



By The Office of Equal Opportunity, Kristal White

Each month, the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) looks forward to providing content that celebrates the diversity across our state's workforce and embraces the differences that help make us better together. We believe diversity and inclusion are everyone's responsibility and we hope all state employees carry such responsibility with honor, courage, and passion. Check us out [here](#)!

December Religious & Cultural Holidays: How to make celebrations more inclusive

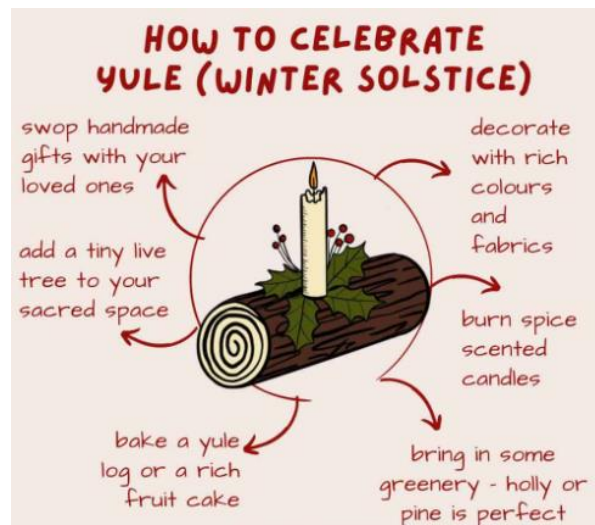
Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday, begins December 7th and ends December 15th. Hanukkah is an eight-day winter festival of lights, observed through nightly menorah candle lighting, special blessings, songs, and prayer. Hanukkah reaffirms the ideals of Judaism and commemorates in particular the rededication of the Second Temple of Jerusalem by the lighting of candles on each day of the festival. Each night, one additional candle is lit by the shamash until all eight candles are lit together on the final night of the festival. Other Hanukkah festivities include singing Hanukkah songs, playing the game of dreidel and eating oil-based foods, such as latkes and sufganiyot, and dairy foods.



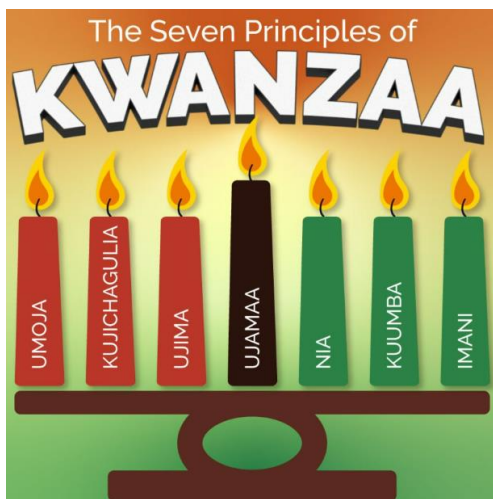
Christmas, a Christian holiday, is celebrated on December 25th. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Many celebrate through exchanging gifts, eating dinner, uniting with loved ones, and singing christmas carols. If you want to get in the holiday spirit and celebrate christmas, start by decorating your home with lights and garland and putting up a christmas tree. Eating traditional christmas foods such as turkey, ham, dressing and/or stuffing.



Yule, a Pagan holiday, is one of the oldest winter festivities, coinciding with the winter solstice, it is celebrated from December 21st through January 1st. Celebrating Yule is celebrating the rebirth of the sun through gift exchanges, merriment, and deep spiritual reflection. This is a time of new beginnings, rebirth, transformation, getting rid of unwanted habits, and creativity. Many celebrate by making evergreen wreaths, lighting a Yule log, having a Yule feast and doing a wishing ritual.



Kwanzaa, created in 1966 by Maulana Ron Karenga, begins December 26 through January 1st. Kwanzaa is an African American and Pan-African holiday that celebrates history, values, family, community and culture. The ideas and concepts of Kwanzaa are expressed in the Swahili language, one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa. Each day a candle is lit to highlight the principle of that day and to breathe meaning into the principles with various activities, such as reciting the sayings or writings of great black thinkers and writers, reciting original poetry, African drumming, and sharing a meal of African diaspora-inspired foods.





Holidays are a time when friends, family members, and coworkers come together and celebrate. When planning holiday celebrations, it is important that you try to make everyone feel included. According to The Center for Association Leadership (ASAE), there are four simple practices that employers can do to make sure their employees feel included in holiday celebrations:

1. Ask employees what they want. When in doubt, ask your staff for their opinions. If you have a party-planning committee, make sure it includes employees with various backgrounds and religious beliefs.
2. If you have a holiday party, plan it with care. Make your party nondenominational, and make sure that staff knows that attendance and any activities involved are completely optional. Consider scheduling the event at a less busy time of the year.
3. Offer extra flexibility, if possible. Recognize that the holidays can be stressful for many team members. Try to take a well-rounded approach to productivity during the busy season.
4. Adopt an open, learning-focused perspective. Foster an inclusive workplace during the holiday and encourage employees to share how they celebrate with one another.