

Presented By:

Alliance Summit 2026

**From Deficit to Asset: Practical Strategies for
Building Strengths-Based Services**

Danny Combs



About Me: Four generations together



Kids grow up fast...



Finding yourself...



Nashville!

Air Force



Build Community



It's never too late

TACT IMPACT IS NOTICED



Mike Rowe's Support



Congressional Medal of Honor Society
Citizen Service Award

TACT IMPACT IS NOTICED



The Pentagon

Stanford Neurodiversity Summit 2024
Putting Strengths-Based Approaches in Action
September 22-24, 2024

Employment Track

 Tara May CEO Aspiritech	 David Siegal CEO Exceptional Minds	 Ivan Rosenberg The Uniquely Abled Project	
 Ben Schwartzman Vanderbilt	 Caroline Grantz Grantz Psychological Services	 Alex Sturm Loyola Marymount University	 Danny Combs Founder/President TACT

Sept 22 - Strengths-Based Culture in the Workplace
Sept 23 - Partnership between Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories and Neurodiversity Researchers
Sept 24 - Having a Strangths-Based Career in a Trade

Accreditation Statement: In support of improving patient care, Stanford Medicine is jointly accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCM), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), to provide continuing education for the healthcare team.

American Medical Association (AMA): Stanford Medicine designates this Live activity for a maximum of 25.25 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

SWB Approved Continuing Education Credit (ACE): As a Jointly Accredited Organization, Stanford Medicine is approved to offer social work continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. Organizations, not individual courses, are approved under this program. Regulatory boards are the final authority on courses accepted for continuing education credit. Social workers completing this activity receive 25.25 continuing education credits.

American Psychological Association (APA): Continuing Education (CE) credits for psychologists are provided through the sponsorship of the American Psychological Association (APA) Office of Continuing Education in Psychology (CEP). The APA Office maintains responsibility for the content of the program.



Stanford University



The White House

Presented By:

How started TACT - Teaching the Autism Community Trades



TACT History... Humble Beginnings



TACT CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP



CREDENTIALS

- TACT is a fully accredited program
- TACT is a Medicaid-approved PASA
- TACT is a DVR Vendor
- TACT is the most successful transition to employment program in the state of Colorado, with a 83.3% placement rate
- 80 Employer Partners
- \$19.86 per hour. Average starting wages for graduates
- Specialized Day School - A completely new public school



TACT Clients who were told they couldn't by others...









Strengths Model Over Deficit Model

The Set Up/Assessment



The Training

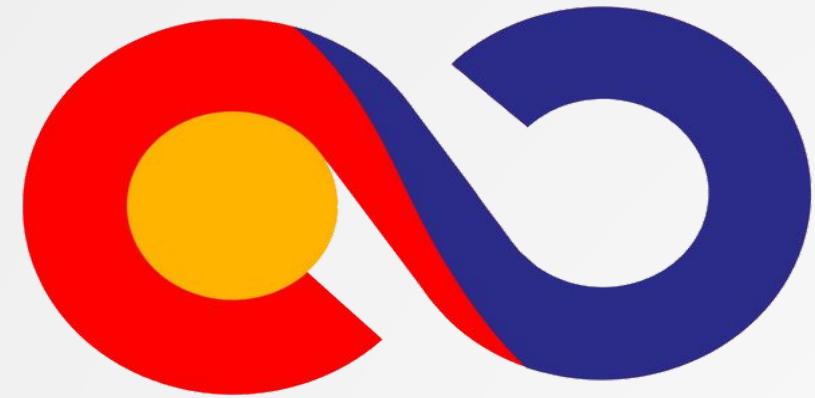


Portfolio and Resumes



Supported Employment





Colorado Neurodiversity Chamber of Commerce

Co-Founders Dr. Amanda Kelly
Tiffany Feingold
Danny Combs

1st in the Nation!



