



# Social Equity Foundations

Glossary



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# INTRODUCTION

This quick reference glossary was developed by the Office of Social Equity to introduce concepts and words and how ODOT and the enterprise are framing equity conversations. How we frame conversations and the terms we use help us to shift our thinking, interactions, and the way we do business. As society changes, language changes, and as changes occur this document will be updated.

Use this glossary as a starting point for individual and team learning. Use the links and QR codes embedded in the document to explore more resources.

## GLOSSARY WORDS OFFERED

**ACCESS** – The ability, right, and permission to approach, enter, speak with, or fully use all aspects of the systems, institutions and the services offered in a society.

**ACCESSIBILITY** – The extent to which a space is readily approachable and usable by people with disabilities. A space can be described as:

- ✘ Physical or literal space, such as a facility, website, conference room, office, or bathroom.
- ✘ Figurative space, such as a conversation or activity.
- ✘ Digital space, such as a website.

**AGE** – The length of an existence of someone or something, from the beginning to any given time.

**ALASKAN NATIVE** – Persons belonging to the tribal nations and villages of Alaska.

**ALLY** – An agent of social change, who is a member of an advantaged social group(s) and who uses their social power to stand against injustice directed at a targeted group (e.g. Whites who are anti-racist, men who are anti-sexist).

[Learn more about allyship.](#)

**AMERICAN INDIAN** – Persons belonging to the tribal nations of the continental United States.

**ANTI-RACIST** – A person who actively opposes systems of prejudice based on race with the intent to dismantle systems, policies, practices, or procedures to redistribute power in an equitable manner.

**BELONGING** – More than just being seen, it requires having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of social and cultural structures. Belonging means having the right to contribute to and make demands on society and political institutions.

**BIPOC** – An acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This term is inclusive of people who identify as Native American, members of Oregon’s nine federally recognized tribes, American Indian, Alaska Native; Black, African, African Americans; Latina/o/x, Hispanic; Asian, Pacific Islander; Arab/Middle Eastern/North African; and people of two or more races/ethnicities.

**BRAVE SPACE** – An environment where teams or participants are encouraged to speak and be supported when doing so honestly and critically from their own experiences with the intent of mutual learning.

**CANCEL CULTURE** – A modern form of exclusion in which someone is pushed out of social or professional circles – whether it is online, on social media, or in person. Those who are subject to this exclusion are said to have been “cancelled.”

**CISGENDER** – Someone who has a gender identity that is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth.

**COLONIZING** – The process of forcing people to abandon their culture, language, religion, beliefs, traditions, and/or practices as a means of gaining power and control. This process often involves taking land, and violence and harm.

**COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOS)** – A public or private non-profit organization that is representative of a community or significant segments of a community, or provides educational, technical, financial assistance, advocacy, arts, civic, cultural, health and human service, or related services to individuals in the community.

**COMPASSIONATE CURIOSITY** – The process of working through conflict by asking open-ended questions, while suspending judgment and acting with empathy and respect. The overall goal is to learn, not to teach. [Learn more about this topic.](#)

**CULTURAL APPRECIATION** – The respectful borrowing of elements from another culture with an interest in sharing ideas and learning about other cultures. [Learn more about and appreciation, appropriation, and denigration.](#)

**CULTURAL APPROPRIATION** – Benefiting from a cultural aspect of a group of people without their permission and/or compensation (e.g. taking Intellectual property, artifacts, dance, clothing and fashion, language, music, food, religious symbols, decorations, medicine, makeup, hairstyles, traditional tattoos, wellness practices).

**CULTURAL COMPETENCE** – Understanding how institutions and individuals can respond with appreciation of people from all cultures in a manner that recognizes, affirms, values worth, and preserves the dignity of individuals and communities. In practice, this is cultural responsiveness.

**CULTURAL HUMILITY** – The ability to recognize that cultures and perspectives that differ from our own are as valid and important. Cultural humility can include a lifelong commitment to self-critique about differences in culture and a commitment to be aware of and actively mitigate power imbalances between cultures.

**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE** – The ability to learn from and relate with appreciation to community members from other cultures as well as our own.

**DECOLONIZING** – The process of becoming free from a nation or culture that has established and maintained its domination over another. Part of decolonization often includes attempts to reclaim control of stolen land and culture that was forcibly stripped.

**DEI** – Acronym for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**DIGNITY** – The act of mutually seeing and valuing people by offering and/or protecting relationship, merit, excellence, access, and identity.

**DISABILITY** – Any condition of the mind or body that makes it difficult for the person experiencing the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions). [Learn more about disabilities. Learn more about ODOT and the Americans with Disabilities Act.](#)

**DISADVANTAGED** – A person or group lacking in the basic resources or conditions (e.g. standard housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights) necessary for an equal position in society.

