



## DEI Glossary of Key Terms

*The following foundational definitions are provided as key terms necessary for understanding and engaging in DEI work. Even if you are familiar with these terms, revisiting them may produce additional insights. As the saying goes “the choir still needs to practice every Wednesday.” We look forward to assisting you with brave conversations and meaningful action on your DEI journey!*

**Ally:** A person who supports or advocates for individuals who are being marginalized or treated as though they are insignificant. Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. Allyship is a process and everyone has a lot to learn. Allyship involves a lot of listening ... Sometimes, people say ‘doing ally work’ or ‘acting in solidarity’ with reference to the fact that ‘ally’ is not an identity but an ongoing and lifelong process that involves a lot of work. Optical Allyship is performative allyship!

**Access:** Having the right, opportunity or ability to reach, enter or use a facility, program, service or materials, visit a person or people and/or receive, understand and use information, knowledge or skills. There are a variety of ways in which community buildings, programs, services and opportunities can be inaccessible to people, such as physical design, communications, signage and attitude. Such barriers limit, restrict or prevent access.

**Anti-Oppression Organization:** An organization that actively recognizes and mitigates the oppressive effects of white dominant culture and power dynamics, striving to equalize that power imbalance internally and for the communities with which they work.

**Anti-racist:** A conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of white supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being racist or antiracist is not about who you are; it is about what you do.

**Barrier:** An obstacle that prevents an individual or group from accessing the same (or similar and appropriate) services or opportunities as others. A barrier can be physical (e.g., stairs), financial (e.g., the need for childcare), attitudinal (e.g., individual and systemic discrimination), social (e.g., prevailing norms and attitudes) and geographic (e.g., inaccessible transportation).

**BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, People of Color. The term is used to highlight the unique relationship to whiteness that people of color have, which shapes the experiences of and relationship to white supremacy for all people of color within a U.S. context.

**Colorism:** A practice whereby privileges and disadvantages are systematically doled out on the basis of skin color, with a disproportionate amount of advantage provided to lighter-skinned people. Synonym: light-skin privilege.



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**Community:** A place where a group of individuals reside and are subject to the same laws. Community can also refer to a group of individuals with common characteristics, beliefs, values, or interests (e.g., a faith-based community). As well, communities can be composed of individuals sharing a range of common needs or experiences (e.g., the need for physical accommodation, the experience of racism). What is key to any “community”, however, is the sense of belonging or attachment that individuals have with one another and/or their environment.

**Culture:** It has over 200 different definitions and means many things. It can refer to the way groups of people have learned or have had to live together by sharing certain historical experiences, including ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge and historical, geographical, linguistic, racial, religious, ethnic or social traditions. Culture is a complex and dynamic organization of meaning, knowledge, artifacts and symbols that guide human behavior, account for shared patterns of thought and action, and contribute to human, social and physical survival. Culture is transmitted, reinforced and passed on from generation to generation and is constantly changing.

**Discrimination:** The denial of equal treatment, civil liberties and opportunity — the unequal treatment of people or groups resulting in subordination and deprivation of political, social and economic rights with respect to education, accommodation, health care, employment, and access to other goods, services and facilities. Discrimination may occur on the basis of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious or political affiliation, marital or family status, and mental or physical ability. Discrimination is often invisible to those who are not its targets. There are three kinds of discrimination:

1. **Overt discrimination:** Either the granting or denying of certain rights to certain groups or individuals.
2. **Unequal treatment:** The differential treatment of one group in comparison with another because of certain characteristics (e.g., paying lower wages to women compared to men for work of equal value).
3. **Systemic discrimination:** Institutional policies, procedures and practices, lodged in the operation of established institutions, that result in the exclusion or promotion of particular groups of individuals. It differs from overt discrimination in that it is not based on individual intent but may affect entire groups of people.

**Diversity:** Broadly, diversity refers to the unique characteristics and the psychological, physical, and social differences that exist among individuals and groups within a community. While we may share many things in common, it is important to recognize that groups and individuals are both visibly and invisibly different from each other. These differences shape and have a significant impact on their experiences and expectations in any given situation. Diversity is commonly understood in terms of dimensions that include, but are not limited to race, age, place of origin, religion, ancestry, skin color, citizenship, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability/ability, marital, parental or family status, same-sex partnership status, citizenship, creed, educational background, literacy level, learning styles, geographic location, income level, cultural tradition and work experience. Welcoming diversity not only acknowledges and respects differences but also recognizes the worth of every individual and their value to their communities and to society at large.