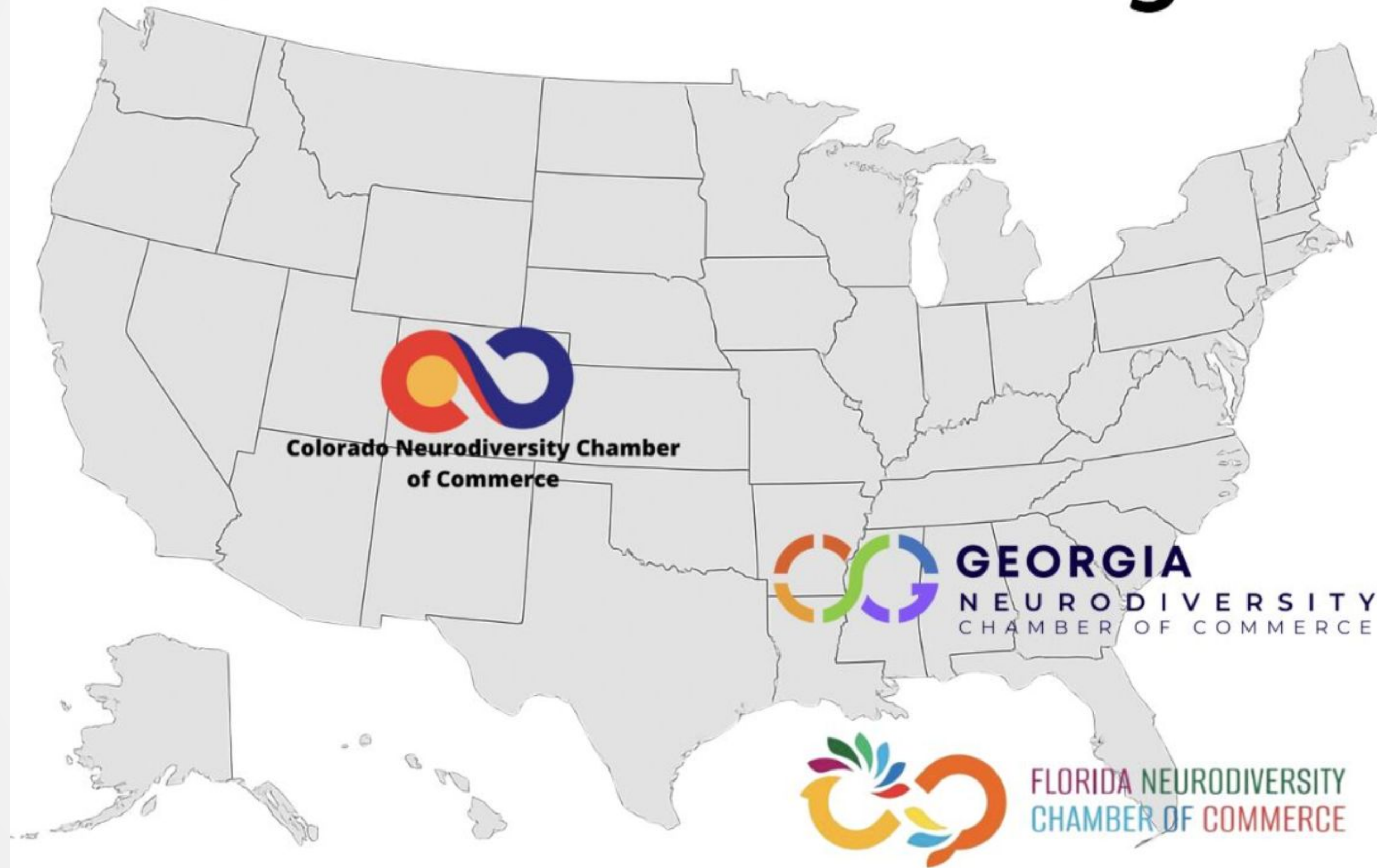
Late to the Game...

