



Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, (A.I.D.E) Strategic Plan



2025-2030



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

We celebrate 400+ years of African Nova Scotian descent.

We strive to foster a diverse community that values everything that makes us unique including our visible differences, such as race or gender expression, as well as our non-visible differences, such as gender identity and diversity of thought.

We are committed to equity, fairness and dignity for all.

Mayor's Message



On behalf of the Town of Amherst, I am proud to introduce our newly combined Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, (AIDE) Plan. This plan reflects our unwavering commitment to building a community where every resident, visitor, and business feels valued, respected, and empowered to participate fully in all aspects of town life.

Previously, our Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Plan and our Accessibility Plan were separate documents. By bringing them together, we recognize that the principles of IDE and accessibility are deeply connected – ensuring that Amherst is not only welcoming but also designed and structured to allow everyone to thrive.

This plan outlines our vision, goals, and concrete actions to create a more inclusive and accessible Amherst. It is the result of meaningful engagement with our community and a shared commitment from Council, staff, and residents to foster a town where barriers are removed, voices are heard, and diversity is celebrated.

As we move forward, we acknowledge that this work is ongoing. Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility are not just policies but principles that must guide our everyday decisions and interactions. I invite each of you to join us in making Amherst a place where everyone belongs.

Sincerely,
Rob Small
Mayor, Town of Amherst



Purpose

Amherst is becoming an increasingly diverse population which shapes and enriches the town. As we welcome all, we need to acknowledge that there are many forms of discrimination that can affect one's ability to participate in our community, from generations of systemic racism to facing physical barriers when trying to access our programs and services.

The Town of Amherst, in partnership with other levels of government and community organizations have a pivotal role to play in eliminating inequalities and systemic racism in order to create a welcoming and inclusive community.

This Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity & Equity Plan (AIDE) outlines our vision and goals over the next three years and will guide our work to bring equity, accessibility and anti-racism to the forefront of the town's decision-making process to strengthen the health and wellbeing of Amherst.



Vision

The Town of Amherst's vision is to be a healthy, prosperous, inclusive and environmentally sustainable community in which people of all ages, abilities, genders and cultures are engaged and proud to live, work and play.

We are committed to ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to contribute and be valued. We believe in supporting diversity, inclusion and dignity for all citizens of our community.

We further seek to understand how we can be more responsive to the needs of the underrepresented groups of our community. We recognize that we need to create a space that is safe for their voices to be heard thus creating a community that is balanced, equitable and committed to ongoing review of our vision's objectives.



Mission

We provide quality leadership, services, opportunities and resources for the benefit of our citizens, and in support of our growth and development of our community in a fair, equitable and transparent manner.



Guiding Principles

Respect-Integrity-Collaboration-Accountability-Inclusivity-Evidence based decision Making-Sustainability.



How Did We Create This Plan

The Town of Amherst Accessibility, and Inclusion Diversity and Equity committees, each created a strategic plan to guide the Amherst Town Council in making decisions related to accessibility, inclusion, diversity and equity. These strategic plans were adopted by Amherst Town Council in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

As we moved towards the development of a new combined plan for Accessibility Inclusion Diversity and Equity (AIDE) it became apparent that a review of the existing strategic plan goals would be required and further community consultation necessary to bring an updated combined plan forward.

Meetings were held with both committees to look at how best to combine the plans. We met with our community allies and members of underserved and underrepresented groups to guide our work. This included people from the African Nova Scotia community, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, new settlers, youth, seniors and persons with disabilities.

We also gathered feedback from a survey that was initially intended to inform our work around the new Amherst Police Department Strategy. This gave us insight into how marginalized groups feel about our policing services, systemic racism in the community, and procedures around dealing with hate crimes.

Our Commitment

The Town of Amherst is aware of the need for reconciliation, the acknowledgement of the centuries long displacement and systemic racialization impacting persons of Indigenous and African NS descent.

We also understand that discrimination and bias exists towards individuals who live with disabilities, the 2SLGBTQ+ and newcomer communities. We are committed to including those who are typically excluded, actively seeking input to hear all voices and identities in the community.

With the guidance of the Town of Amherst Social Equity Committees: Accessibility, and Inclusion, Diversity and Equity, we are committed to doing the necessary work, by growing strong relationships with underserved, underrepresented groups, gathering feedback, researching and revising relevant policies, creating actionable, achievable goals and adequately resourcing the work.





