

# Building Belonging: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Rural Communities



**Commissioned By:**  
Huron County Immigration Partnership

  
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# Purpose

Everyone belongs in Huron County.

However, the feeling of belonging is often hindered.

Embracing the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion is essential for rural communities that want to build a sense of belonging for all.

Attracting immigrants to rural areas and creating a community where immigrants want to stay is key to keeping a vibrant community.<sup>1</sup> Many rural communities, including those in Huron County, have older residents. Attracting immigrants is key to economic growth, keeping businesses in communities and maintaining a dynamic workforce.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants also contribute countless volunteer hours and strengthen the social fabric of communities.

Everyone has a role to play in building belonging in Huron County. This guide introduces key terms often used in conversations related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. It aims to spark conversation and encourage reflection.

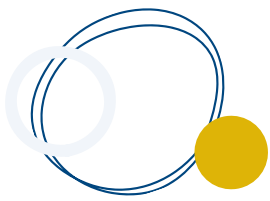
This guide is part of a broader Huron County Immigration Partnership vision to ensure Huron County is a welcoming community. This means that newcomers to Canada feel supported and like they belong. Everyone feels integrated in the community through participation in all spheres of life.

This guide was supported with funds from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Clark Banack and Dionne Pohler. 2023. Building Inclusive Communities in Rural Canada. University of Alberta Press.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Caldwell, Brianne Labute, Bakhtawar Khan and Natasha D'Souza Rea. 2017. Attracting and Retaining Newcomers in Rural Communities and Small Towns. Municipal World.



# Key Terms

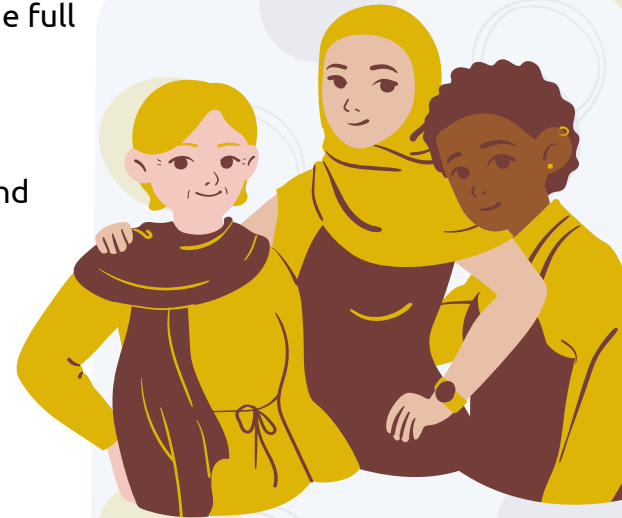
**Accessibility** refers to reducing or eliminating barriers that prevent the full participation of persons with disabilities throughout society. Accessibility ensures that everyone, regardless of their disability, can enjoy and benefit from the full environment, including community services and events, workplaces, transportation, etc.<sup>3</sup>

An **anti-oppressive framework** is a process of analyzing and understanding how systems of oppression, such as:

- Racism
- Sexism
- Ableism
- Ageism
- Classism
- Colonialism
- Homophobia

An anti-oppressive framework understands the impact of individual and systemic acts of discrimination and inequity. Anti-oppression describes actively searching for inequity, unfairness, and discrimination and working towards reducing and dismantling discriminatory practices and neutralizing power imbalances.<sup>4</sup>

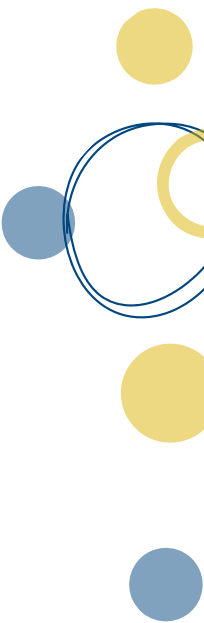
Remember, Anti-oppression is action oriented. It always goes beyond good thoughts and feelings. Anti-oppression is used in all decision-making, policy creation, community event planning, recruitment, strategic planning, and general practices.



