

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Self, Systems, and Steps Approach

*Moving towards a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive FPRA*

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Not everything that is faced can be changed; but  
nothing can be changed until it is faced.

**-James Baldwin**

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# Introduction

In the summer of 2020, the United States saw some of the largest protests for social justice in its history. With this backdrop, American institutions in the public and private sectors pledged to evaluate their current practices and promised to focus on **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** (DEI) efforts. While change can be seen in our country, too much of what was promised has yet to materialize. For organizations that were serious about making a difference, the realization set in that true change is a process that requires much introspection, planning, and commitment from all involved. Making a public statement or putting up a flag is a supportive gesture, but systemic change is much more difficult and requires an in-depth evaluation of current practices, policies, and structures.



With this context in mind, the Florida Public Relations Association (FPRA) has committed to becoming a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. To avoid becoming a victim of good intentions, FPRA must continue the work it pledged to undertake in the Fall of 2020. That October, FPRA surveyed its membership to begin the work to become a more inclusive organization. In that survey, it was determined that while most people agreed that a focus on DEI was important, a majority of respondents felt that the organization lacked diversity as a whole. *(Full report on the survey can be found here.)* The survey helped frame the DEI work ahead which will require the association to be intentional with its work, determine goals, level-set common language, and address root causes to become an inclusive body.



Over the past six months, Facing Change, LLC worked closely with the FPRA DEI Task Force to determine how to proceed. Along with an analysis of the survey results, Facing Change individually interviewed members of the committee to get their perspective and input; hosted a retreat to train committee members on the use of an equity lens to work through a self, systems, and steps analysis of the organization; and led a dilemma protocol where members worked through the Equity Literacy Framework. This report summarizes the work of the past year and provides some actionable steps to take in the future as FPRA moves towards becoming a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive association using the self, systems, and steps approach summarized on the next page.



## 1 Self



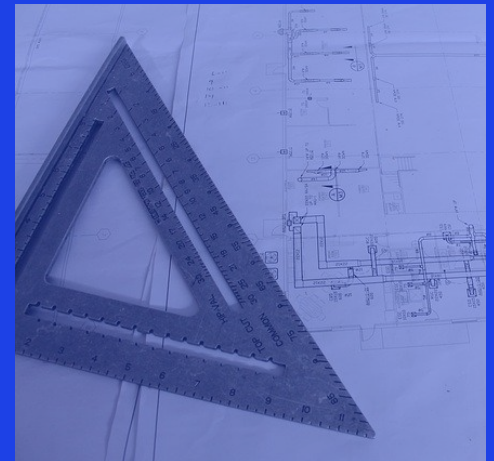
*Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.*  
- Aristotle

With the work of DEI, you have to begin with yourself. This refers not only to individuals within the organization, but also the organization itself. For individuals, what are your dimensions of identity? How do they shape how you view the world and how the world views you? For the association: who is in our organization, what do we value as an organization, and how ready are we to commit to the work of DEI? Time must be spent reflecting on the make up of the organization and what action the organization is willing to take to make a change.

## 2 Systems

*We're all connected by the system, and we all have to be a part...in changing it.*  
-Eric Schlosser

A system is an assemblage of parts that form a complex whole to achieve a goal. To become inclusive, FPRA must critically examine this combination of parts, people, and how they interact. Systems get the outcomes they are set up to achieve and if inclusiveness is a goal, FPRA must intentionally put equity at the center of its work to have equitable outcomes. Bias, discrimination, and racism functions far from the intentions and malicious actions of individual actors. They are embedded in systems and FPRA must commit to using an equity lens to critically evaluate its policies, practices, and procedures for any potential bias and address the root causes of any inequitable outcomes it has identified.



## 3 Steps

*Those who say it can't be done are usually interrupted by others doing it.*  
-James Baldwin



The biggest challenge with making any organization more diverse, equitable, and inclusive is deciding which action to take. Move too quickly and poor planning and unintended consequences will sabotage your efforts. Spend too much time self-reflecting and looking at your systems and the association will never move forward. Taking meek action, such as making hollow statements or superficial cosmetic changes, will be seen as performative and will not change the system. So, what can be done? We offer the term championed by Evan Gutierrez: "go small to go big." Determine small, high-impact actions FPRA can take to change outcomes. Identifying areas of need and goals will help focus where the organization can get the biggest bang for its buck.



