

Equity Language Guide

Governor’s Interagency Council on Health Disparities

Approved December 6, 2018

Introduction

To assist state agencies with talking about issues related to equity in general and racial equity in particular, the Governor’s Interagency Council on Health Disparities (Council) is creating this Equity Language Guide. It provides guidance, standard definitions, and terms to avoid that agencies can use in the creation of reports, forms, and other written materials. This guidance is not comprehensive. It is just a first step and has a limited focus on terms that are routinely used in state government. The Council intends to review the guide annually and to update it to reflect the most current language and definitions and to continue to add further guidance to agencies. We welcome feedback—please send questions, comments, suggestions, edits, and resources to Christy Hoff at Christy.Hoff@sboh.wa.gov.

Glossary of Equity-Related Terms

Term (Sources)	Definition	Examples and Considerations
Bias (1,2,3)	Prejudice or preference toward a group over another group. Implicit or Unconscious Bias are associations we hold about groups of people without realizing it that affect our attitudes and actions. Explicit or Conscious Bias are biases we know we have and may use purposefully.	The <u>Implicit Association Test</u> is a tool to measure implicit biases related to race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and many other topics.
Culture (1, 12)	A set of values, beliefs, customs, norms, perceptions, and experiences shared by a group of people. An individual may identify with or belong to many different cultural groups.	Examples can include age/generation, country of origin, disability status, education level, employment status/profession, family/household type, gender identity, geographic location, immigration status, income, language, literacy level, military experience, political beliefs, race/ethnicity, religion spirituality, sexual orientation, etc.

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Cultural Humility (4,5,6, 12)	Approach to respectfully engaging others with cultural identities different from your own and recognizing that no cultural perspective is superior to another. The practice of cultural humility acknowledges systems of oppression and involves critical self-reflection, lifelong learning and growth, a commitment to recognizing and sharing power, and a desire to work toward institutional accountability.	Cultural humility is a preferred term to other related concepts such as cultural competency, cultural awareness, cultural sensitively, cultural appropriateness, cultural responsiveness, and cultural safety.
Discrimination (1)	Unjust treatment of an individual or group based on their actual or perceived membership in a specific group.	<p>Examples of discrimination include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ableism: Against people with disabilities • Ageism: Against people based on age • Classism: Against people based on social or economic class • Heterosexism/Cisgenderism: Against people in the LGBTQ+ community • Islamaphobia: Against Muslims • Sexism: Against people based on sex
Diversity (1)	Similarities and differences among a group of people based on cultural factors such as race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, age, educational status, religion, geography and other experiences.	<p>Diversity is a noun meaning to be diverse. The adjective, diverse, should never be used to describe individuals (e.g., she is a diverse candidate).</p> <p>Diversity in the workplace means adequate representation of different cultural groups at every level of an organization.</p>

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Term (Sources)	Definition	Examples and Considerations
Equity (1)	Fairness and justice, focused on ensuring everyone has the opportunity to meet their full potential. Equity takes into account disadvantage experienced by groups. Equity is distinct from equality , which refers to everyone having the same treatment without accounting for differing needs or circumstances. Inequity means lack of fairness or justice and describes differences that result from a lack of access to opportunities and resources. Inequities are avoidable and different than disparities , which are differences that do not imply unfairness.	<p>Providing an informational brochure to all clients of an agency is an example of equality—everyone gets the same information in the same form. Providing the same brochure in multiple languages is a strategy that promotes equity, because it takes into account differing language needs.</p> <p>The difference in breast cancer rates between women and men is a disparity, because it is not unfair, unjust, or avoidable. However, the higher rates of breast cancer mortality among black women compared to white women is an inequity—it is unfair, unjust, and avoidable.</p>
Inclusion (1,7, 14)	An intentional effort and sets of actions to ensure authentic participation, with a true sense of belonging and full access to opportunities.	Inclusion builds on the assets that a diverse workforce provides by creating an environment of involvement and respect that fosters innovation and ideas.
Intersectionality (1,2)	The interaction of cultures and identities held by an individual.	Intersectionality describes how individuals can experience privilege in some areas and disadvantage in other areas. It can also demonstrate how individuals with multiple marginalized identities can experienced compounded oppression. For example, a transgender Asian man can experience racism for being a person of color and oppression because of his gender identity.