- ...1929 - First Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- ...1974 - First LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce (GGBA)
- ...1993 - First Black Chamber of Commerce
- ...2001 - First Women's Chamber of Commerce

- ...2022 - First Neurodiversity Chamber of Commerce

Mission Spreading...

Three Down! 47 to go!



Colorado Disability Opportunity Office



Sustainable Funding

Disability Policy and Strategy

Talent Is Infrastructure
What do I want from
Today?

Discussion Overview

Terminology

Understanding Variability

UD at Work

Current Data Trends

Steps Towards Neuroinclusion

Next Steps

Terms and Definitions

Neurodiversity

**The natural diversity
of human brains.**

Neurodivergent

**A person whose brain
functioning differs
from the dominant
societal standards of
“normal.”**

Neurotypical

**A person whose brain
functioning is the
dominant societal
standard of “normal.”**

Inclusive Language

Is:

- ✓ Being considerate of and respecting others
- ✓ A reflection of your brand and its values
- ✓ A continuous learning process
- ✓ Fluid and always changing
- ✓ Developed through conversations and dialogue
- ✓ Recognizing that words can affect how people feel

Is Not:

- ✗ Avoiding discussing certain issues out of the fear you may "offend" someone
- ✗ Ignoring differences between people (e.g. "I don't see color")
- ✗ Something that can be done perfectly
- ✗ Limited to the written word
- ✗ A strict set of guidelines about what to say
- ✗ Just a trend

Understanding Variability

Neurodiversity recognizes that there is no single "normal" or "standard" way for brains to function. Instead, it embraces the idea that variation in neurological functioning is natural and valuable.

This mindset is foundational to Universal Design

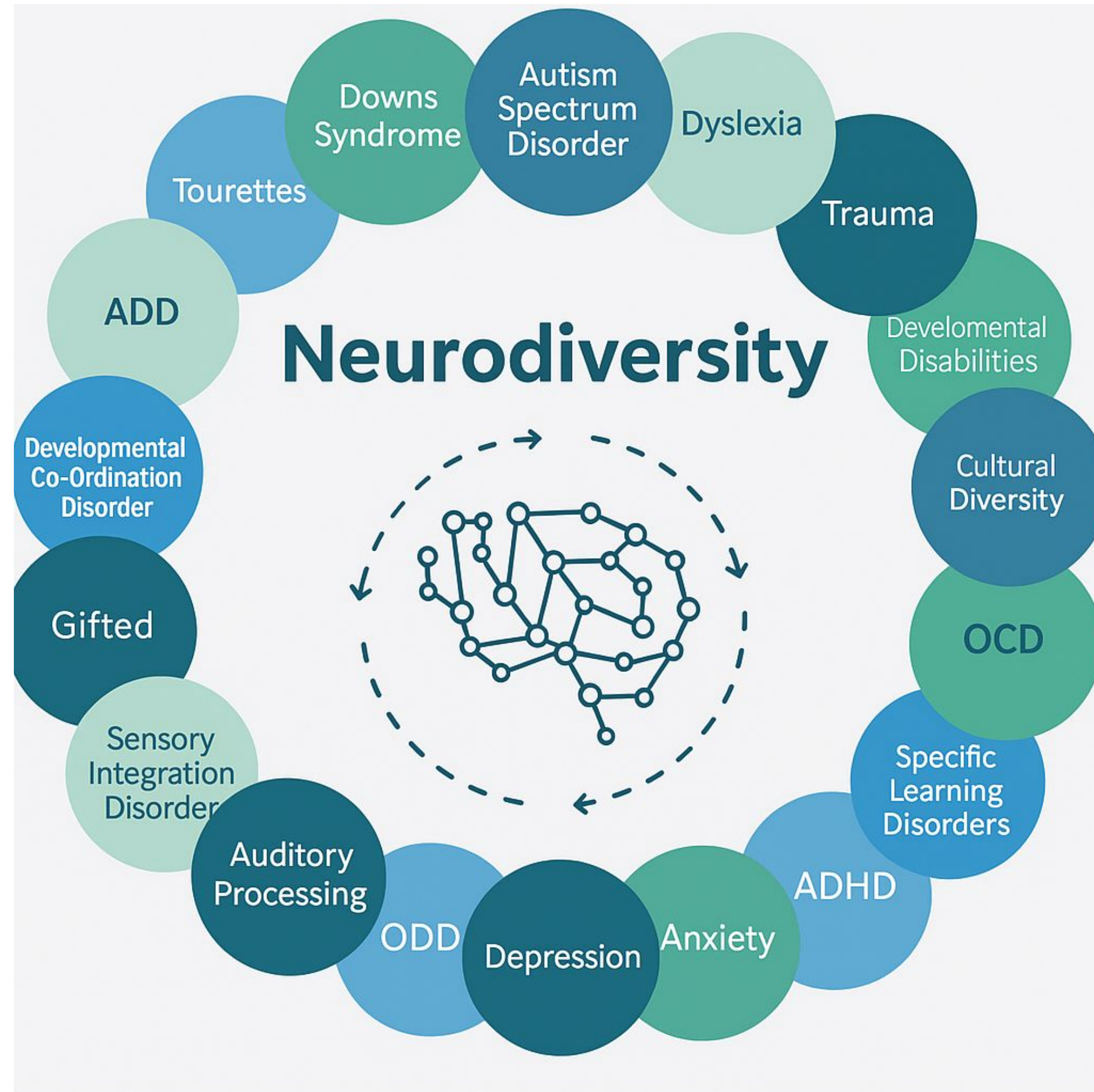
- Thinking
- Learning
- Experiencing the World



