

Inclusive Community Organisations – Glossary Of Key Terms

Access.

Access is defined as having the right, opportunity or ability to reach, enter or use a facility, program, service or materials, visit a person or people and/or receive, understand and use information, knowledge or skills. There are a variety of ways in which community buildings, programs, services and opportunities can be inaccessible to people, such as physical design, communications, signage and attitude. Such barriers limit, restrict or prevent access.

Accessibility.

The extent to which needed services or opportunities are available to, and used by, people from diverse groups. Some individuals may find it difficult to fully participate in their communities without some type of special accommodation. For example, individuals who have a hearing impairment may find it difficult to participate in a community forum if sign language translation is not available. However, it is important to recognize that there are other ways in which programs, services and opportunities can be inaccessible. For instance, single parents and low-income earners may find it difficult to participate in an event if childcare or transportation accommodations are not made.

Accommodation.

The removal of barriers that prevent people from accessing a facility, program, service, materials, etc. or from fully participating in important activities such as employment or recreation. Lack of accommodation includes not only physical but also social and economic inaccessibility. For example, if adaptations aren't made at an event, members of the community that are hearing impaired, visually impaired, or whose first language is not English may not be able to fully participate. In this scenario, the provision of translation services and Braille resources would accommodate and increase the accessibility of the event for these community members. Similarly, providing child care services at the same event may allow single parents or low-income earners to attend.

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Barrier.

An obstacle that prevents an individual or group from accessing the same (or similar and appropriate) services or opportunities as others. A barrier can be physical (e.g., stairs), financial (e.g., the need for childcare), attitudinal (e.g., individual and systemic discrimination), social (e.g., prevailing norms and attitudes) and geographic (e.g., inaccessible transportation). See also Systemic Discrimination, under Discrimination.

Community.

Community refers to a physical location — a place where a group of individuals reside and are subject to the same laws. Community can also refer to a group of individuals with common characteristics, beliefs, values, or interests (e.g., a faith-based community). As well, communities can be composed of individuals sharing a range of common needs or experiences (e.g., the need for physical accommodation, the experience of racism). What is key to any “community”, however, is the sense of belonging or attachment that individuals have with one another and/or their environment.

Culture.

Culture has over 200 different definitions and means many things. It can refer to the way groups of people have learned or have had to live together by sharing certain historical experiences, including ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge and historical, geographical, linguistic, racial, religious, ethnic or social traditions. Culture is a complex and dynamic organization of meaning, knowledge, artefacts and symbols that guide human behaviour, account for shared patterns of thought and action, and contribute to human, social and physical survival. Culture is transmitted, reinforced and passed on from generation to generation and is constantly changing.

Disability.

An impairment of an individual’s ability to function physically, cognitively or emotionally. The disability may be present at birth or acquired at any point in life (e.g., as a result of injury or illness). An individual’s impairment may be compensated for through the use of assistive devices and, as a result, an individual with a disability may be able to fully, or more fully, participate in their community/communities. Equally, the inability to access such assistive technologies may result in further disadvantage to full participation. *See also* Handicap.

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Discrimination.

The denial of equal treatment, civil liberties and opportunity — the unequal treatment of people or groups resulting in subordination and deprivation of political, social and economic rights with respect to education, accommodation, health care, employment, and access to other goods, services and facilities. Discrimination may occur on the basis of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious or political affiliation, marital or family status, and mental or physical ability. Discrimination is often invisible to those who are not its targets. There are three kinds of discrimination:

- 1. Overt discrimination:** Either the granting or denying of certain rights to certain groups or individuals.
- 2. Unequal treatment:** The differential treatment of one group in comparison with another because of certain characteristics (e.g., paying lower wages to women compared to men for work of equal value).
- 3. Systemic discrimination:** Institutional policies, procedures and practices, lodged in the operation of established institutions, that result in the exclusion or promotion of particular groups of individuals. It differs from overt discrimination in that it is not based on individual intent but may affect entire groups of people. For example, in Canada,

Foreign-trained professionals are often required to fulfil burdensome requirements before they are able to practice in Canada. This policy can result in qualified individuals and their families experiencing economic and social marginalization.

Diversity.

Broadly, diversity refers to the unique characteristics and differences that exist among individuals and groups within a community. While we may share many things in common, it is important to recognize that groups and individuals are both visibly and invisibly different from each other. These differences shape and have a significant impact on their experiences and expectations in any given situation.

Diversity is commonly understood in terms of dimensions that include, but are not limited to race, age, place of origin, religion, ancestry, skin colour, citizenship, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability/ability, marital, parental or family status, same-sex partnership status, citizenship, creed, educational background, literacy level, geographic location, income level, cultural tradition and work experience. Welcoming diversity not only acknowledges and respects differences

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but also recognizes the worth of every individual and their value to their communities and to society at large.

Equity.

Equity refers to the right of the individual to a fair share of the goods and services in society. However, equal treatment will not necessarily guarantee equal results. Creating equity sometimes requires treating people differently from each other e.g., providing additional resources to some individuals so they are better able to compete for jobs, obtain education, or access to other programs and services.

Ethnic Group.