Equity and Anti Racism Plan

Goals	Initiatives/ Actions	Indicators of Progress	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Be the leader in the community known for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity	Ensure compliance with the NS Human Rights Act.	Our policies and procedures will be updated to reflect a lens of equity and inclusion and accessibility.	Chief Administrative Officer	2027
	Work to create a diverse municipal workforce.	Elected officials and staff will embrace fairness, equity and operate with these principles each and every day.	Mayor and Council	
	Ensure municipal services are equitable and accessible to all.	The community will look to the Town as a role model in AIDE.	Community Living Department	
	Develop, implement and promote anti racism policies and procedures including ways to hear complaints and resolve disputes.		Human Resources	
	Provide educational opportunities for elected officials and employees on respect, cultural awareness and the promotion and protection of human rights.			



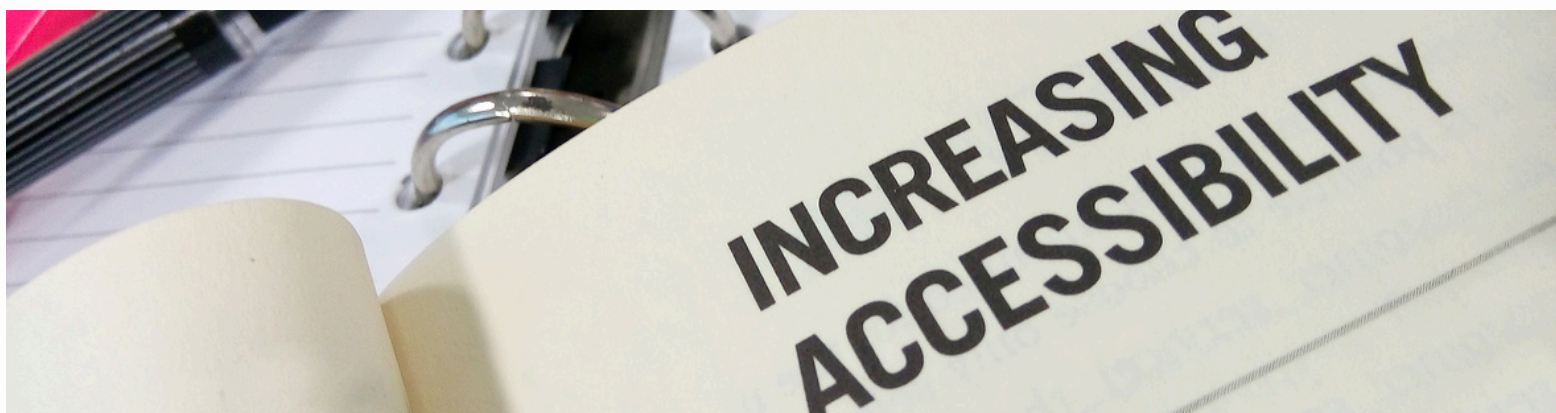
Goals	Initiatives/ Actions	Indicators of Progress	Owner/Lead	Target Date
To use Equity, Anti-Racist and Accessible language on all public documents	Ensure that all new public documents, website content, social media posts, publications, policies and procedures will be developed through an accessible and equitable lens.	We will ensure 100% of new content meets this standard using readability tools.	Marketing Specialist	Ongoing until 2028
		Training will be provided to content creators to ensure successful implementation.	Community Well-Being Manager	
	Existing documents will undergo a review to ensure we are updating documents to reflect our vision.	Existing documents reviewed with an equitable and accessible lens.	Director of Community Living Communications Officer Marketing Staff	



Goals	Initiatives/ Actions	Indicators of Progress	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Increase Community Engagement	<p>Over the next 12-24 months we will increase opportunities for engagement by launching an outreach campaign, round tables, to gather public information with diverse groups.</p> <p>Build stronger connections with youth, the 2SLGBTQ+ and newcomer community.</p>	<p>Organize and launch an outreach campaign to understand how to improve our engagement strategies.</p> <p>Through improving our engagement strategies we will increase our participation in community consultations, increase feedback from surveys</p> <p>Create volunteer opportunities that build a sense of belonging and support relationship building in our community.</p> <p>Build a community committee of volunteers from all diverse sectors of our community to further out Municipal Strategic plans.</p>	Community Living Department	2025-2027



