

Words and how we use them matters. Though there is no agreed upon set of terms when discussing equity it is important to achieve some level of common understanding in order to move to action in disrupting longstanding racist systems. The terms outlined in this document provide common language and definitions for terms often used in equity and racial justice work. The list of terms and definitions below is date stamped and will be revisited annually to update as needed. To submit new terms or definitions please complete the following [form](#).

(Last updated Sept. 2021)

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) is a term that seeks to highlight the Black and Indigenous communities, who in the United States have historically experienced racism and discrimination in a unique relationship to whiteness and white supremacy. The term includes all People of Color, including people of Latinx and Asian and Pacific Islander descent. SOURCE: Workforce Matters Funders Network Jan. 2021 [Report](#)

Use this term when describing Black, Indigenous and People of Color in relationship to the disruption of racist systems. For example: "Harness grantmaking resources and leverage relationships to re-envision workforce programs, replace unfair employment practices, and influence policy changes to remove barriers to economic advancement for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) workers, learners, and job candidates" ([Workforce Matters 2021](#))

DISCRIMINATION

The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion and other categories. Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative, A Community Builder's [Tool Kit](#), Appendix I (2000).

In the United States the law makes it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. The law also makes it illegal to retaliate against a person because the person complained about discrimination, filed a charge of discrimination, or participated in an employment discrimination investigation or lawsuit. The law also requires that employers reasonably accommodate applicants' and employees' sincerely held religious practices, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Laws Enforced by EEOC" (accessed 28 June 2013).

DISPARITIES

Measurable differences among groups of people. Inequities cause disparities.

The Prosperity Now Scorecard ranks Colorado 12th nationally on overall prosperity of the state's residents, yet at the same time ranks Colorado 37th when it comes to racial disparities between white residents & residents of color ([Prosperity Now Scorecard 2020](#))

DISPLACEMENT

A process by which families involuntarily have to move, generally to a new neighborhood or city, because they can no longer afford the high costs of new development. Oftentimes, families affected by displacement are experiencing low income and/or families of color who may have lived in a neighborhood for generations. In an international context, the term refers to the most vulnerable populations of a nation fleeing to become refugees as a result of political instability, persecution, violence, or human rights violations. Displacement can also refer to the involuntary loss of a job due to economic disruption, automation and trade/industry changes.

Jobs vulnerable to displacement or significant transformation are disproportionately concentrated among people of color, those without college degrees, and workers under the age of 34 and over the age of 50 ([McKinsey & Company, 2019, July 11](#))

DIVERSITY

A description of differences usually based on identities, diversity encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term “diversity” is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values. Diversity ≠ Equity. SOURCE: [Racial Equity Tools](#)

More diverse companies are better able to attract top talent; improve their customer orientation, employee satisfaction, and decision making; and secure their license to operate. “Racial workforce diversity is a key driver of America’s economic growth as it is one of the most important predictors of business sales revenue, customer numbers, and profitability.” National Skills Coalition. Sep. 2019. [The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Development Advocates](#).

ETHNICITY

A socially constructed group of people based on culture, tribe, language, national heritage and/or religion. While it is often used interchangeably with race and national origin, ethnicity should be considered as overlapping and usually more limited in geography and number than other racial constructs.

When discussing ethnicities or sub-groups in the United States, be as specific as possible. For example use “In the United States, there are over 33 million Latinx of Mexican origin,” rather than simply using “Latinx.” This will be more inclusive of people with different immigration statuses (American citizens, legal residents, refugees and others) when talking about populations broadly. Prosperity Now, [Communicating on Race and Racial Economic Equity](#). Feb. 2020

EQUALITY

Assures everyone is treated the same regardless of the starting point or context.
Equality ≠ Equity.

