter that is growing the membership at a steady rate, the Board felt this was a worthy endeavor. After all, the chapter started and shut down various SIG/GIGs over the years as the interests and needs of the membership changed. All of the Chapter's "infrastructure" costs are fixed, so adding more members and/or board positions wouldn't create additional strain. Finally, the Board reviewed its bylaws, policies, and procedures and found nothing to prevent it from setting up a new SIG/GIG for a community that had so much in common with the Chapter but needed a new home.

The following proposal was made to the former Florida Chapter of STC members, and they accepted:

- **Keep the Technical Communicators community alive!**
- **Join ATD Florida Suncoast's chapter for free as a "Trial Member" until June 1st**
- **Check out** the chapter's events (all are welcome)
- **Check out** the chapter's new TechComm SIG
    - The TechComm SIG is open to all technical communicators (technical writers, technical editors, documentation specialists/managers, content strategists/developers, information architecture/developers, communications specialists, etc.). We encourage you to join and meet up with a community of people with a broad range of technical communication experience.
- **Participate in** the new TechComm SIG events with:
    - Monthly meetups via Zoom for networking (events thru the end of July)
    - Monthly learning events with topics & speakers (events through the end of July)
    - Topics for internal and external consultants, as well as sole practitioners
    - Are you interested in something specific? Got a particular topic or speaker you'd like us to consider? **Email ideas to**: webmaster@atdsuncoast.org
- **Consider** joining as a Regular Member or Student Member in June.

In addition, the Board of the former STC Florida Chapter was offered the following, and they accepted:

- **Training on chapter assets** will be provided (Zoom, Wild Apricot, Slack, Canva, Gdrive)
- **Invitations to all Board meetings**
- The new **TechComm SIG Manager** is a **former STC chapter Board member**

Sample Timeline for Implementation

- **Month 1-2:** Build awareness & assess practices.
- **Month 3-4:** Implement small, actionable changes.
- **Month 5-6:** Leverage resources and expand efforts.
- **Ongoing:** Measure progress, adapt, and celebrate successes.

Final Tips & Considerations

- **Lead with Empathy** – Address sensitive topics thoughtfully.
- **Practice Transparency** – Regular updates build trust.
- **Create Safe Spaces** – Provide forums for open discussion.
- **Embrace Intersectionality** – Recognize overlapping identities.
- **Be Patient and Persistent** – DEIBA is a long-term commitment.
- **Start Small but Act** – Small steps create big change.

Additional References

- **DEI Toolkit** - https://www.td.org/chapters/clc/toolkits

Join our Slack channel:
DEIB Community of Champions!

THIS PLAYBOOK WAS CREATED BY:
Juliet Hart, Gwen Navarrete Klapperich,
Jenn Buckley & Rosemary Okoiti