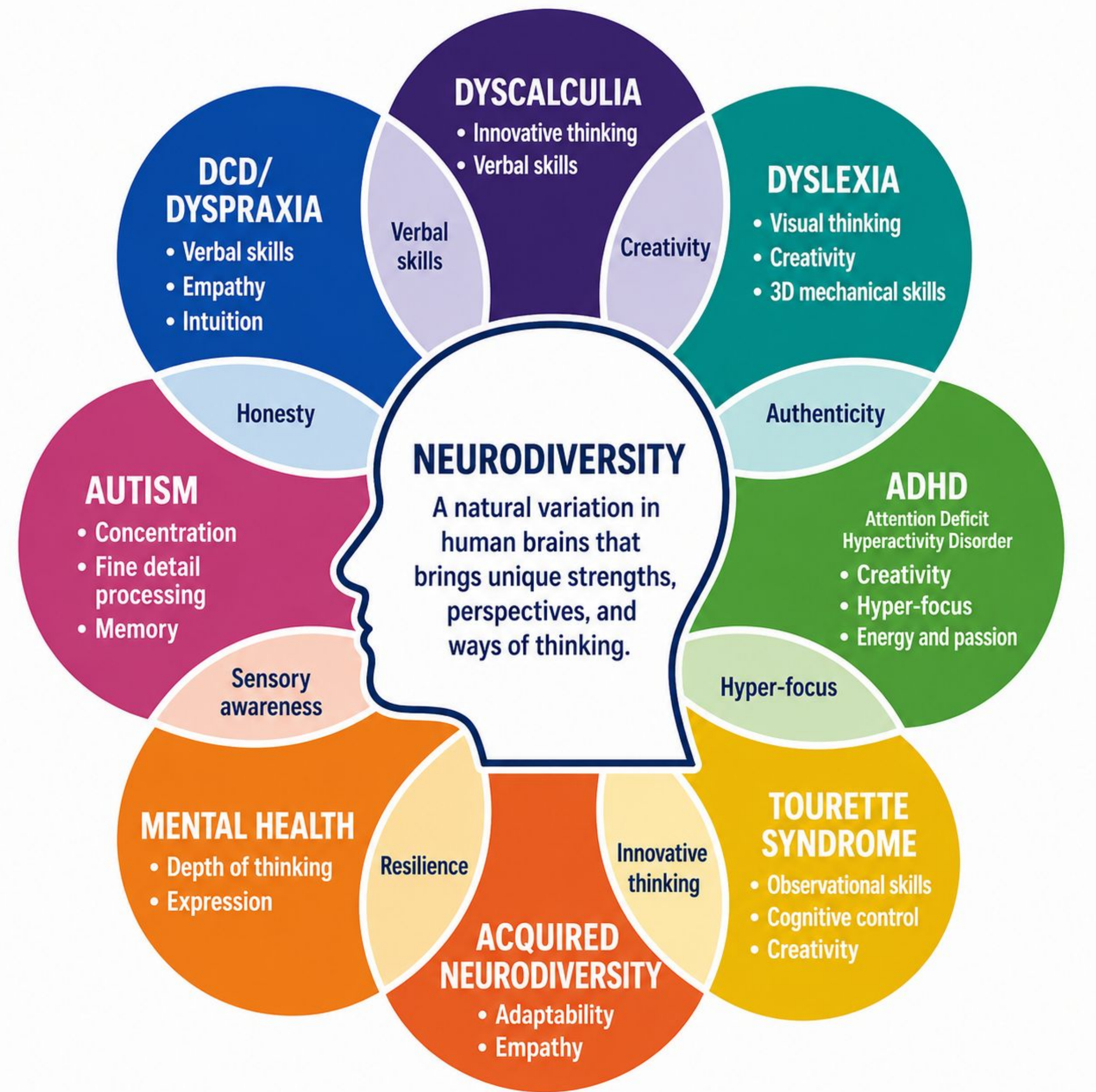
Why Universal Design



What is Neurodiversity?



Neurodiversity



Universal Design in the Workplace



Group Input

What is your first impression?



When you hear the term Accommodation, what immediately comes to your mind?



What is the first thing that pops into your mind when you hear Universal Design?



How has neurodiversity impacted you personally or professionally?



What is your initial reaction when you consider working with/hiring neurodivergent individuals?

The Facts

20% of the population or 1 in 5 people are neurodivergent

30 – 40% of neurodivergent adults are unemployed

Of employed neurodivergent individuals, 50% only disclose after being hired, and many do not disclose at all.

Masking or lack of disclosure can lead to burnout, depression, anxiety, or other difficulties

Communication matters – every survey, every study, every time.

Neurodiversity has been broadly missing from DE&I efforts

Employment Details

89% of employees waste at least thirty minutes of time during every workday.

31% of employees waste at least one hour per workday.

16% of employees say they waste about two hours every day at work.