Fundamentally, equality is the aim of sameness in status, opportunities, rights, quality, power or degree. In contrast with equity, equality is a question of sameness rather than fairness; equality requires that people have equal representation in power, rather than a freedom from biases or discrimination within that held power. [Race Reporting Guide](#)

EQUITY

When everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has the opportunity to thrive. Equity recognizes that some individuals have an advantage because of their identity, while others face barriers. Unlike equality, which suggests giving the same thing to everyone, equity works to provide opportunities and resources to those who have been historically oppressed and/or continue to face barriers. Equity requires the elimination of root causes like poverty as well as the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce or fail to eliminate disproportional outcomes (economic, educational, health, criminal justice, etc.) by group identity. Baltimore Racial Justice Action (BRJA) (2016) <https://bmoreantiracist.org/resources/our-definitions>

Equity is distinct from diversity, which can simply mean variety (the presence of individuals with various identities). It is also not equality, or “same treatment,” which doesn’t take differing needs or disparate outcomes into account. Systemic equity involves a robust system and dynamic process consciously designed to create, support and sustain social justice. [Race Reporting Guide](#)

EQUITY GAP(S)

Disproportional outcomes such as economic, educational, health between group identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, immigration status, geography, gender, age)

Colorado experiences an equity gap in graduation rates between white students and Black and Latinx students.

GENTRIFICATION

A process of neighborhood change that includes economic change in a historically disinvested neighborhood —by means of real estate investment and new higher-income residents moving in - as well as demographic change - not only in terms of income level, but also in terms of changes in the education level or racial make-up of residents. <https://www.urbandisplacement.org/gentrification-explained>

Gentrification is complex and requires the consideration of both historic policies and practices that make communities susceptible to gentrification as well as current city investment and disinvestment patterns.

HISPANIC

The term “Hispanic” was historically used by the United States government to identify people who share the common language of Spanish. However, “Hispanic” is viewed as a limiting term, in part because not all Latinx speak Spanish, nor are all Spanish-speaking cultures the same.

This term is used by many data sources but is not recommended except for data integrity reasons. Ideally, the ethnic subgroup (e.g., Cuban, Mexican, etc.) should be specified to acknowledge their distinct experiences.

HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED

Populations that have a history of oppression and because of that have been excluded from opportunities and resources that the more powerful social group were able to benefit from.

Historically excluded intentionally avoids the prefix “under” which is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as “not enough”, “not done as well”, and “below.” Avoid use of the term label underrepresented minority, which refers to the low participation rates of racial and ethnic groups in specific fields or programs relative to their representation in the U.S. population. Avoid denying groups the right to name themselves and be specific when possible. Historically excluded is not the best solution. The right to rename a group should always lie within the hands of its members. [‘Underrepresented Minority’ Considered Harmful, Racist Language](#)

INCLUSION

What you do with diversity to ensure individuals have the opportunity to share power including but not limited to full participation in decision-making processes. Inclusion intentionally promotes a sense of belonging where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized and abilities, unique qualities and perspectives of individuals are leveraged through shared power.

More than simply diversity and quantitative representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation, with a true sense of belonging and full access to opportunities.

INEQUITY(IES)

When an individual’s race, immigration status and other historically oppressed identities is correlated with one’s outcomes; when everyone does not have what they need to thrive.

Inequity is a broad term used to discuss the different manifestations of racism and unequal outcomes between different racial groups. This term includes, but is not limited to, these indicators: income, employment, lending, homeownership, wealth, retirement, business ownership, etc Prosperity Now, [Communicating on Race and Racial Economic Equity](#). Feb. 2020

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

The ways in which the structures, systems, policies, and procedures of institutions in the U.S. are founded upon and then promote, reproduce, and perpetuate advantages for the dominant culture (white people) over BIPOC communities and people. "[What Is Racism?](#)" – Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks) web workbook.

Examples of institutional racism: Historically oppressed people and communities who are not-represented and misrepresented on television, racially biased standardized tests used to determine who will be admitted to higher education programs and institutions, historic and ongoing breaking of treaties with indigenous Native American communities, reliance on low-paying undocumented immigrant labor by farms and factories. "[What Is Racism?](#)" – Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks) web workbook.