Goals	Initiatives/ Actions	Indicators of Progress	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Work to build an Equitable and Inclusive Community	We will continue to increase our promotion, respect, understanding and appreciation of our community's diversity by organizing annual workshops, offering educational resources on equity and anti racism.	<p>Embed social connection and sense of belonging into decisions about policies and programming.</p> <p>Partner with community groups and organizations to help create meaningful opportunities that celebrate diverse backgrounds and cultures.</p> <p>Support a culture of safety and inclusion for all community members.</p>	Community Living Department	Ongoing



Accessibility Plan

The Town of Amherst and the Accessibility Advisory Committee have been working tirelessly to identify, prevent and eliminate barriers to people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives and facilities.

We are taking the steps to address discrimination, racism and inequalities in our community as these can limit access to our services, education, employment, information and hinder our resident's ability to navigate our buildings and town.



Successes to date:

Training:

Training was offered to summer staff to ensure our park programs were more accessible to children with different needs. Safer Spaces training which strives to build and increase awareness of the 2SLGBTQIA+ experience, raises awareness of importance of pronouns, explores privilege and addresses how we can be allies. Physical and Health Training was also offered and focused on behaviors and technique, as well as adapting activities.

Staff attended multiple training opportunities for staff on accessibility and equity offered through the Association of Municipal Administrators Nova Scotia.

Active Living Strategy:

An Active Living Strategy was developed in 2024 where fostering equity, access, inclusion and safety were the key components in planning a framework to ensure an active and welcoming community for all.

Community Support Grants

Over \$20,000.00 was awarded to community groups and organizations to help with accessible projects including Fundy Winds to develop accessible trails, Autism Nova Scotia to help with community programming, the 50 + Club to improve the parking lot to be more accessible as well as the Cumberland County Museum to update displays to be more accessible.

Goals	Initiatives/Actions	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Increase Inclusive and Accessible community resources and services	Through community engagement, services will be created that fit the needs of all residents and visitors of Amherst.	Director of Community Living	2025-2026
	All existing services to be reviewed for being equitable, inclusive and accessible.	Community Well Being Manager	
	New services will be introduced that increase sense of belonging (Volunteerism).		
	Create reporting/ monitoring system for incidents of accessibility, hate, racism, discrimination and accessibility issues.		

Goals	Initiatives/Actions	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Improve service delivery for residents	Improve service delivery by educating staff through ongoing awareness and training programs.	Chief Administrative Officer	Ongoing
	Increase knowledge and understanding of accessibility, equity, human rights, disability rights and accessibility barriers in our community.	Community Living Team	
	Explore new awareness and training opportunities for staff, senior management and Council.		
Improve program delivery	Deliver training to all administrative and forward facing staff, including, event staff and summer students on accessibility issues and barriers to participation.	Community Living Department	Ongoing
Ensure events are accessible to everyone	Continue to improve accessibility of public events hosted by the town by planning events with an equitable, anti-racism and accessibility lens, including location, event delivery and participation.	Community Living Department	Ongoing
	Planning will have culture considerations as well as consider the needs of persons with disabilities including, but not limited to, having adequate accessible event parking, accessible portable toilets and, when possible, places to rest from sensory overwhelming environments.		



Information & Communication

Successes to date:

Delivery of Communication:

Staff attended Accessible Communications regional training on digital communications and plain language.

Website Re-Development:

The Town of Amherst recently completed a website re-development project, which included making improvements for accessibility.

Information:

Community Well Being team exploring different platforms to help information be more accessible to the public on events on activities.

Goals	Initiatives/Actions	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Ensure that all new public documents, website content, social media posts, publications, policies and procedures will be developed through an accessible and equitable lens	We will track and aim for 100% of new content to meet this standard using readability tools.	Community Living Department	Ongoing to 2028
	Training provided to content creators to ensure successful implementation.	Marketing Specialist	
Existing documents will undergo a review to ensure we are updating documents to reflect our vision	Existing documents will be revised where necessary.	Chief Administrative Officer	2028
		Marketing Specialist	
		Staff	

Goals	Initiatives/Actions	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Improve signage to meet provincial standards	Implementing signage consistent with accessibility best practice. Prioritize having signage where necessary and appropriate.	Community Living Staff Operations	2028
Evaluate how we communicate to our external partners	Develop a comprehensive communications plan that identifies strategies on how to communicate to and engage with the public. Seek input from equity deserving groups, persons with disabilities and newcomers.	Marketing Strategist	2028



Successes to date:

Improvement of Town Sidewalks:

\$145,000 for sidewalk improvements 2023/24/25. All the sidewalk improvement projects included the installation of Tactile warning surface indicator plates.

