

BIOLOGY DEI

Diversity | Equity | Inclusion

Lab Handbooks as Tools for Promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

By Prof. Babak Momeni



What is a lab handbook?

A lab handbook (also called a lab manual) is a document that outlines the routines and procedures of conduct for working in a laboratory (Aly, 2018). Similar to a manual used for traditional lab experiments, a lab handbook helps users easily find the information they need. A lab handbook can include material about the day-to-day lab routines. In setting up these routines, **a lab handbook can lay out expectations for mentors and their trainees, as well as resources and tips to guide trainees through their time in the lab.** However, how we choose to perform day-to-day routines in the lab is rooted in the broader vision of the lab. For example, how to distribute the lab chores, expectations for lab- and biosafety, and the

procedures for hiring new researchers all intersect with the vision of the lab, including its attitude towards diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In that sense, a lab handbook manifests not just the day-to-day routines, but also the overall vision and goals of the lab.

The lab handbook reflects a lab's values

Capturing the priorities of the lab in the handbook is your way of formally stating the lab's values. These values have a wide range, and can cover anything from a commitment to reproducibility to a call for respectful treatment of lab members. Including the DEI considerations in the lab is no exception. Without a doubt many labs implicitly consider DEI in their actions, for example when they are recruiting new members or when deciding how often to meet with trainees. However, **there is value in transparency when these goals are clearly stated in a lab handbook.** The transparency holds the decision-makers accountable and gives trainees assurance about the principles that are valued in each lab.

One size does not fit all

Each lab is different. What works for another lab may not work for you. When setting up a lab handbook, your lab, your collective vision and priorities, and your lab's culture are what matter.



Reading & Resources

Aly, M. 2018. **The key to a happy lab life is in the manual.** *Nature* 7:561.

Leigh N, de Winde CM, Sarabipour S, Hainer S, Furlong E, Momeni B, Albright A. 2020. **Lab Manual template by eLife community ambassadors.** OSF <https://osf.io/2xn6z/>

An [open-source Google Sheet](#) with a **compiled list of lab handbooks** and lab manuals for reference and inspiration.

Upcoming Events at BC

Who we are: A chronicle of racism in America, Jeffrey Robinson

September 8 2022, 7:00 pm

Boston College Law School, East Wing
114 A&B

Settler colonialism, race and the law: Why structural racism persists

Natsu Taylor Saito

October 6 2022, 7:00 pm

Gasson Hall Room 100

The Sum of Us: what racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together, Heather McGhee

October 26 2022, 7:00 pm

Gasson Hall Room 100

Connect



Share your ideas and events:
BiologyDEI-ggroup@bc.edu

That said, **putting together a comprehensive lab handbook may feel like a daunting task.** Rest assured that there is help out there. Especially, looking at existing lab handbooks (see [link](#) in Reading & Resources) and templates (Leigh et al, 2020) is a great way to get started. Your lab can then pick what works, change things to your lab's taste, and tailor the lab handbook such that it captures your lab's needs and goals.

The lab handbook is a living document

Priorities change, new aspects and concerns arise, and shortcomings are found in our way of doing things. In response to these, the lab handbook needs to get edited, amended, and updated to reflect the inevitable changes. As an example, after we had compiled an initial template (see Leigh et al 2020), a colleague's question revealed a big gap: we had not included a policy for vacation time. **Any missing procedure in the handbook is an opportunity to clearly formalize how that procedure should be done.** Involving lab trainees in this process of refining the handbook is important to ensure that the lab handbook is well-rounded and represent the diversity of perspectives within the lab.

Fall DEI Coffee Hours

The Biology DEI Committee is excited to initiate monthly coffee hours, which will involve a friendly and largely informal discussions focused on specific DEI topics. These monthly gatherings will be held in the last Wednesday of the month at **9:30 am in Higgins 416**. Please plan to join us for refreshments, sharing, learning and growth!

| Date | Facilitator | Topic |
|----------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 9/28/22 | Sarah McMenamin | Women in Academia |
| 10/26/22 | Doug Warner | Mental Health |
| 11/30/22 | Maitreyi Das | To be announced |
| 12/21/22 | Khyati Girdhar | Talent vs. Diversity |

Growing is the result of learning
-Malcom X