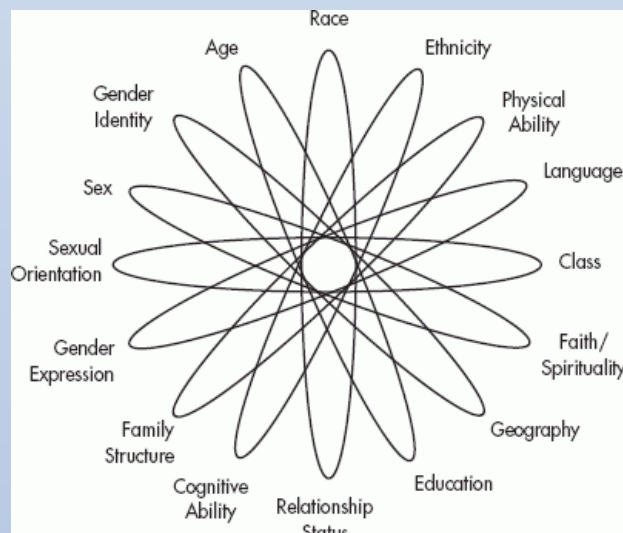
The work of equity starts by looking within. This applies to individuals and organizations. For individuals, this means considering their dimensions of identity and their personal readiness. For an organization, it must know who the people are who make up the organization, consider the dimensions of identity of its members, and then look into the following questions:

- How ready is our organization for the hard work involved with DEI?
- What do we value as an organization and what does that mean for our commitment to DEI?
- What commitments are we willing to make as an organization to change how we operate to be more inclusive?

For individuals, this self-examination is important in your equity journey because who you are shapes how you see the world and the way the world sees you. It is important to recognize that everyone is more than what we can “see.” There are visible and invisible aspects of our identity just as there are visible and invisible aspects of our cultures. Do all of your members feel comfortable and do they believe that their visible and invisible aspects of their identities have value and that they belong in FPRA? Who does and does not feel valued and what can be done to ensure that everyone would answer that question in the affirmative? How will you know? These are questions that can help drive any future goals that your task force will create.

While self-reflection is difficult to mandate, FPRA should provide opportunities for its membership to explore their dimensions of identity and consider the impact of identity on the work of Public Relations at FPRA led events. Activities such as crafting [cultural autobiographies](#), participating in meaningful book studies followed up with action, or providing specific DEI focused local workshops can allow members to dig deeper and get prepared for the work of equity. Discussions on [implicit biases](#) and their [direct impact](#) on [biased outcomes](#) could be fostered as an organization. What opportunities can FPRA create for its membership to dig deeper into the idea of self-exploration? Other examples could be having standing DEI agenda items for meetings, a recurring DEI Task Force created digest, or relevant articles that can be shared monthly/quarterly with its chapters to provide more context to the efforts and keep membership up to date with DEI efforts of the organization and within the industry as a whole. The task force should consider what ways to further systemize these types of discussions and explore ways to incentivize and encourage chapters to cultivate and sustain equitable practices that will permeate the association.

One vital step the organization must take is to identify its membership. Collecting demographic data from its members needs to be a non-negotiable next step. It is impossible to determine whether FPRA is equitable, diverse, or inclusive if it has no idea who makes up the organization. Collecting demographic data is a practice that has been normalized across industries and can be done in a non-intrusive and equitable fashion. Similarly, if FPRA chooses to collect input on DEI efforts in the form of another survey or other means of collecting feedback; this must also include demographic data. Analyzing results by demographic data/dimensions of identity can give you much needed information about who is feeling what within the association. To begin the journey of self, FPRA must know who that self is and must make a concerted effort to collect this data to even begin the work ahead.



Dimensions of Identity



The outcomes an organization achieve are a direct result of the systems and structures that are at work. Attempting to analyze a system that you are a part of may seem overwhelming, but pausing to look at the parts of the organization, the people involved, and how those parts and people interact will help you understand how outcomes are achieved. For any organization, you will see written and unwritten rules that guide its innerworkings. Both must be named and identified in order to discover where issues of inequity and bias can manifest themselves. Once areas of concern are identified, root causes must be sought out in order for the concerns to be addressed. Remember, it is important to focus on impact and outcomes and not intent. If we see inequitable outcomes, the intent of the policy or action is not as important as the impact. It is helpful to focus on policies and actions because you can point to them and address them and not get caught into a discussion about the intent behind them. Systems are complex, to move forward the association must avoid the idea that there is a simple good/bad binary at play. It is always more complex than that and the sooner the organization realizes that you are not trying identify good and bad people, but are focusing on outcomes that will benefit ALL of your membership, the sooner you can take actions that will address the inequities.