**DISPARATE IMPACT** – A judicial theory developed in the United States that allows challenges to employment or educational practices that appear to be non-discriminatory but have an overly negative effect on members of legally protected groups.

**DIVERSITY** – The honoring and including people of different backgrounds, identities, and experiences collectively and as individuals. It emphasizes the need for sharing power and increasing representation of communities that are systemically underrepresented and under-resourced. These differences are strengths that maximize the state's competitive advantage through innovation, effectiveness, and adaptability.

**DOMINANT CULTURE** – Language, religion, values, rituals, social customs, etc. that are seen as a standard because they were developed by those with social and political power, and influence in a group or society.

**EMPATHY** – Sensing another person's emotional state and imagining how they might be feeling.

**ENGAGEMENT** – Working collaboratively in ways that consider and appreciate multiple perspectives, backgrounds, and values. All participants are a part of the process that informs and supports plans and decisions integrated throughout systems and organizations, and creates opportunities to achieve full participation by all. [Learn more about intentional engagement.](#)

**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE** – At ODOT, this means to provide all Oregonians, regardless of race, culture, or income, equal access to transportation decision-making so all Oregonians may fairly share in benefits and burdens and enjoy the same degree of protection from disproportionate adverse impacts. This includes providing equal access to public information and decision-making about transportation planning, financing, construction, operations, and maintenance activities. [Learn more about Climate and Environmental Justice at ODOT.](#)

**EQUITABLE ENGAGEMENT** – A combination of processes, practices, and decisions that are responsive and appropriately reactive to community priorities. Equitable engagement requires directly empowering historically marginalized and excluded communities. Community expertise must be incorporated in every phase of decision making with emphasis on deepening connections with those most impacted, underserved, and underrepresented.

**EQUITABLE FUNDING** – Assigning funding and resources in a way that considers that not all people or communities are starting from the same place and redistributing resources to those communities who have been disadvantaged. [Learn more about the distribution of the benefits and burdens in transportation systems.](#)

**EQUITY** – Equity acknowledges that not all people, or all communities, are starting from the same place due to historic and current systems of oppression. Equity is the effort to provide different levels of support based on an individual’s or group’s needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. Equity actionably empowers communities most impacted by systemic oppression and requires the redistribution of resources, power, and opportunity to those communities. [Learn more about how ODOT is engaging in equity.](#)

**EQUITY LENS** – Recognizing the ways systemic inequities disadvantage marginalized people in a range of social contexts. Reframing disparities as indication of institutional underperformance rather than a person’s underperformance; attributing outcome disparities to systems and process in our roles and responsibilities rather than circumstance or capability of individuals.

**FOLX** – A variation of folks, also inclusive, that signals the space is open and accepting of all identities especially those that are consistently marginalized.

**GENDER EXPRESSION** – How an individual’s gender identity is expressed to the world at large, including, but not limited to, dress, appearance, manner, or speech.

**GENDER FLUID** – Being in motion between two or more genders where gender identification and presentation shifts, whether within, or outside of, societal gender norms.

**GENDER IDENTITY** – How individuals experience their gender, regardless of whether or not it differs from their sex assigned at birth. [Learn more about gender identity and creating gender-inclusive workplaces.](#)

**GENDERISM/CISSEXISM** – Systematic power and control targeting non-cisgender groups, who hold less power and control. It is used to uphold the belief that there are, and should be, only two genders and that gender is tied to sex assigned at birth. It is supported and maintained by institutional structures and policies, cultural norms and values, and individual behaviors.

**GENERATIONAL GAP** – A perceived gap between different generations based on difference of opinions between one generation and another regarding beliefs, politics, or values. [Learn more about different generations and how they can work well together.](#)

**GENTRIFICATION** – Changing the character of a neighborhood of marginalized people through the influx of more affluent residents and businesses, causing development-induced displacement of current residents and businesses. In this process, it becomes unaffordable for residents to remain in the community when property values, mortgages, rents, goods and services become more expensive because of the character changes to the neighborhood.

**HETEROSEXISM** – Systematic power and control targeting groups who do not identify as heterosexual, who hold less power and control. It is used to uphold the belief all people are or should be heterosexual. It is supported and maintained by institutional structures and policies, hetero cultural norms and values, and individual behaviors.

**HISTORICAL REVISIONISM** – A challenge to the established, accepted, or traditional views held by scholars about a historic event, time-span, or phenomenon. It can be accomplished by introducing contrary evidence, or by reinterpreting the motivations and decisions of the people involved.