February 24, 2025 Council approved amendments to the Sidewalk/Curb Construction Policy as part of the Accessibility Strategy. This change was recommended by the Accessibility Committee.

Active Transportation:

Currently, the Town of Amherst partially funds the Cumberland County Transportation Society bus system. The transportation society has fully accessible buses that run daily throughout Cumberland County and the Town of Amherst.

Goals	Initiatives/Actions	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Improve Pedestrian Infrastructure	We will enhance connectivity in the community by improving pedestrian infrastructure including: Sidewalks: replacing the existing brick pavers with concrete. Installation of tactile warning plates. Prioritize safety of pedestrian infrastructure by investigating and making recommendations for appropriate lighting and benches to rest where possible.	Operations CAO	Ongoing as operational budget allows - 2028
Enhance snow removal practices through consultation with outside agencies such as CNIB	Prioritize snow clearance at public buildings and municipally managed parking areas.	Operations	Ongoing
Continue to improve Active Transportation opportunities by reviewing accessibility of trails and sidewalks	Review current Active Transportation strategy, continue to enhance AT opportunities.	Operations	Ongoing

Increase opportunities for citizens to move throughout the community barrier free

Determine feasibility of an accessible community transit system.

Council
CAO
Staff

2027



Education

Initiatives/Actions

Indicators of Progress

Owner/Lead

Target Date

Continue to grow partnerships with schools and education centres at all levels to offer supports where needed

Support in preventing and removing barriers to accessing education.

Inclusion of students in community based cultural events such as, the Mawio'mi and pride events.

Community Living Department

Ongoing

Provide training and opportunities for accessibility, equity and anti-racism

Training and get staff involved in conversation about how equity, racism and accessibility impact their work.

Community Living Department

Ongoing

Work to ensure Community Safety

Support community initiatives such as neighborhood watch, provide training in senior scooter and crosswalk safety.

Police

Community Living Department

Ongoing



Employment

Successes to date:

Human Resources:

We implemented the Employment Equity Policy in February 2024. Over the past two years, we have conducted a comprehensive review of all HR policies to include inclusive language.

All job postings now include language around needing accommodations, equal opportunity and identifying protected groups. We have also eliminated bias from job postings.

We offer flexible work options and accommodations as required and have adopted a Flexible Workplace Policy.

Initiatives/Actions	Indicators of Progress	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Diversify recruitment methods	Advertise jobs through diverse networks and community organizations.	Human Resources	Ongoing to 2026
	Create hiring committee with equitable review of resumes.	CAO	
Promote Amherst as an inclusive and diverse workforce	Provide support and accommodations where necessary.	Human Resources	Ongoing
	Create team building and a welcoming atmosphere.	CAO	
	Ensure all abilities are recognized and celebrated.	Staff	
Review of policies and procedures	Continue to examine policies through a lens of accessibility and equity.	Human Resources	2028
	Create Anti discrimination policies and mechanisms for dealing with issues.	CAO Staff	



Successes to date:

Town Hall:

Replacement of the ramp at Town Hall to current standards -approx. - \$45,000 Addition of handrails at Town Hall entrances- approx. - \$5000 Ensuring new reception desk is at proper height.

Robb's Complex & Trail System:

\$21,000 for a new trailer groomer. The new groomer attachment can bury stones, remove surface vegetation, breakup clumps of hard packed soil, fill in holes / washouts, and leave behind a levelled surface layer with a single pass of the tractor. The attachment will also be used to maintain the foul lines and warning tracks at the Robb's Complex. The groomer has improved operational efficiency and accessibility of our trail system. 2023.

Stadium Platform:

To allow individuals who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices have access to view the ice surface over the dasher boards during an ice event, the Facilities Department at the Town of Amherst built a \$2000 10" high raised platform. The ramp can be moved and stored until needed. This project was completed as of September 2023.