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<sup>3</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission. 2024. <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/moving-towards-barrier-free-services-final-report-restaurant-accessibility-initiative/code-disability-and-accessibility>

<sup>4</sup> Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (EFTO), An Anti-Oppressive Framework: A Primer (2001)





# Key Terms

**Anti-racism** is a practice of actively seeking out racism and opposing it in a way that creates positive change in:

- Policies
- Organizational structures
- Individual behaviours, attitudes, and racist ideas and stereotypes about groups

Understanding race and racism is at the foundation of beginning the journey of anti-racism practice and change. Understanding race and racism begins with seeking to understand the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

**Belonging** occurs when equity, diversity, and inclusion work is done well. It is the experience of feeling safe, valued, and accepted within a group, community, workplace, or other communal spaces. When a person has a strong sense of belonging, they make meaningful connections within the community and can be their whole authentic self.

**Bias** is a prejudice that is in favour of or against a group of people or individuals in comparison to another group of people. Biases are conscious or unconscious associations. They may be beliefs, attitudes or identity characteristics. Bias is learned through socialization and is a condition of being human. All people hold biases. Biases can move into discriminatory acts without awareness and intentional safeguards.



# Key Terms

**Colonialism** involves inequitable power imbalances. It is a set of policies and practices that are applied over a long period where a group of people or nation wields power or control over another territory or people. **Colonialism** is often violent and accompanies the extraction of rich resources and the destruction of land. In Canada, **settler colonialism** was experienced as land was taken, and many Indigenous nations and communities were displaced in the process while settlers took over rich lands.<sup>5</sup>

**Decolonization** is the process of dismantling colonial ideas, structures and power imbalances. It is about unlearning ideas that wrongly deem Western culture as superior. Decolonization involves change on multiple levels, including through individuals and systems. Learning and humility are necessary to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous and historically marginalized communities, knowledge, and beliefs.

**Disability** should be interpreted in broad terms. A disability can be a complex, evolving matter that limits bodily or mental functioning. Disability has also been used to describe different learning styles.

**Discrimination** is the conscious or unconscious distinction between people based on personal characteristics that create an unfair disadvantage, barrier, and/or reduce access to opportunities.<sup>6</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. 2016. "Colonialism and its Impacts" <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Local-Women-Matter-3-Colonialism-and-its-impacts.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/iii-principles-and-concepts/2-what-discrimination>

# Key Terms

**Diversity** is the vast range of differences among and between humans, including but not limited to:

- Sexual orientation
- Sex
- Gender
- Gender expression
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- National origin
- Physical ability
- Age
- Religion
- Creed
- Geography
- Immigration status
- Citizenship
- Accent
- Language
- Ethical values
- Political beliefs

**Equality** refers to distributing resources equally among all groups. Equality is good in theory but does not consider diversity and barriers. Taking an equality approach without understanding and considering the community's actual needs can lead to inequitable outcomes.



# Key Terms

**Equity** calls us to understand, identify, and analyze the impact of inequality. Equity considers the vast diversity that exists and the different needs among and between people that arise from these differences. Equity refers to the practice of providing everyone with the resources and support they need to thrive in a particular environment and/or circumstance, addressing differences in access amongst social groups.

**Inclusion** occurs when a culture welcomes all people, regardless of their race, gender, sex, ethnicity, ability, religion, sexuality, etc. Inclusion is the full participation and decision-making within the community, workplace, or general communal space.

**Power** is the ability to influence or make decisions that impact others. It can be individual, collective, or through a system (policies and practices).

**Privilege** is unearned advantages and benefits due solely or primarily to group membership. Privilege is not neutral and often comes at the expense of historically and currently excluded and discriminated against communities.



# Equity Lens

An equity lens is a process for reviewing and analyzing how communities and individuals who currently and historically experience oppression are impacted by:

- Policies
- Practices
- Projects
- Designs
- Implementation plans

Using an equity lens often allows one to actively adopt an anti-oppressive framework and increase opportunities to increase equitable outcomes.







# Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept and framework that allows us to understand the complex dynamics of identities and inequity.

Intersectionality describes how different aspects of our identities overlap with systems of discrimination. This can influence how we each experience race, gender, sexuality, disability, age, class and other identities.