LATINX

Latinx is a gender-neutral, non-binary way of referring to the ethnic and racial identity of Latin Americans (and their descendants) that resists defaulting to the masculine form of the word. The "x" does not imply a specific gender - as would the 'o' (masculine) or the 'a' (feminine) for nouns in Spanish and Portuguese. It is used to disrupt the grammatical binary that is inherent in these Romance languages. SOURCE: Race Equity Tools <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

Terms used to refer to members of communities of color have changed over time including the terms, Hispanic and Latino/a which many Americans identify as. It is important whenever possible to identify people through their own terms which could differ depending on a variety of conditions, including the intended audiences' geographic location, age, and generation.

OPPRESSION

Oppression = power + prejudice. The systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic, and political benefit of the more powerful social group.

Oppression exists when the more powerful social group has the power to define reality for themselves and others; when targeted groups internalize the negative messages and end up cooperating with the oppressors; when genocide, harassment and discrimination are not necessary to keep the systemic subjugation going. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

PEOPLE OF COLOR

Often the preferred collective term for referring to non-White racial groups.

While "people of color" can be a politically useful term, and describes people with their own attributes (as opposed to what they are not, e.g., "non-White"), it is also important whenever possible to identify people through their own racial/ethnic group, as each has its own distinct experience and meaning and may be more appropriate. Race Forward, "Race Reporting Guide" (2015). If all non-White groups (primarily American Indian, Latinx, Black and Asian) are not being addressed, avoid these terms when possible. Prosperity Now, [Communicating on Race and Racial Economic Equity](#). Feb. 2020

RACIAL EQUITY

When race or immigration status is no longer correlated with one's outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive no matter who they are, the color of their skin or where they live. Racial Equity requires the elimination of policies, practices and cultural messages that reinforce disparities or fail to eliminate them.

Racial equity is both an outcome and a process. "[What is Racial Equity?](#)" Race Forward

RACISM

Racism = race prejudice + social and institutional power. When one group of people defines another group as inferior on the basis of physical or other distinctions, and creates laws, institutions and practices that maintain and reinforce the privilege of the dominant group and the oppression of the "others."

Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

STRUCTURAL RACISM

Structural racism manifests itself across institutions, systems and the whole of society. It refers to the interplay among public policies, laws, practices and cultural norms that results in racial inequities within society. [The Aspen Institute](#)

Structural racism visible in many institutional, cultural, and structural factors that contribute to lower life expectancy for African American and Native American men, compared to white men. These include higher exposure to environmental toxins, dangerous jobs and unhealthy housing stock, higher exposure to and more lethal consequences for reacting to violence, stress, and racism, lower rates of health care coverage, access, and quality of care, and systematic refusal by the nation to fix these things.

SYSTEMIC RACISM

Systemic Racism: In many ways "systemic racism" and "structural racism" are synonymous. If there is a difference between the terms, it can be said to exist in the fact that a structural racism analysis pays more attention to the historical, cultural and social psychological aspects of our currently racialized society. [The Aspen Institute](#)

[Systemic Racism explained](#)

THRIVE

When a person has the opportunity to make healthy choices, afford food and housing, have good jobs that can sustain a family, attend quality schools for better education, and fulfill their potential.

Often used in establishing goals related to equity. For example: Acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, the infrastructure needed to thrive. Prosperity Now, [Communicating on Race and Racial Economic Equity](#). Feb. 2020

TRANSFORMATION

Solutions alter the ways institutions operate, thereby shifting cultural values and political will to create equity.

Transformational work tends to be: Policy initiatives that cross multiple institutions and shifts efforts towards proactive solutions.

TRANSFORMATIONAL GOALS

Working towards meaningful engagement with depth and quality

Using qualitative goals in addition to whatever deliverables are required from funders.

TRANSFORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships that are based on trust, understanding and shared commitments.

<https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>

Taking the time to see, greet and acknowledge one another to sustain caring connections.

WHITE SUPREMACY

A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of nations and people of color by white peoples of European descent for the purpose of establishing, maintaining, and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

*Adapted from [Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation](#) by Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens and Jasmine Syedullah

In the past, white supremacy was considered synonymous with extremist groups like the Klu Klux Klan however the term now refers to a political and socio-economic system where white people enjoy structural advantages and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not.