

TOOLKIT

# 80 DIVERSITY & INCLUSION DEFINITIONS YOU SHOULD KNOW





# INTRODUCTION

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are more than mere buzz words or quantifiable goals in today's society. They are the ongoing realization and valuing of difference, inequity and the understanding of various nuances that contribute to power and privilege.

We recognize that a diverse community and organization is stronger, richer and more sustainable than one which actively, or passively, excludes people who are different. In order to truly embrace those differences and foster an inclusive workplace, individuals must come together through honest dialogue to exchange ideas and debate.

The definitions below are not exhaustive, but include a curated list of diversity and inclusion terms you should know to aid in your DEI journey. They will help you to understand the roots of our identities and disciplines, and recognize how they both affect and are shaped by society and culture.

## INCLUSIVE TERMS

**DIVERSITY:** Diversity is about who we are and the different ways we show up. Individually, each of us has different characteristics that make us unique.

**EQUITY:** Equity seeks to ensure an equal outcome for each person despite different circumstances by allocating resources and opportunities tailored to their specific needs.

**INCLUSION:** Inclusion is about level of participation and creating an environment where diversity is accepted and celebrated and all people are able to fully participate.

<b>ABLEISM</b>	The practices or dominant attitudes by a society that devalue or limit the potential for people with disabilities. The act of giving inferior value or worth to people who have different types of disabilities (physical, emotional, developmental or psychiatric).
<b>ADVOCATE</b>	A person who champions achieving equity and social justice through the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities, so they actively participate and are directly included in decision making processes affecting their lives.
<b>AFFINITY GROUPS</b>	A collection of individuals with similar interests or goals. Affinity Groups promote inclusion, diversity and other efforts that benefit employees from underrepresented groups.
<b>AFFIRMATIVE ACTION</b>	The practice of favoring groups of people who have been discriminated against in the past.
<b>AGENDER</b>	A person who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender.
<b>ALLY</b>	Someone who supports a group other than one's own (in terms of multiple identities such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.). An ally acknowledges oppression and actively commits to reducing their own complicity, investing in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression.

<b>ADA/AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT</b>	The ADA is an American civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities.
<b>APPROPRIATION</b>	The non-consensual/misappropriate use of cultural elements for commodification or profit purposes - including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. - often without understanding, acknowledgment or respect for its value in the context of its original culture.
<b>ASEXUAL</b>	An umbrella term for people who do not experience sexual attraction though there is a great amount of diversity in this community in regards to how different people experience attraction, relationships and intimacy in different ways. This is not the same as celibacy.
<b>ASSIMILATION</b>	A term for the concept where an individual, family or group gives up certain aspects of their culture to adapt to the beliefs, language, patterns and behaviors of a new host country.
<b>BELONGING</b>	A term used to define the experience of being accepted and included by those around you. Belonging means to have a sense of social connection and identification with others.
<b>BIAS</b>	A form of prejudice that results from our need to quickly classify individuals into categories.
<b>BIPOC</b>	An acronym used to refer to black, Indigenous and people of color. It is based on the recognition of collective experiences of systemic racism. As with any other identity term, it is up to individuals to use this term as an identifier.
<b>BI/BISEXUAL</b>	A term for individuals who are attracted to people of two genders.
<b>BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY</b>	Attempts to move beyond mere legal compliance with EEO and affirmative action laws. The value in the diversity of thought and perspective that employees from a wide range of cultures can bring to a business.
<b>CASTE</b>	A form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a style of life which often includes an occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy, and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution.

<b>CISGENDER/CIS</b>	A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior aligns with those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.
<b>CLASSISM</b>	A hierarchical system that provides or denies resources, agency, and dignity based on one's, or one's perceived, socioeconomic class (poor/working class, middle/upper class, upper class, etc.).
<b>CODE SWITCHING</b>	When a person changes the way they express themselves culturally and linguistically based on different parts of their identity and how they are represented in the group they're with.
<b>COLOR BLIND</b>	The belief that everyone should be treated "equally" without respect to societal, economic, historical, racial or other difference. No differences are seen or acknowledged; everyone is the same.
<b>CONSCIOUS BIAS</b>	Intentional attitudes or stereotypes toward a particular person or group that affect our actions and decisions.
<b>CULTURE</b>	A social system of customs that are developed by a group of people to ensure its survival and adaptation.
<b>DEAD NAMING</b>	Using someone's birth name instead of their chosen name, usually trans or non-binary.
<b>DEMISEXUAL</b>	A sexual orientation where people experience sexual attraction only to people they are emotionally close to.
<b>DIFFABILITY/ DIFFIBILITY</b>	The combination of the words "different" and "ability." An example could be a psychological condition, such as Asperger's syndrome, viewed as a natural neurological variation rather than a disability or disorder.
<b>DISCRIMINATION</b>	The unequal treatment of members of various groups, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favors one group over others on differences of race, gender, economic class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, language, age, national identity, religion and other categories.