**HOMOPHOBIA** – An irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or LGBTQIA2S people.

**IDENTITY** – Who you are, the way you think about yourself, and the characteristics that define you. How we are viewed by the world and are assigned identities that may or may not align with how we see ourselves.

**IMPLICIT BIAS** – A belief or attitude that affects our understanding, decision, and actions, and that exists without our conscious awareness. [Learn more about unconscious bias and ODOT.](#)

**INCLUSION** – A state of belonging where people of different backgrounds, experiences, and identities are valued, integrated, and welcomed equitably as decision-makers, collaborators, and colleagues. Ultimately, inclusion is the environment that organizations create to allow these differences to thrive. Click here to learn more about how we can create inclusion at ODOT.

**INDIGENOUS** – The earliest known people inhabiting a geographical location.

**INTERSECTIONALITY** – Termed by Kimberle Crenshaw, understanding of the compounding effect of oppression on those that are targeted based on multiple identities simultaneously. [Learn more about intersectionality.](#)

**INTERSEX** – An umbrella term describing people born with anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. The most thorough research finds intersex people make up an estimated 1.7% of the population, about as common as having red hair (1%-2%).

**"ISMS"** – The act of oppression of a person or group that uses power, privilege and prejudice to affect access, opportunity, policies, programs. For example, color (racism), gender (cissexism, genderism, and heterosexism), economic status (classism), older age (ageism), religion (e.g. Anti-Semitism), sexual orientation (heterosexism), language/immigrant status (xenophobia), etc.). They are supported and maintained by institutional structures and policies, hetero cultural norms and values, and individual behaviors.

**JEDI** – Acronym for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

**LATINX** (La-TEEN-ex) – A non-gender specific way of referring to people of Latin descent that does not assume a gender and includes non-binary people.

**LGBTQIA2S+** – An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, two spirit and allies of people who hold these identities.

**LOW-INCOME** – An individual or family whose income is at or below 150 percent of the [federal poverty line](#).

**MENTAL HEALTH** – Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how we think, feel, and act. [Here is more information on mental health.](#)

**MICROAGGRESSIONS** – Verbal, behavioral, or environmental humiliations, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, racial slights. These messages may be sent verbally, nonverbally, or environmentally. These communications subtly exclude, deny, or invalidate the thoughts, feelings, or experience of people. [Learn more about microaggressions.](#)

**MINDFULNESS** – Maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens.

**MULTICULTURAL** – Relating to or containing several cultural or ethnic groups. [Learn about this topic.](#)

**NATIVE AMERICAN** – All Native people of the United States and its trust territories (i.e. American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians, Chamorros, and American Samoans), as well as persons from Canadian First Nations and Indigenous communities in Mexico, Central and South America who are U.S. residents.

**NEURODIVERSITY** – The natural and important variations in how human minds think. These differences can include autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, Tourette syndrome, and others. It is not something to be cured or corrected to fit some social norm.

**NON-BINARY** – A gender identity that does not fall into the male/female gender binary.

**OPPRESSION** – Social power, privilege, and prejudice in systems that create multilayered inequities, sustained and reinforced through actions, laws, policies, and processes.

**OTHERING** – Dynamics, processes, and structures that produce marginality and lasting inequity across human identities of religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), language spoken, ability, sexual orientation, and skin tone. [Learn more about othering and belonging.](#)

**PEDESTRIANS** – A person who is walking or rolling on sidewalks, walkways, paved shoulders, etc. [Learn more about equity and pedestrians at ODOT.](#)

**PILE ON PRINCIPLE** – When multiple negative experiences “pile up” and the accumulated experiences cause someone to react strongly based on related or unrelated experiences.

**PRIVILEGE** – A set of social and economic advantages people have based on identity both chosen and assigned.

**PRONOUNS** – Singular first person pronouns (e.g. myself, mine, me and my). Singular second person pronouns (e.g. you, your, yours and yourself). Singular third person pronouns used based on the pronouns the person being referred to goes by (e.g. she, her, him his, they, them, their, theirs, Ze, hir, himself). [Learn more about pronouns and how to use them.](#)

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY** – An environment where it’s safe to be yourself, take risks, hold different views and address tough issues without being penalized. When it exists, team members feel accepted and respected across differences. [Learn more about psychological safety.](#)

**RACIAL EQUITY** – When race does not determine or predict the distribution of resources, opportunities, and burdens for group members in society. It involves addressing root causes of inequities by transforming policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce disparaging outcomes by race.

**RACISM** – Systematic power and control targeting racially marginalized groups, who hold less social and political power, used to uphold white supremacy. It differs from prejudice, hatred, and discrimination because one racial group has power and superiority over other groups in society. It is supported and maintained by institutional structures and policies, cultural norms and values, and individual behaviors.

