

Ramadan: creating inclusive service and work environments

The North Shore Multicultural Society (NSMS) values the traditions and practices of our clients, students, staff and of the many communities that call the North Shore their home. NSMS' values are to promote excellence and respect and to acknowledge and celebrate our collective diversity. NSMS is continually striving to increase our inclusive practices. We thought we would share some ideas on how to be inclusive understanding and sensitive to staff, volunteers, clients, students and community members who may be observing Ramadan. Together, we can create safe and inclusive spaces in our work, learning and service environments and in our communities!

What is Ramadan?

In the Islamic, Muslim or Hijri calendar (a lunar calendar consisting of 12 months in a year of 354 or 355 days), Ramadan falls on the nine month each year of this lunar calendar. Ramadan is one of the key times for reflection, to celebrate connection with family and friends, and for deepening observances and practices like saying prayers, reading the Qur'an, and practicing generosity. There can be many different ways to observe Ramadan, such as fasting from sunrise to sunset, in the month-long span of Ramadan. At the end of Ramadan is a special celebration called Eid. There is much celebrating at this time and Eid often spans multiple days.

Things to be aware of:

- Please be careful not to make assumptions about who may or may not identify as a Muslim or follow the Islamic faith. There may be people who speak Arabic, or Farsi, or Dhari, or folks individuals coming from predominantly Muslim countries but it does not mean all are Muslims or followers of Islam.
- Not all people who identify as Muslim observe Ramadan or observe Ramadan in the same way. There may be people who observe Ramadan by gathering with friends and family in the time of Ramadan, or who observe a reflective practice other than fasting, or who observe a partial fast, or who pray at regular intervals during the day, or who commit to a food and water fast for all daylight hours, or who do not smoke, or who are doing some or all of the practices above. Please be careful not to make assumptions about how people observe Ramadan. It is best to offer an environment that is inclusive and supportive in a general way, rather than asking individuals directly about their personal decisions around Ramadan.
- For those individuals who are observing Ramadan by fasting during daylight hours, here are some thoughts to keep in mind:
 - Often those who observe Ramadan through fasting from sunlight to sunset report that they may be more tired due to disrupted sleep patterns and blood sugar levels running lower. It may be harder to keep up concentration.
 - For those who are not taking water during sunlight hours - if the day is particularly hot and long it can be harder physically and emotionally.

Please encourage discussion to support and raise awareness amongst our valued staff and volunteer teams about Ramadan and feel free to ask for advice or support from the NSMS management team.

Thoughts for the Service Providers:

While we maintain regular service delivery as per usual, here are some ideas on how to be supportive and make sensitive accommodations where possible:

- Please try to find a way to accommodate those who may wish to offer prayers before, and/or after classes and workshop sessions.
- Please be flexible about the scheduling of services, workshops and classes. Evening workshops and classes might be more difficult to attend, due to opening the fast for those who are fasting and there may be more family and social obligations in this time. Workshops in the later afternoon might be more difficult to attend as those who are observing fasting can experience more tiredness.
- Please find a way to be thoughtful around the sharing of snacks, drinks and treats in the service environment so we can respect those who are refraining from having food and/or drink. This might include setting food off to the side, offering snacks at strategic times or places and/or holding off on celebrations and social events that involve a focus on eating.
- At the end of Ramadan, Eid is celebrated. The celebration of Eid is very important and many people have obligations to family and the community at this time. Please be mindful of all requests and accommodate as is possible.