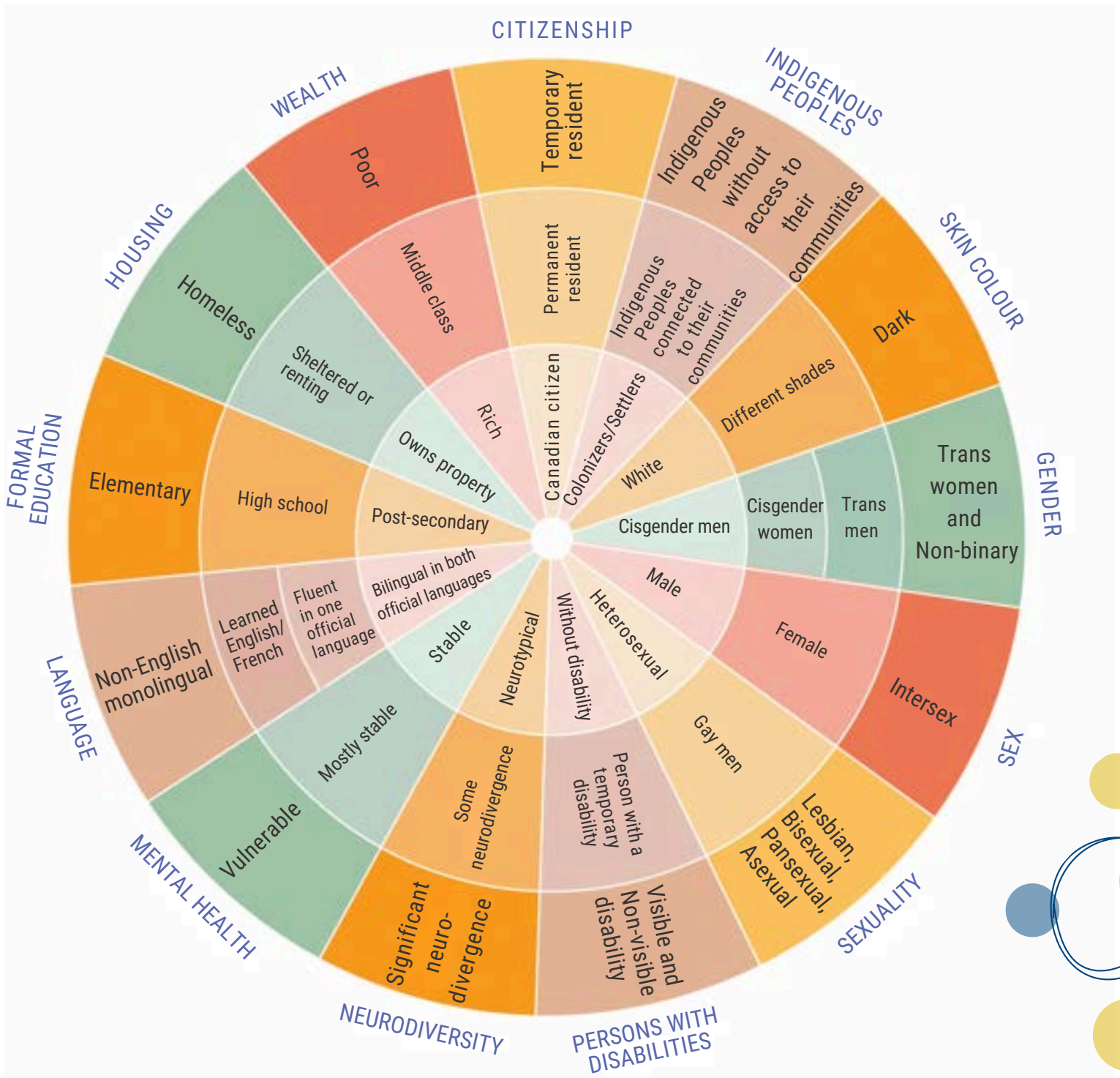
**Example 1:** Someone who is a woman and has a disability may experience both sexism and ableism. These may overlap and occur simultaneously.

**Example 2:** A transgender person who is an immigrant and belongs to a racialized group may experience many types of discrimination at once. They may experience discrimination based on their gender identity, immigration status and their race all at once. These combined factors can make their experience even tougher and affect how they're treated in our community and by our immigration system.