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Term (Sources)	Definition	Examples and Considerations
LGBTQ+ (12, 13)	An abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning. The + allows space for other diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression groups. Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction or non-attraction to other people. People use a variety of labels to describe their sexual orientation. Gender identity is one’s innermost concept of self as female, male, a blend of both, or neither. Transgender describes identities and experiences of people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from conventional expectations based on assigned sex at birth. Cisgender refers to a gender identity that matches a person’s assigned sex at birth.	While LGBT and LGBTQ are often used as short-hand umbrella terms meant to capture multiple sexual orientations and gender identities, LGBTQ+ is ideal due to its more inclusive nature. People use many different terms to describe their sexual orientation and gender identity; however, the term homosexual should not be used as it suggests pathology.
Microaggression (16)	Brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that are perceived as hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults about one’s marginalized identity.	Microaggressions can appear as compliments, but the impact is negative. For example, asking a non-white person, “Where are you from?” or “Where are you <i>really</i> from?” sends the message that people of color cannot be from the United States and reinforces ideas of difference and marginalization.

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Term (Sources)	Definition	Examples and Considerations
Oppression (2, 12)	Devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging people with certain social identities with the intent to benefit the dominant group. Oppression can happen at the individual, institutional, systemic, or structural levels. –see Figure 1: Levels of Oppression	Individual Oppression refers to beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that perpetuate oppression. Institutional Oppression refers to the ways in which institutional policies and practices perpetuate oppression. Systemic Oppression refers to how the major systems in our lives—economy, politics, education, criminal justice, health, etc.—perpetuate oppression. Structural Oppression refers to how individuals, institutions, and systems reinforce one another in ways that perpetuate oppression.
People of Color or Communities of Color (1,2)	Collective term for referring to non-white racial/ethnic groups.	People of color or communities of color are preferred terms versus minorities , which is not recommended because of changing demographics and the ways in which it reinforces ideas of inferiority and marginalization.
People with Disabilities (15)	People with functional limitations that affect one or more major life activities.	Generally, people-first language is preferred as it avoids defining a person in terms of their disability. However, some advocates prefer identity-first language. Asking people about their preference in terminology is a best practice.
Privilege (1)	Unearned advantage, immunity, and social power held by members of a dominant group.	Individuals can be privileged due to one identity that they hold but disadvantaged by another. For example, a white woman with a physical disability has privilege for being white even though she may experience disadvantage because of her sex/gender or disability.

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Term (Sources)	Definition	Examples and Considerations
Race/Ethnicity (1,2,8)	Socially constructed system of organizing people into groups based on characteristics such as cultural affiliation, physical appearance, language, national heritage, religion, or ancestral geographical base. Race/ethnicity has no genetic basis—no characteristic, trait, or gene distinguishes members of one racial/ethnic group from another. The single term race/ethnicity emphasizes how the words are non-precise and socially constructed.	Racial/ethnic categories are socially constructed, yet they have real impacts on the lives of people. Therefore, the collection of disaggregated data is critical in order to identify inequities in service delivery or outcomes. Currently, data standards use separate questions for race and ethnicity. Therefore using the separate terms may be needed in certain cases to reflect data that is collected using those categories.
Racism (2,7,9,10,11)	Individual, institutional, systemic, and structural ways by which groups are advantaged or disadvantaged based on race/ethnicity. Racism disadvantages people of color at the benefit of people who are white. —see Figure 1: Levels of Oppression Anti-racism is the work of actively dismantling racism at every level, from the foundations of institutions to the attitudes and beliefs that individuals reinforce.	Individual Racism (aka interpersonal racism) refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that perpetuate racism. Institutional Racism refers to the ways in which institutional policies and practices perpetuate racism. Systemic Racism refers to how the major systems in our lives—economy, politics, education, criminal justice, health, etc.—perpetuate racism. Structural Racism refers to how individuals, institutions, and systems reinforce one another in ways that perpetuate racism.
Stereotype (1)	Characteristics attributed to an individual or group based on generalization, oversimplification, or exaggeration that may result in stigmatization and discrimination.	Even so-called positive stereotypes (e.g., Asians as “model minorities”) can be harmful due to their limiting nature.
White Privilege (1, 2)	Unearned advantages, benefits, and choices that people who are white have, solely because they are white.	Even within racial/ethnic groups, lighter-skinned people can experience more privilege than those with darker skin, also known as colorism .