A community that is maintained by a shared heritage, culture and language; a human group bound together by ties of cultural homogeneity, with a prevailing loyalty and adherence to certain basic institutions such as family structure, religion, and language. The term is often assumed to refer only to those 'other than' the dominant ethnic group (e.g., white, English speaking, Canadian born Christians). However, all people belong to one or more ethnic groups. Related terms are "ethno-racial" and "ethno-specific". *See also* Ethnicity and Race.

Ethnicity.

The many and varied beliefs, behaviours and traditions held in common by a group of people of a particular linguistic, historical, national, geographical, religious, and/or cultural origin. "Ethnic diversity" refers to the variety of similarities and differences of such groups, and to the presence of a number of groups within one society or nation. In Canada, ethnicity is often used to refer to the original homeland of immigrants or one's ancestors prior to immigration to this country.

Handicap.

Related to *disability*, handicap occurs when one's disability prevents or poses a serious barrier to his or her ability to participate fully in their community. Most handicaps can be reduced, or even eliminated, through the use of assistive technologies. However, many individuals are unnecessarily "handicapped" because they are not able to access assistive technologies due to the high costs of equipment and home or workplace modifications.

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Note: The term “handicapped” is often used to refer to people with different abilities or disabilities, but it is not considered to be a favourable term; people of different abilities tend to prefer the term “disability” or “differently abled”.

Inclusivity.

The principles of inclusivity involve a clear recognition that society is not homogeneous and the perception of diversity as enriching rather than a problem. It requires the recognition that ideas and practices based on or modelled after norms of the dominant culture or society can result in experiences of exclusion and discrimination for a number of people in society. Inclusivity within an organizational context is comprised of a strategic process to eliminating barriers and implementing change, based on the acceptance that many people do not have access to services, jobs and positions of leadership due to societal and systemic factors rather than personal deficiencies. This process includes the active and meaningful involvement of people who are reflective of the diverse groups within a community.

Marginalization.

The position of certain individuals or groups that do not have full and equal access to, and cannot participate fully in, the social, economic, cultural and political institutions of society. Marginalization can occur as a result of a number of factors, alone or in combination. These factors might include, but are not limited to, poverty, discrimination, a lack of education and training, or disadvantaged geographic or social location. For example, the marginalized workers are those who are employed on short-term contracts with low wages and no health or other benefits, little opportunity for skill development or advancement and those who face regular periods of unemployment. Conversely, the mainstream world of work comprises those with secure, stable employment at a living wage with health and other benefits. Individuals in the mainstream work world also tend to have opportunities for professional development and growth and careers with some upward mobility. *See also* Social Location.

Majority Group.

The group within a society that is largest in number and/or that controls the major economic, social, political and educational institutions. The social position and power of those belonging to the majority group is generally higher than those of minority groups. *See also* Minority Group, Visible Minority.

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Minority Group.

Refers to a group of people within a society that is either small in number or that has little or no access to social, economic, political, cultural or religious power due to ethnicity, race, income, sex, disability, faith, or other factors. Members of minority groups often experience a lower social standing. *See also* Majority Group, Visible Minority.

Multiculturalism.

A concept that refers to the varied composition of Canada in terms of its cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. Multiculturalism is also an ideology that holds that racial, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity is integral, beneficial and a necessary part of Canadian society and identity.

Oppression.

Occurs when a group (or groups) of individuals use one or more forms of power to suppress another group (or groups) in order to maintain or improve their own economic or social position. Oppression can be overt (e.g., the use of police or other bodies to repress a group of individuals) or covert, manifested in social institutions and in the social relationships and group interactions of everyday life.

Power.

Involves the control of, or the ability to access, influence, or manipulate economic, political, educational and/or social structures. The location of power at any given time is the direct result of historic, social, economic and political events. With power, comes privilege; i.e., the ability to meet the needs and desires of some over others.

Prejudice.

A mental state or attitude that involves judging (usually unfavourably) an individual or group based on characteristics that have been falsely or incorrectly attributed to the person or group. *See also* Stereotype.

Race.

A means of classifying people by common ancestry. It relies on the differences in physical characteristics such as colour of skin, hair texture, stature and facial features.

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Racism.

A system in which one individual or group of people exercises power over another individual or group on the basis of skin colour and/or common ancestry. It is based on the erroneous belief that one racial or ethnic group is better, more capable and somehow superior to other groups as determined by hereditary factors. Racism is a barrier that can be built into and supported by our social/political/economic systems and institutions. For example, unnecessary height/weight requirements and the demand for Canadian experience may exclude certain racial minority groups from employment opportunities.

Social Location.

The biases and beliefs that individuals hold as a result of their “location” along several axes.

An individual’s age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, income, family or parental status, relationship status, place of origin, ancestry, religion, colour, citizenship, ethnic origin, disability, citizenship, creed, literacy level, geographic location, cultural tradition and work experience all inform their unique view of the world.

Stereotype.

A generalized conception of a group of individuals that results in the unconscious or conscious categorization of each member of that group without regard for individual difference. To stereotype is to have an oversimplified idea of a group, which ignores the individual differences and diversity within that group.

Visible Minority.

A term that has been used to refer to people who are visibly different from members of the majority culture, and it usually refers to racial attributes. The terms “racial minority” and “people of colour” are also used. Visible minority is also used to classify individuals for the purpose of employment equity programs. In this context, visible minority groups include Black, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Southeast Asian, Filipino and other Pacific Islanders, West Asian, Arab, Latin American, Aboriginal and multiple origins. *See also* Majority Group, Minority Group.