# Wheel of Privilege and Power

The Wheel of Privilege illustrates how various aspects of a person's identity can grant them advantages or disadvantages in society, depending on factors such as race, gender, sexuality, and ability. The closer you are to the centre, the more privilege you have. The farther you are from the centre, the more barriers you will have.<sup>7</sup>

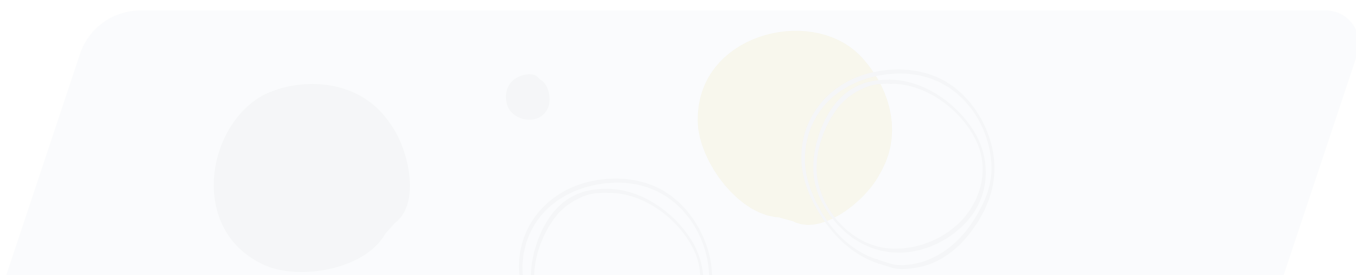
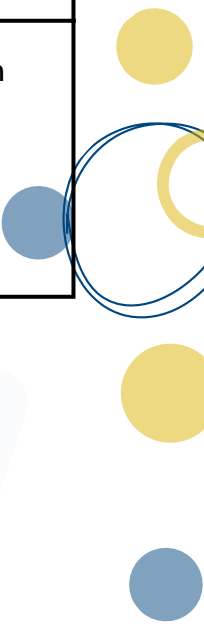


<sup>7</sup> Image source: Canadian Government  
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/anti-racism/wheel-privilege-power.pdf>



# The Four I's Of Oppression

Oppression Type	Description	Examples
<b>Ideological Oppression</b>	Ideas that one group is more deserving than another group. Stereotypes about groups that have been historically discriminated against that assign negative attributes to the groups.	If I give money to someone who is unhoused, they will spend it on drugs.
<b>Interpersonal Oppression</b>	Up close and personal discrimination is often based on or influenced by Ideological Oppression.	Making a statement against someone who is unhoused when you meet them.
<b>Institutional Oppression</b>	Policies and practices that discriminate against groups that historically have been discriminated against. Institutional oppression occurs in legal systems, social services, education, hiring policies, media etc.	Requiring people to have a home address to access services.
<b>Internalized Oppression</b>	When individuals from groups that have been historically discriminated against begin to internalize the negative messaging about themselves.	When an unhoused person believes they should be without shelter or help because they have an addiction.

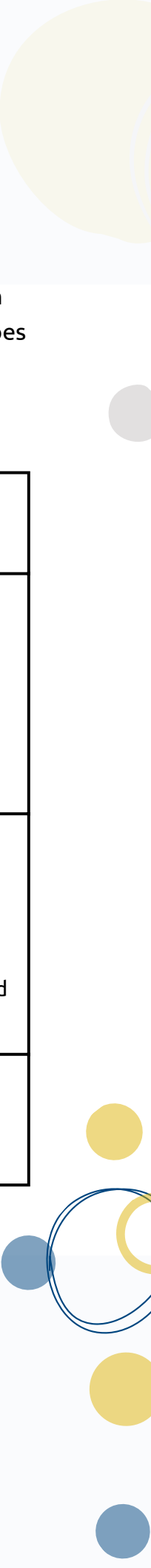




# ● Micro-aggressions

Micro-aggressions are commonplace, subtle, everyday forms of discrimination. They can be remarks, actions, or questions that convey put-downs and insults based on stereotypes and beliefs associated with someone's identity. Often, micro-aggressions are unintentional. Harm is caused by the compounding nature of micro-aggressions.