Raised Garden Beds:

Town of Amherst provided \$5000 to the Amherst Community Garden to build accessible raised garden beds. 2023.

Accessible Playgrounds:

Over the past several months Town staff have connected with like-minded organizations and committees to discuss accessible playground planning, design, cost and inclusivity. Playground consultation was conducted with Camp Tidnish, the Parrsboro Playground Committee and the Town of Westville. Staff also issued a public survey for parents, caregivers and those with disabilities in the Town of Amherst to gain insight and understanding on how to make our play spaces accessible and inclusive for all. Terms of reference for an external Accessible Playground Committee has been developed. Council approved \$200,000 for the construction of a fully accessible playground and a work plan has been developed to move this work forward.

Initiatives/Actions	Indicators of Progress	Owner/Lead	Target Date
Review emergency management and building evacuation plan with a lens of accessibility in mind	A new emergency management and building evacuation plan is written with an equitable and accessible lens.	CAO Safety Committee	2026
Conduct built environment assessments	Continue to assess areas of accessibility to provide recommendations to council on improvements.	Operations CAO Council Staff	2025-2028
Improve ability to provide barrier free participation in events	Invest in infrastructure to host inclusive and accessible signature events which will attract tourists and newcomers.	Mayor/Council CAO Operations Community Living Staff	Ongoing to 2030
Improve access to safe, affordable and accessible housing	Support organizations that develop affordable and accessible housing.	Council CAO	Ongoing to 2030
Investigate & make recommendation on the establishment of an Accessible Playground	<p>Review parks and greenspace to evaluate usage and accessibility to accommodate growth and changing needs of the community.</p> <p>Consult community members with lived experience to gain insight and input on what should be included in the playground.</p> <p>Begin fundraising initiatives: community outreach, grants.</p>	CAO Operations Community Living	2028

**Increase
partnerships in
Accessibility**

Work with
community partners
to assist them with
grant writing.

Community Well
Being Staff

2026

Advise on how
community partners
can become more
accessible.



Who is Responsible for Implementing?



Amherst Town Council:

Recognize the importance of implementing this plan and seek adequate funding to allow our municipality to meet the requirements under Nova Scotia's Accessibility and Anti-Racism Acts.



CAO/Staff:

Ensure the commitments outlined in the AIDE Plan are integrated into all municipal practices.



Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee:

Review this AIDE Plan on an annual basis as required by the Accessibility and Anti-Racism Act and update as required. The committees Review Municipal Accessibility Report Cards annually and report on progress toward meeting the commitments outlined in this plan.



Director of Community Living/Community Well-Being Manager:


Guide the work of the Accessibility Advisory and the Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee. Book meetings, prepare and distribute agendas and minutes, assist the chairperson in leading the meetings, manage recruitment for the committee when necessary. Act as a liaison with the Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee and the Amherst Town Council.



Human Resources:

Ensure all employee and hiring policies, procedures comply with Nova Scotia Human Rights Act and are reviewed and revised using an equitable, anti-racism and accessibility lens.





How We Will Measure And Evaluate?

- Develop a communications pathway that includes a emailing/ mailing list of persons who are interested in the ongoing work the committee is doing, to promote the work that is being done, and ask for feedback.
- Host regular information sharing sessions on the work of the committee and ensure underserved/underrepresented and diverse communities are invited.
- Establish a process of inquiry/complaint that is reviewed by the CAO and senior staff to respond to these inquiries.
- Community participation to be tracked and reviewed by the committee and council where required.
- Feedback to be gathered in various forms. The manner in which it's collected will be based on community preference.
- Equity Impact Assessments and Evaluation tool to be used when creating and reviewing policies, procedures, programs and services.



Key Partners

The Town of Amherst has many community allies and partners.