**REDLINING** – The systematic denial of various services or goods by governments or the private sector either directly or through the selective raising of prices. Used by mortgage companies to suppress BIPOC access to home loans, it only offered high-risk loans at high interest rates and denied funds to improve current homes. These actions were supported by policy set by the Federal Housing Administration. It created a racial wealth gap that exists today and it reinforced segregation. Redlining also takes/has taken place in student loans, credit cards, banking, insurance, healthcare, and politics. [Learn more about redlining.](#)

**REPARATIONS** – The making of amends for wrongdoing to a person or group of people, by paying money to or otherwise repaying those wronged.

**RESPECT** – The act of honoring someone by showing care, concern, or consideration for their needs or feelings.

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE** – A process where parties with a stake in a specific offense resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its future impacts.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** – Any individual's romantic, emotional, and/or physical attraction to or lack of attraction to other people.

**SHAME** – A painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrongful self-actions or wrongful actions of others that have harmed us. [Learn more about shame, guilt, and resilience.](#)

**SIZEISM** – Systematic power and control targeting people who have bodies that society has labeled outside the desired 'norm' (like overweight or short in stature). It is used to uphold unhealthy perceptions of body size related to weight or stature (like everyone should be skinny or tall). Exclusion or judgement in this context is supported and maintained by institutional structures, policies, cultural norms and values, and behaviors.

**SOCIAL CHANGE** – Transformations in human interactions, relationships, behaviors, patterns, and cultural norms over time.

**SOCIAL GROUP** – A collection of people that interact with one another, accept expectations and obligations as members of the group, and share a common identity.

**SOCIAL POWER** – The influence over people's actions, beliefs, or conduct through information, rewards, legitimization, or coercion.

**SOCIOECONOMIC** – The social standing of a class or group of people based on a combination of factors including income, education level, occupation, and social status in society.

**STEREOTYPE** – Descriptions and beliefs that are applied to every person in a group connected to their habits, traits, abilities, or expectations (e.g., Irish are redheaded, Asians are good at math, women are bad drivers).

**TOKENISM** – Systematic power, control and practices of doing something, such as hiring a person who belongs to a marginalized group, only to prevent criticism and give the appearance of diversity, equity, and inclusion and uphold internal and public perception. It is supported and maintained by institutional structures, policies, cultural norms and values, and behaviors. [Learn more about tokenism and why it matters in the workplace.](#)

**TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGED** –

People who lack access to statewide, regional, and/or local transportation and mobility needs.

[Learn more about transportation equity.](#)

**TRAUMA INFORMED** – Understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma that focuses on physical, psychological, and emotional safety for impacted individuals.

**TRIBAL MEMBER** – A person who is enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. Tribes establish membership criteria based on shared customs, traditions, language, and tribal decendency lineage or a relationship to a tribal member who descended from someone who holds lineage.

**TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY** – The authority for tribes to self-govern and hold inherent powers of self-government through treaties with the Supreme Court, the President, and Congress. Aspects of tribal government include economic development and commerce, public safety and justice, education and culture, communications and technology, environment and energy, infrastructure and housing, transportation and roads, natural resources, and agriculture, and human services and healthcare.

**TRIGGERED** – To have an intense emotional or physical reaction to something someone does or says, or an environmental trigger like a scent or smell.

**UNDERSERVED** – A person or group who is provided inadequate services. For example, communities that are disadvantaged because of their lack of access to services or goods.

**UNLEARN/RELEARN** – The process of continually analyzing, evaluating, and challenging knowledge as a process to increase proficiency, innovation, and belonging. [Learn more this concept.](#)

**VULNERABLE COMMUNITY** – Populations that are more likely to experience burdens and barriers in an attempt to access social, economic, political, health, education, and environmental resources based their on social demographics.

**WHITE FRAGILITY** – Discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a White person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice.

**WHITE GUILT** – The individual or collective guilt felt by a White person(s) for the harm of racist treatment of marginalized ethnic groups by White people.

**WHITENESS** – As an ideology derived from “White supremacy.” Whiteness has resulted in political, economic, and structural benefits for those socially deemed White, at the expense of people of color. Social regulations were built upon the fiction of a superior “White” race deserving special privileges and protections. [Learn more about the invention of “Whiteness” in society.](#)

**WHITE PRIVILEGE** – The set of social and economic advantages people have based on race, as it is not a factor considered in their access, opportunity, or advancement.

**WHITE SUPREMACY** – A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and individuals of color by White individuals and nations for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege for White people.

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