**Dominant Culture:** Dominant culture in a society refers to the established language, religion, values, rituals, and social customs on which the society was built. It has the most power, is widespread, and influential within a social entity, such as an organization, in which multiple cultures are present. An organization’s dominant culture is heavily influenced by the leadership and management standards and preferences of those at the top of the hierarchy. In the US, dominant culture refers specifically to the American context in which organizational culture is predominantly defined by white men and white women in positional power.



## Equality / Equity

- Equality is the measure of sameness - being treated in the same way. Everyone gets the same/equal.
- Equity is a measure of fair treatment, opportunities and outcomes across race, gender, class and other dynamics. Equity refers to the right of the individual to a fair share of the goods and services in society. Everyone gets what they need. This distinction is important. We are told that to be fair we must treat everyone the same (equal), however, when we recognize the legacy of institutionalized and structural racism we understand that differing people and communities need different resources (equity). In order to be equitable we provide specific, unique resources that will support people and communities getting their basic needs met and reaching their full potential. Sameness is not always fairness if the oppressed group remains disadvantaged. Creating equity sometimes requires treating people differently from each other e.g., providing additional resources to some individuals so they are better able to compete for jobs, obtain education, or access to other programs and services.

**Ethnicity:** Social and cultural forms of identification and self-identification. Membership in a group is identified by connection to a place or lineage/ancestry. The many and varied beliefs, behaviors and traditions held in common by a group of people of a particular linguistic, historical, national, geographical, religious, and/or cultural origin. "Ethnic diversity" refers to the variety of similarities and differences of and within such groups, and to the presence of a number of groups within one society or nation.

**Ethnic Group:** A community that is maintained by a shared heritage, culture and language; a human group bound together by ties of cultural homogeneity, with a prevailing loyalty and adherence to certain basic institutions such as family structure, religion, and language. The term is often assumed to refer only to those 'other than' the dominant ethnic group. However, all people belong to one or more ethnic groups.

**Humility:** Admitting that you don't know everything on a subject, and using your mistakes to learn and grow.

**Implicit Bias:** Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. The snap judgments our brains make based on stereotypes. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to override individuals' stated commitments to equity and inclusion, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess.

**Inclusion:** The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate and bring their full, authentic selves to work. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in the words/actions/thoughts of all people. An environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization's success.

**Inclusivity:** The principles of inclusivity involve a clear recognition that society is not homogeneous and the perception of diversity as enriching rather than a problem. It requires the recognition that ideas and practices based on or modelled after norms of the dominant culture or society can result in experiences of exclusion and discrimination for a number of people in society.

Inclusivity within an organizational context consists of a strategic process to eliminate barriers and implement change, based on the acceptance that many people do not have access to services, jobs and positions of leadership due to



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societal and systemic factors rather than personal deficiencies. This process includes the active and meaningful involvement of people who are reflective of the diverse groups within a community.

**Internalized Racism (Racial Inferiority):** A process People of Color go through of believing, accepting, and internalizing inferior and subordinate images of themselves and their people, resulting in fear, anxiety, and uncertainty about challenging the institutions that have disempowered them.

**Internalized Privilege (Racial Superiority):** A process Whites go through to develop a sense of superiority over people of color, accepting and internalizing negative images and beliefs about People of Color, and positive images and beliefs about themselves.

**Intersectionality:** A prism to see the interactive effects of various forms of discrimination and disempowerment. It looks at the way that racism interacts with patriarchy, heterosexism, classism, xenophobia—seeing that the overlapping vulnerabilities created by these systems actually create specific kinds of challenges.

**Majority Group:** The group within a society that is largest in number and/or that controls the major economic, social, political and educational institutions. The social position and power of those belonging to the majority group is generally higher than those of minority groups.

**Marginalization:** The position of certain individuals (social location) or groups that do not have full and equal access to, and cannot participate fully in, the social, economic, cultural and political institutions of society. Marginalization can occur as a result of a number of factors, alone or in combination. These factors might include, but are not limited to, poverty, discrimination, a lack of education and training, or disadvantaged geographic or social location. For example, the marginalized workers are those who are employed on short-term contracts with low wages and no health or other benefits, little opportunity for skill development or advancement and those who face regular periods of unemployment. Conversely, the mainstream world of work comprises those with secure, stable employment at a living wage with health and other benefits. Individuals in the mainstream work world also tend to have opportunities for professional development and growth and careers with some upward mobility.

**Micro-affirmations:** Small acknowledgments that signal you value a person and their accomplishments; can also include micro-expressions of significant acts that influence our overall communication.