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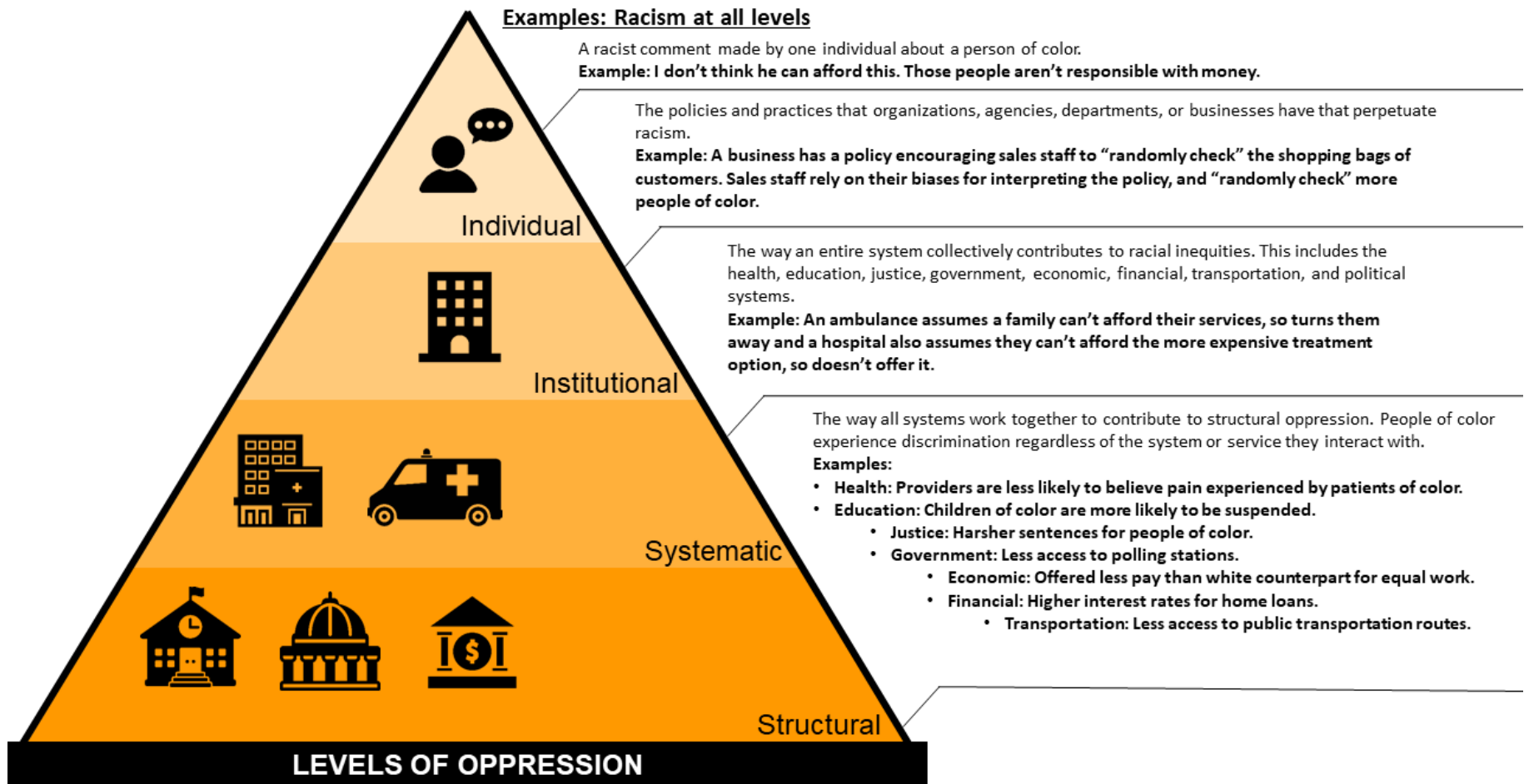