The average employee is interrupted 56 times a day while at work.

Research suggests that teams with neurodivergent professionals in some roles can be up to 30% more productive and make fewer errors (e.g. Hewlett Packard)

Autistic individuals can be between 90 and 140% more productive than neurotypical individuals (e.g., JPMorgan Chase)

Yep...It's 2026...

Understood.org Study- April 2024 - 2,000+ U.S. ND adults (diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or another condition)

▶ 59% of Neurodivergent adults worry that disclosing their condition would negatively impact their career.

▶ 60% feel there is a stigma around asking for support.

▶ 49% do not know who to talk to about requesting a workplace accommodation within their company.

▶ 23% surveyed said they lost their job or were demoted after requesting accommodations.

Practical Steps Towards Universal Design

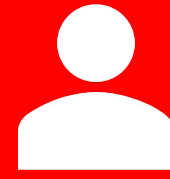


STEP1

STEP2

STEP3

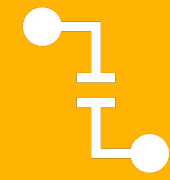
Barriers to Embracing Universal Design



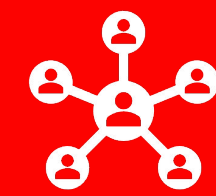
Recruitment Stage: Job descriptions



Interview Stage: Standardized interviews, non-inclusive rubrics, etc.