These include:

- The Cumberland African Nova Scotia Association
- Autumn House
- Bridge Adult Service Centre
- Maggie's Place
- Cumberland YMCA
- Lilac Place (Resource Centre for Women)
- Sexual Health Centre
- Schools Plus
- Cumberland Housing and Homelessness Association
- Cumberland Restorative Justice Society
- Cobequid Housing Authority
- Mental Health and Addictions
- Autism NS
- Senior Safety program
- Amherst 50+ club
- Spring Street Academy
- The Nova Scotia Community College
- Y Reach
- West Highlands Elementary
- Amherst Regional High School
- Amherst and Area Multi-Cultural Society
- After the School Bell
- Amherst Food Assistance Program
- Cumberland County Transportation Society
- Cumberland Adult Education
- Cumberland Early Intervention Program
- Cumberland Pride
- Indigenous Affairs
- In the Works
- E.B. Chandler Junior High



Conclusion

We understand this plan is a living document and as our population continues to grow and age, new issues may arise. We will continue towards meeting the accessibility goals by 2030 as well as advancing equity and addressing systemic racism to improve community well-being.



Glossary

A Glossary of terms has been developed in an effort to promote understanding and clarify the terms that are contained in the strategy. It is recognized and understood that these definitions may change over time but will form a foundation for understanding in the current document.

Accessibility: Accessibility involves removing the barriers faced by individuals with a variety of disabilities (which can include but not limited to physical, sensory, cognitive, learning, mental health) and the various barriers (including attitudinal and systemic) that impede an individual's ability to participate in social, cultural, political and economic life. Disabilities can be temporary or permanent. As we age our abilities change and therefore an accessible society is one designed to include everyone and be fluid over time.

Anti-Racism involves actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. It includes understanding one's own privilege, challenging internalized racism, and speaking out against racism when it is seen.

An anti-racist person or organization goes a step further than simply stating they are anti-racist. These individuals and organizations work to understand their own privilege, challenge their own internalized racism and call out racism when they see it impacting others.

Barrier: Something that makes it harder for some people to participate. Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act defines a barrier as "anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice."

Disability: As defined in Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act: "a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society."



Glossary

Diversity: Vancouver's A Healthy City for All (2014) describes diversity as a term that is often confused for race or culture when in fact it should be used to consider the number of interlocking ways that people are disadvantaged and mistreated, and thus how people from various and marginalized groups or communities feel comfortable, safe and able to access their community spaces and institutions (City of Vancouver, 2014)

Equity: Fairness, impartiality, even-handedness. A distinct process of recognizing differences within groups of individuals and using this understanding to achieve substantive equity in all aspects of a person's life (Government of Canada, 2019)

Inclusion: Acknowledging and valuing people's differences so as to enrich social planning, decision making and quality of life for everyone. In an inclusive Municipality, we each have a sense of belonging, acceptance, and are recognized as valued, contributing members of society. Real inclusion takes place when those already included in the mainstreams learn from those who are excluded and initiate change (City for All Women Institute, 2015)

Institutional Racism: Policies, practices and procedures that work better for white people than people of color, often intentionally or inadvertently (National League of Cities, 2017)

Intersectionality: The intersection, or crossover, of our many identities affect how each of us experiences the Municipality. The intersections occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments, other political and economic unions, religious institutions and media (City for all Women, 2015)

Marginalization: Refers to a long-term, structural process of systemic discrimination that creates a class of disadvantaged minorities. These groups become permanently confined to the margins of society; their status is continually reproduced because of various dimensions of exclusion, particularly in the labor market, but also from full and meaningful participation in society (Province of Ontario, 2017)



Glossary

Oppression is when one group benefits at the expense of another, using power and privilege.

Plain Language: Conversational communication that makes sense to the intended audience. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information (plainlanguagenetwork.org/).

Privilege: The experience of freedoms, rights, benefits, advantages, access and or opportunities afforded to members of a dominant group in a society or in a given context (City of All Women Institute, 2015)

Race: A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, ethnic classification, and the social, economic and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups (Portland Metropolitan Region, 2017)

Racism is when people treat others unfairly because of their race, either personally or through unfair practices in organizations.

Racialization: A process of delineation of group boundaries and of allocation of persons within these boundaries by primary reference to (supposedly) inherent and/or biological (usually phenotypical) characteristics (Province of Ontario, 2017)

Racial Equity: Closing the gap so that race does not predict one's success, while also improving outcomes for all (National League of Cities, 2017)

Structural, Institutional or systemic racism: When institutions or systems create or maintain racial inequity, often as a result of hidden institutional biases in policies, practices and procedures that privilege some groups and disadvantage others (Province of Ontario, 2017)

Systemic racism refers to policies and practices within institutions that unintentionally exclude or promote certain groups.