Micro-aggression Type	Description	Example
<b>Micro-invalidations</b>	Comments and behaviours that reject, ignore, or exclude historically excluded people's experiences and lived realities.	Stating, "I don't see colour."  This sends the message that you ignore racism as a legitimate factor. If you don't see colour how will you identify racism and discrimination?
<b>Micro-insults</b>	Communications that are considered rude and insensitive and put down someone's identity.	Commenting on how well someone speaks English based on their country of origin or race.  This sends the message that you are surprised they speak English well and expect them not to.
<b>Micro-assaults</b>	Intentional insults meant to hurt the targeted person.	Using a racial slur in any context.





# Responding To Micro-Aggressions

Responding to micro-aggressions can be uncomfortable and challenging. Knowing how to respond empowers you to speak up and influence positive change.

Choosing to respond to micro-aggressions is not a one-size-fits-all strategy. Here are some steps you can consider before responding.

## Step 1: Identify

- a. Identify micro-aggressions. Some micro-aggressions are blatant and easy to identify. Others are subtle and harder to identify.
- b. If you are uncertain, you can seek clarification or ask others who have witnessed the event.

## Step 2: Reflecting on your response

- a. How are you feeling? Are you feeling calm and able to address the microaggression productively?
- b. Do you feel safe to respond to the person who delivered the micro-aggressions?
- c. Will your relationship with the person change?
- d. How will you feel if you don't speak up?
- e. Do you need additional support to address the micro-aggressions?

## Step 3: Addressing Micro-aggressions

- a. Ask for more clarification, “Can you explain further?”, “What do you mean by that?”, “Why do you think that?”
- b. Separate intent from impact, “I know you didn't mean to be hurtful but when you said this it was hurtful/offensive.”
- c. Share your own experiences. “ I used to say or do (insert behaviour), but now I have learned to...”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Royal Pharmaceutical Society. micro-aggressions. 2024. <https://www.rpharms.com/recognition/inclusion-diversity/micro-aggressions#5>



# Micro-Affirmations

Micro-affirmations are small gestures of kindness that can help stop small acts of discrimination. These gestures make people feel included, listened to, comfortable, and supported. This is important if someone feels left out or unseen. You can do things to create a positive space for others. Instead of just avoiding problems, do things that create a positive space.

## Active listening

- Look at people when they talk to you.
- Keep your body relaxed and open.
- Repeat or summarize what others say.
- Ask questions to make sure you understand.
- Give people your full attention and time.
- Invite everyone to join in and build relationships.<sup>9</sup>

## Affirm Emotions and Experiences

- Affirm what happened and why it matters
- Show that you care about how the event affected others.
- Recognize accomplishments.
- Acknowledge people's feelings, whether they're frustrated or hurt. Guide conversations towards solutions when possible.
- Give individuals enough time and attention to share their experiences.
- Actively include and encourage people to join in and share what they've been through.
- Make space for a range of lived experiences.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rowe, M. (2008). Micro-affirmations and micro-inequities. *Journal of the International Ombudsman Association*, 1(1), 45-48. Advice on how to respond to a microaggression can be found here: <https://hbr.org/2020/07/when-and-how-to-respond-to-micro-aggressions>

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from, Royal Pharmaceutical Society. *micro-aggressions*. 2024. <https://www.rpharms.com/recognition/inclusion-diversity/micro-aggressions#5>



# Steps For Organizations

## **1. Understand the diversity within your community. Encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Questions you can ask include:**

Questions:

- a. What demographic data is currently available through the government?
- b. Are there organizations that have already collected data that can be useful to us?
- c. What steps can be taken to begin recording demographic data if no data is available?

## **2. Offer equity, diversity and inclusion training to build capacity and support change system-wide. Questions you can ask include:**

Questions:

- a. What training has been offered in the past?
- b. Are there specific areas of training that would be beneficial for your team to support the community you serve?
- c. What barriers prevent training from being offered?
- d. What planning could ensure access to ongoing training opportunities?

## **3. Review current policies from an equity and anti-oppressive lens. Questions you can ask include:**

Questions:

- a. Are some policies outdated and in need of review?
- b. Do policies need to change to include newcomer populations?
- c. Are there simple ways to adapt policies and procedures?

## **4. Provide opportunities for ongoing feedback from staff, volunteers, or the wider community.**

## **5. Measure! Measure! Measure! Questions you can ask include:**

Questions:

- a. Have you implemented metrics to track your progress?
- b. What outreach methods are you using to gather feedback?



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