Figure 1: Levels of Oppression

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Terms to Avoid

The table below includes terms that are offensive and that reinforce the marginalization and devaluing of people and groups as well as options for ideal language. Avoiding these terms can help agencies connect more meaningfully with the communities they serve. The list is not comprehensive—it focuses on terms that are still commonly used today but that many people may not realize are offensive. It does not include many of the terms that are more commonly known to be intentional slurs and insults. In general, people-first language (as opposed to identity-first language) is recommended; however some advocates prefer identity-first language. Asking community members for guidance on terminology is a best practice.

Terms to Avoid	Ideal Language
Aliens, Illegals, Illegal immigrants	Individuals who are undocumented, immigrants
Challenged, Differently-abled, Handicapable, Handicapped, Special needs	People with disabilities
Citizens	If it is not necessary to refer to citizenship status, use people or residents.
Developing nations, Developing world, First world, Third world, Global South	Be specific—name the country (e.g., Somalia) or the geographical region (e.g., East Africa). When trying to communicate the level of monetary resources, use low-, middle-, and high-income countries.
Disparities due to race, Disproportionality by race/ethnicity	Inequities due to racism – see next section, Improving the Way We Talk About Inequities Due to Racism
Homosexual	LGBTQ+ people, the LGBTQ+ community
Minorities	People of color, Communities of color
Sexual preference(s)	Sexual orientation
Special interest groups, Special populations, Vulnerable populations	Marginalized communities, Marginalized people
Transgendered, Transsexual	Transgender, Trans

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Improving the Way We Talk About Inequities Due to Racism

State agencies routinely collect and report on data disaggregated by race/ethnicity. This is important in order to identify inequities in access to or receipt of state services by different population groups, as well as inequities in outcomes. These kinds of data are essential for identifying where additional resources may need to be invested. In general, state data have consistently pointed to differences in access and outcomes experienced by people of color. Examples include gaps in kindergarten readiness, disproportionality in the criminal justice system, disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards, and health inequities. When documenting these inequities, agencies have historically used language that explicitly states or implies that race/ethnicity is a risk factor. For example, if we say that black women are at higher risk for having a low-birthweight baby, we are implying that there is something innately wrong with being black that puts those women at higher risk. In fact, it is the cumulative effects of racism experienced by black women that put them at higher risk.

The Council's guidance to agencies is to be explicit about racism and other forms of oppression as the underlying causes for the inequities that exist and show up in state data. Such inequities may be due to overt interpersonal racism or institutional racism that results in policies or processes having disparate adverse impacts on people of color. When sharing information on outcomes by race/ethnicity, include context about the underlying reasons, including lack of opportunity, policies that have a disparate impact on people of color, effects of implicit bias on subjective decision making, and toxic stress.

The Council is committed to promoting equity broadly for all historically marginalized groups. The Council also recognizes that racism is ingrained in our history and deeply embedded in our institutions today, leading to the inequities we see across all sectors. Therefore, while the Council seeks to challenge and undue all forms of oppression, it is committed to centering racism as a primary focus.

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