Any examination of a system includes the use of an **equity lens**. The State of Minnesota defines an equity lens as: a process for analyzing or diagnosing the impact of the design and implementation of policies on under-served and marginalized individuals and groups, and to identify and potentially eliminate barriers. Such groups may include: race/ethnicity, religious expression, veteran status, nationality, including underrepresented groups and new immigrant populations, people who identify as women, age, socio-economic, people with both apparent and non-apparent disabilities, people of various gender and sexual identities and expressions, American Indians and other indigenous populations. In practice, Dr. Paul Gorski uses what he has dubbed: the *Equity Literacy Framework* to work through issues of equity. His focus is education, but the lens can be used for all situations of equity. It requires one to apply four equity literacy abilities: **1. Recognizing:** this involves simply identifying biases and inequities that are occurring and taking stock of the various perspectives at work. Simply put, this means naming the issue and considering how those involved see what is happening. **2. Responding:** what immediate steps can be taken to address the issue. Asking: what short term solutions can be done now? What challenges or opportunities exist? What would an equitable outcome "look like?" **3. Redressing:** Fixing the problem for the long term and asking: What are longer-term solutions that address the root causes of the problem? **4. Cultivating and Sustaining:** What needs to change or be implemented to ensure that an equitable environment is maintained? The analogy for these abilities is to consider if equity was a a medical issue, we would first diagnose the problem (recognize), then provide immediate treatment to the area like a bandage to cover the wound (responding), followed by surgery to fix the problem completely (redressing), bookended by a change in the way the person behaves to prevent the problem from reoccurring (cultivating and sustaining).

Therefore, FPRA must look at its structures using an equity lens to see what barriers are in place to more equitable outcomes. In interviews, several potential systemic causes of inequity within the organization were repeatedly identified. First, the volunteer nature of the leadership structures at both the state and chapter level pose a challenge. Taking on a leadership role is a big undertaking that demands time and energy. For many, there needs to be a return of investment on that time and energy. Several task force members felt that this may be holding others back from wanting to take on more leadership roles. While committing time and energy is an investment for anyone, it can give members of communities that have been historically marginalized greater pause if they are unsure that their contributions will be valued or if the motives for asking them to serve are unclear. Therefore, FPRA must understand and consider this when making any moves to diversify its leadership in the future. It could prove useful to survey current leadership to find out their opinions on what motivated them to serve, what benefits serving gave them, and how they chose to serve while also asking those who have chosen *NOT* to serve in leadership positions why they are *NOT* serving.



When examining root causes one must move past assumptions and find evidence. In this example, written and unwritten rules are at play. For the written, FPRA must look at its process for how leadership is encouraged and chosen. Who has been chosen and who has NOT been chosen and why that has happened? Does FPRA have a process for determining this? For the unwritten, who has been encouraged and coached by other members for leadership? Are there any blind spots or implicit biases at play that may cause someone to encourage one person to volunteer for leadership and not another? Is there a way to mitigate this in a systemic fashion? With initiatives like the LeadershipFPRA program, has anything been done to ensure that the 21 person cohort is diversified? Overall, FPRA needs to try to see what it can do to provide equitable ways to encourage more people to serve by making the process transparent and making the benefits of serving clear. Getting feedback from membership about why they do or do not serve can help spot patterns and determine root causes and disaggregating that by demographic data can help pinpoint issues of equity.

One specific unwritten systemic aspect of the FPRA system that was repeated in several interviews was the perception of how welcoming the organization seems as a whole. Multiple members that were interviewed used similar language when describing their first impressions of FPRA. We know from sociology, that groups take on their own identities and if you are an outsider to the group you must learn the customs and ways in an attempt to fit in. Interviewers of different backgrounds all described a similar experience about their experiences with FPRA saying it felt "intimidating" and "cliquish." All said that they eventually felt welcomed by those in the organization, but it gave each interviewee pause. While changing the entire dynamic of a group is an ambitious undertaking; the association must own that this is the perception of several members. Furthermore, with the profession being dominated by white women, one has to consider how someone outside of that demographic would feel entering that space. FPRA may want to consider ways to break the ice for new members, provide structured ways to welcome people on board, ensure that members do not have to solely rely on the kindness of strangers to welcome them in, while avoiding the perception of in-groups and out-groups as much as possible. Considering an systemic onboarding process could help change the perception of the organization.

Other areas that were identified as potential systemic barriers to progress and could be investigated further include: membership dues and other associated costs, not replicating and spotlighting the best practices of local chapters who are doing the work, lack of a presence on HBCU campuses, prerequisites to serve in leadership roles that may prohibit members from rising in the organization, and term limits/turnover on the Board that makes implementing long-term change a challenge.

When issues of inequity are identified, the four abilities of equity literacy and an equity lens must be applied. When crafting policies, procedures, or making any decision that affects membership, an equity lens should be applied to determine if the decision will make FPRA a more or less inclusive organization. If leadership names the process and uses it when making any decisions, the outcomes FPRA will see will not only benefit those who have been historically marginalized, but all members will benefit. A rising tide lifts all boats and looking at how your system works will pay dividends in the long run.