**Micro-aggression:** Tiny slights or insults that accumulate over time. Brief, commonplace, subtle, or blatant daily verbal, behavior, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

**Minority Group:** Refers to a group of people within a society that is either small in number or that has little or no access to social, economic, political, cultural or religious power due to ethnicity, race, income, sex, disability, faith, or other factors. Members of minority groups often experience a lower social standing.

**Multiculturalism:** A concept that refers to the varied composition of a place in terms of its cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. Multiculturalism is also an ideology that holds that racial, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity is integral, beneficial and a necessary part of society and identity.

**Oppression:** Occurs when a group (or groups) of individuals use one or more forms of power to suppress another group (or groups) in order to maintain or improve their own economic or social position. Oppression can be overt (e.g., the use



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of police or other bodies to repress a group of individuals) or covert, manifested in social institutions and in the social relationships and group interactions of everyday life.

POC: People of Color, often the preferred collective term for referring to non-white racial groups, rather than “minorities.” Racial justice advocates have been using the term “people of color” (not to be confused with the pejorative “colored people”) since the late 1970’s as an inclusive and unifying frame across different racial groups that are not white, to address racial inequities. While “people of color” can be a politically useful term, and describes people with their own attributes (as opposed to what they are not, eg: “non-white”), it is also important whenever possible to identify people through their own racial/ethnic group, as each has its own distinct experience and meaning and may be more appropriate.

Power: Involves the control of, or the ability to access, influence, or manipulate economic, political, educational and/or social structures. The location of power at any given time is the direct result of historic, social, economic and political events. With power, comes privilege; i.e., the ability to meet the needs and desires of some over others.

Prejudice: A mental state or attitude that involves judging (usually unfavorably) an individual or group based on characteristics that have been falsely or incorrectly attributed to the person or group.

Privilege: Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits, and choices bestowed on people based on their dominant identities such as white, young, educated, mid-upper class, able bodied, heterosexual, neuro-typical, cis gender, citizenship, English as first language, and Christian. Generally people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it. These powers and advantages derive from the historical oppression and exploitation of marginalized groups.

Psychological safety: The shared feeling that interpersonal risk-taking will not lead to negative outcomes personally or professionally.

Race: A means of classifying people by common ancestry. It relies on the differences in physical characteristics such as color of skin, hair texture, stature and facial features. A theory of specious classification of human beings that assigns human worth and social status using skin color and other visible characteristics for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power. Race is a social, political construct.

Racism: Racial Prejudice + Power = Racism. A system of advantage and oppression based on race. A way of organizing society based on dominance and subordination based on race. Racism penetrates every aspect of personal, cultural, and institutional life. It includes prejudice against people of color, as well as exclusion, discrimination against, suspicion of, fear and hate of people of color.

A system in which one individual or group of people exercises power over another individual or group on the basis of skin color and/or common ancestry. It is based on the erroneous belief that one racial or ethnic group is better, more capable and somehow superior to other groups as determined by hereditary factors. Racism is a barrier that can be built into and supported by our social/political/economic systems and institutions.

- Individual Racism: refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways. The U.S. cultural narrative about racism typically focuses on individual racism and fails to recognize systemic racism. Examples include believing in the superiority of white people, not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right,” or telling a racist joke.
- Interpersonal Racism: Occurs between individuals. These are public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, or hateful words or actions.



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- Institutionalized Racism: Occurs in an organization. These are discriminatory treatments, unfair policies, or biased practices based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for whites over people of color and extend considerably beyond prejudice. These institutional policies often never mention any racial group, but the intent is to create advantages. Example: A school system where students of color are more frequently distributed into the most crowded classrooms and underfunded schools and out of the higher-resourced schools.
- Structural (Systemic) Racism : The overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These systems give privileges to white people resulting in disadvantages to people of color. Example: Stereotypes of people of color as criminals in mainstream movies and media.

Social Justice: A concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society. This is measured by the explicit and tacit terms for the distribution of power, wealth, education, healthcare, and other opportunities for personal activity and social privileges.

Social Location: The biases and beliefs that individuals hold as a result of their “location” along several axes (positionality). An individual’s age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, income, family or parental status, relationship status, place of origin, ancestry, religion, colour, citizenship, ethnic origin, disability, citizenship, creed, literacy level, geographic location, cultural tradition and work experience all inform their unique view of the world.

Stereotype: A generalized conception of a group of individuals that results in the unconscious or conscious categorization of each member of that group without regard for individual difference. To stereotype is to have an oversimplified idea of a group, which ignores the individual differences and diversity within that group.

*This is not an exhaustive list of required understanding of the complexities and nuances of DEI work. Please contact us for a glossary of more advanced terms and concepts.*