

USDLA Innovative Leadership Award

Award description: This award recognizes instructors and talent developers who **create a sense of belonging and connection in their virtual classrooms**. This award is for those who build strong student-to-student and student-to-instructor relationships through activities like group projects, peer feedback, or virtual social events.

Rubric:

Criterion	Strong (10)	Medium (5)	Weak (1)
Fostering Belonging	Creates a highly inclusive, welcoming environment where all students feel valued and supported.	Provides some opportunities for inclusion but efforts are inconsistent or limited in reach.	Shows little to no effort in creating an inclusive, supportive environment.
Student-to-Student Connections	Consistently facilitates rich, structured, and impactful peer collaboration leading to strong student bonds.	Provides some group activities or peer interactions, but with moderate impact.	Offers no meaningful opportunities for students to connect with one another.
Student-to-Instructor Relationships	Builds strong trust and rapport; students feel highly supported, valued, and connected to the instructor.	Provides moderate engagement and support, but not consistently.	Minimal interaction or availability; students rarely feel connected to the instructor.
Innovative Practices	Regularly pioneers innovative, impactful strategies that significantly enhance	Occasionally integrates new or creative approaches but not fully embedded.	Relies only on traditional methods with little to no innovation in

	connection and belonging.		fostering connection.
Impact on Learning Experience	Students consistently report high levels of belonging, engagement, satisfaction, and success	Students show moderate engagement and some sense of connection.	No noticeable improvement in engagement, satisfaction, or belonging.