Onboarding Stage: Disorganized, inconsistent, lack of initial supports



Retention: Physical space, expectation setting, meeting structures, efficiency.



Summary: Inclusive Workplace: Skills-based hiring, transparency of procedures, normalizing remote work*

Strengths-based Perspective:

- Neurodiversity paradigm emphasizes the strengths and unique abilities that individuals with these differences possess.
- Vs focusing on deficits or challenges associated with neurodivergent conditions, the



UD Affirming Practices

- Be clear and specific from the outset*
- Validate individual experiences
- Provide appropriate requested accommodations
- Respect language preferences
- Create psychological safety & environment supporting disclosure
- Validate all forms of communication

UD Affirming Practices

- Eye contact alternatives should be widely accepted, e.g., orienting to the speaker, vocal/nonverbal acknowledgement of attention
- Ensuring sensory environment is appropriate
- Providing alternative communication methods
- Model and honor appropriate self advocacy
- Presume competence, engagement & dedication
- Honor self regulating practices at the individual level

Universal Design

- Multiple means of information representation
- Multiple means of action and expression
- Multiple means of engagement
- Role of Technology

- **Accommodations:**
 - alternative communication methods
 - sensory-friendly spaces
 - flexible work arrangements

[Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#)



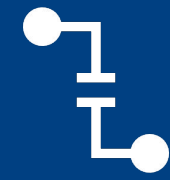
Universal Design Friendly Workplaces



Recruitment Stage: Job descriptions



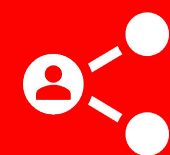
Interview Stage: On the job interviews, outcomes & skills focused



Onboarding Stage: Organized, consistent, mentor or buddy system



Retention: Physical space, expectation setting, meeting structures, efficiency.



Summary: Inclusive Workplace: Skills-based hiring, transparency of procedures, normalizing remote work*

Benefits of Neurodivergent Thinkers

There is an untapped pool of immense potential:

Reliability and
dependability

Honest and
non-judgmental

High levels of
concentration and
focus

Attention to detail
and accuracy

Factual knowledge,
excellent memory
for facts

Innovative thinkers

Thrive in a
structured, well
organised
environment

Excellent
problem-solving
skills

Creative and
imaginative

Disclosure?

- Written Accommodation Policy
- Accessible process for requesting
- Education for managers on neuroinclusion & accommodation acceptance
- Responding to disclosure
- Demonstrating commitment – ERG, Membership, etc.
- https://www.understood.org/en/audiences/workplace-supports-and-accommodations?utm_medium=comms&utm_source=linkedin&utm_campaign=GAAD_mch_2024&utm_content=dis



What ALL Employees Want You to Know!

Not every
neurodivergent
individual is the
same.

Non-Universal
Traits

Written
communication
preferred.

Be literal

Unspoken social
cues

Eliminate
personality-based
interviews

Set clear and
transparent
expectations

Flexible
environment

Direct and
objective
feedback is key

www.neurodiversityhub.org

What Should We Do Now?

Education: Learn through
Chamber membership

Networking: Meet and chat
with neurodivergent
individuals, entrepreneurs
and business owners.

Ensure there is at least one
person on your team who
can coordinate inclusion
efforts

Focus on Inclusive hiring and
retention practices

Think about reasonable
adapptions

Ensure visibility as a
company that welcomes
disclosure

Consider buddy/mentor systems,
or ERGs

Listen and ask questions, it's
okay to not have all the
answers.

What keeps me centered and focused...





By embracing **Our Community**, we can foster environments that respect and celebrate these differences, creating opportunities for all individuals to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives to society.

- Contact me! danny.combs@state.co.us