<b>DOMINANT CULTURE</b>	A term that refers to the cultural beliefs, values and traditions that are based on those of a dominant society. Practices in a Dominant Culture practices are considered “normal” and “right.”
<b>EEO/EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY</b>	Part of the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits discrimination in any aspect of employment based on an individual’s race, color, religion, sex or national origin.
<b>EQUALITY</b>	Treating everyone the same and giving everyone access to the same opportunities. It is sometimes used as an alternative to “inclusion.” The company Salesforce, for example, uses Chief Equality Officer as the job title for the top diversity and inclusion executive.
<b>ESL/ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE</b>	Refers to individuals who do not speak English as their first language but may still be proficient in speaking English.
<b>ERGS/EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS</b>	Employee identity or experience-based groups that are meant to build the feeling of community in the workplace. ERGs are sometimes known as Affinity Groups or Diversity Groups.
<b>ETHNICITY</b>	A way to divide people into smaller social groups based on characteristics like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural heritage</li> <li>• values</li> <li>• behavioral patterns</li> <li>• language</li> <li>• political and economic interests</li> <li>• ancestral geographical base</li> </ul>
<b>EXCLUSION</b>	Leaving someone out based on their differences. These differences can be related to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, class or other social groups.
<b>GENDER EQUALITY</b>	The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys.

<b>GENDER FLUID</b>	Gender identity that is mutable (liable to change) or that that is not fixed/static.
<b>GENDER NEUTRAL</b>	Gender Neutral, or Gender Neutrality, means that policies, language and other social institutions should avoid distinguishing roles based on sex or gender in order to avoid discrimination.
<b>GROUPTHINK</b>	When people discourage a person from thinking a certain way or making decisions using individual creativity.
<b>HARASSMENT</b>	The use of comments or actions that can be perceived as offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning and unwelcome.
<b>IMPOSTER SYNDROME</b>	Common in members of underrepresented groups and is present when high-achieving individuals are in constant fear of being exposed as a fraud and are unable to internalize their accomplishments.
<b>INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE</b>	The use of gender non-specific language to avoid assumptions around sexual orientation and gender identity.
<b>INSTITUTIONAL RACISM</b>	Refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes and opportunities for different groups based on racial discrimination.
<b>INTEGRATION</b>	When an individual maintains their own cultural identity while also becoming a participant in a host culture.
<b>INTERSECTIONALITY</b>	A social construct that recognizes the fluid diversity of identities that a person can hold such as gender, race, class, religion, professional status, marital status, socioeconomic status, etc.
<b>INTERSEX</b>	To be born with a combination of male and female biological traits.
<b>LATINX</b>	A gender-neutral term used to replace Latino or Latina when referring to a person of Latin-American descent.

<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	An inclusive term for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual.
<b>MANSPLAIN</b>	When men are explaining something to a person in a condescending or patronizing manner, typically a woman.
<b>MARGINALIZATION</b>	To exclude, ignore or relegate a group of people to an unimportant or powerless position in society.
<b>MICROAGGRESSIONS</b>	The verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs, insults or actions, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based solely upon discriminatory belief systems.
<b>MINORITY</b>	A term used to describe racially, ethnically or culturally distinct groups that are usually subordinate to more dominant groups. These groups are called Minority Groups.
<b>MIXED RACE</b>	A person who has parents that belong to different racial or ethnic groups.
<b>MULTICULTURAL</b>	Pertaining to more than one culture.
<b>MULTIETHNIC</b>	A person who comes from more than one ethnicity.
<b>NEURODIVERSITY</b>	<p>A relatively new term coined in 1998 by autistic Australian sociologist Judy Singer. The term began as a way to describe people on the Autistic spectrum. Neurodiversity has since broadened to include people with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autism</li> <li>• Dyslexia</li> <li>• ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Order)</li> <li>• Dyscalculia</li> <li>• DSD (Dyspraxia)</li> <li>• Dysgraphia</li> <li>• Tourette Syndrome</li> <li>• and other neurological differences</li> </ul>

<b>NON-BINARY</b>	A term used to describe people who identify with a gender that is not exclusively male or female or is in between both genders.
<b>OPPRESSION</b>	The systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures.
<b>PANSEXUAL</b>	A term used to describe a person who has an attraction to a person regardless of where they fall on the gender or sexuality spectrum.
<b>PAY EQUITY</b>	Compensating employees the same when they perform the same or similar job duties, while accounting for other factors, such as their experience level, job performance and tenure with the employer.
<b>POC/PEOPLE OF COLOR</b>	A collective term for men and women of Asian, African, Latinx and Native American backgrounds, as opposed to the collective “White.”
<b>POWER</b>	Considered to be unequally distributed globally due to the following things: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wealth</li> <li>• whiteness</li> <li>• citizenship</li> <li>• patriarchy</li> <li>• heterosexism</li> <li>• education</li> </ul>
<b>PREJUDICE</b>	A preconceived judgement or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment and can be rooted in stereotypes, that denies the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized.
<b>PRIVILEGE</b>	An unearned social power for members of a dominant group of society including benefits, entitlements or a set of advantages in society.
<b>PRONOUNS</b>	Consciously chosen phrases that people use to represent their gender identity. There are certain pronouns to avoid like “he” or “she,” especially during the hiring process or in the workplace.

<b>QUEER</b>	Queer has many meanings and definitions for all kinds of people. It is commonly used as an umbrella term by folks who feel that they personally don't fit into dominant norms due to their own gender identity/ expression, their sexual practices, their relationship style, their politics, etc. It is a term that has been reclaimed by many, as it was one time considered a derogatory slur towards the gay and lesbian community. For this reason, some do not wish to identify with it and it should be recognized as one option for folks to identify with if they find it fitting.
<b>QUESTIONING</b>	A person who might be unsure of their sexuality or gender and is exploring preferred labels. If a person goes between labels, comes out and then changes their mind, or experiments safely, this is natural and should be supported.
<b>RACE</b>	A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly race), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic and political needs of a society at a given period of time.
<b>RACISM</b>	A white supremacist ideology backed by systemic power and reinforced through violence. It is a system of power that privileges those people who are defined and socially constructed as "White." Racism treats all races as inferior to white people and also subordinates each race to each other. Racism is often understood as an individual state of being, as in someone is or isn't racist. Racism, however, is not merely a personal attitude, it is a racialized system of power maintained by violence. An individual can be perpetuating this system without even being conscious of their actions.
<b>SAFE SPACE</b>	Refers to an environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule or denial of experience.

<b>SOCIAL JUSTICE</b>	A form of activism, based on principles of equity and inclusion that encompasses a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others.
<b>SPONSOR</b>	A usually senior person who uses their influence to advocate for and place a more junior person in a key role.
<b>STEREOTYPE</b>	A form of generalization rooted in blanket beliefs and false assumptions, a product of processes of categorization that can result in a prejudiced attitude, critical judgment and intentional or unintentional discrimination. Stereotypes are typically negative, based on little information and does not recognize individualism and personal agency.
<b>SYSTEMATIC RACISM</b>	A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time.
<b>TRANSGENDER</b>	This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who do not identify with their assigned gender at birth or the binary gender system. Some transgender people feel they exist not within one of the two standard gender categories, but rather somewhere between, beyond or outside of those two genders.
<b>TOKENISM</b>	Performative presence without meaningful participation. For example, a superficial invitation for the participation of members of a certain socially oppressed group, who are expected to speak for the whole group without giving this person a real opportunity to speak for her/himself.

<b>UNCONSCIOUS BIAS</b>	Subconscious attitudes or stereotypes, both favorable and not, that affect our understanding, actions and decisions.
<b>UNDERREPRESENTED GROUP</b>	A subset of a population with a smaller percentage than the general population. For example, women, people of color or indigenous people.
<b>XENOPHOBIA</b>	Prejudice or a dislike for people from other countries.

Terms included in this list are curated from the sources below.

- Center for Diversity & Inclusion. [Glossary of Bias Terms](#). Washington University.
- Anti-Violence Project. [Glossary](#). University of Victoria.
- HR Magazine. [The Importance of Pay Equity](#). SHRM.
- The Magnet. [The Diversity & Inclusion Glossary](#). ONGIG.
- The Aspen Institute. [Glossary](#) for Understanding the Dismantling Structural Racism.