All of the focus on self and systems will only have an impact if an organization then takes actionable steps for change. Creating a truly inclusive environment is not as simple as implementing a few changes, making a statement, or hoping for the best. FPRA must commit to what is referred to as **equicentricity**. According to Laura Aguada-Hallberg and Louise Santiago, this means "creating an environment where we are not simply 'accommodating;' rather, we are transforming how we operate, and acknowledging everyone's voices. " Organizations and businesses will often make superficial or cosmetic changes that are highlighted publicly, but if the system remains unchanged and the power structure unchallenged, the inequitable outcomes will remain. Whether this was done with ill-intent is inconsequential, because impact is what must be considered. In the end, everyone is harmed by bias and inequity. A 2020 study by Citigroup found that since 2000, the economy of the United States has lost \$16 trillion dollars because of racism. Tackling bias and racism is not a "zero sum game," gains for one does not mean losses for another, and the fact is with inequity, everyone loses. This is not only true on the national scale, but non an organizational scale as well. A focus on systemic change will pay dividends, both literally and figuratively, for your association.

Organizations may not know what action to take first for change. Some organizations feel paralyzed about which changes to make and do nothing. Others try to quickly make broad sweeping changes that in the end do more harm than good and similarly stall efforts. The key is to do what educator Evan Gutierrez suggests: "go small to go big" by focusing efforts on smaller scale, high impact actions. By choosing one effort to focus attention on, other areas will improve as well. As mentioned earlier, true DEI work does not work as simple as checklist of actions to take. You must take a deeper dive into the larger systems at play. Working towards equicentricity is a continuous process, but by using a systemic equity lens when making decisions, FPRA can work towards becoming a more equitable organization.

During the DEI Retreat led by Facing Change, participants were broken up into three groups to focus on a problem of practice of their choosing and work through the Equity Literacy Framework. Unprompted, each group chose the same dilemma to focus on during the protocol: "diversifying leadership within the organization." While the organization lacks access to bigger data, one merely has to look at the FPRA website to see that the executive committee lacks diversity that reflects the State of Florida. This is not an indictment of anyone or the organization, but it is a demonstrable fact. Participants acknowledged this fact and leaned in on ways to tackle the lack of diversity. During those group discussions which focused on diverse leadership, a lot of other inequities that could be addressed and changes that could be made rose up in the discussion. Participating in a "[Five Whys Protocol](#)" each group unpacked the root causes for the lack of diversity and some of the responses included: lack of diverse members in general, lack of opportunity, lack of capacity (time) and chapter experience (chapter president), certifications, bad experiences, culture of the chapter (cliques); and explicit/implicit actions of exclusion. In the whole group debrief, the Task Force identified that an FPRA leadership that reflects the state of Florida and the diverse communities that the chapters represent, would be an equitable outcome of the work and is a tangible goal that can be worked towards. Facing Change agrees this is a worthy goal to pursue.





# Steps

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To redress the issue of a lack of diversity in leadership, the group identified several options for immediate steps that could be taken which included: gathering demographic data from the chapters; crafting a DEI statement to guide FPRA as a whole; intentional recruitment of new members by targeting organizations, businesses, universities; survey members about why they think people will/won't/don't move on to leadership roles; gather data on who has been selected to leadership; and working on getting membership to understand the benefits of becoming a leader. Finally, ways to cultivate and sustain a culture where diverse leadership is not only encouraged but valued must be considered when the Task Force revisits this dilemma.

Therefore, Facing Change suggests that FPRA should tackle the lack of diverse leadership first, because it will provide a clear focus for the work of the DEI taskforce and allow them to uncover and discuss other systemic concerns that will arise. In less than 30 minutes, the task force was able to determine a goal to achieve, identify more questions that needed to be investigated, and developed tangible action that can be taken. As for next steps, the DEI Task Force should set a goal based on the problem that is measurable, determine a timeline, and decide upon a structure that will work for the team moving forward. While it may take some time to achieve the goal that will be decided upon, the steps taken will have an impact and begin changing the organization immediately.

Before leaving FPRA with a few more steps to take or potential areas to investigate, Facing Change wanted to make sure to address two things. First, it is important to mention that Facing Change encourages FPRA to specifically name the concerns they are seeing and will find. Throughout this report, because of a lack of demographic data, Facing Change was unable to identify specific concerns and was unable to cite specific examples of bias or racism. As the work continues and becomes more intentional, it is important that FPRA specifically names these areas of concern. Naming the issues does not separate us or create division, instead it allows all of us to understand what the issues are and how to specifically address them. Imagine going to a doctor and only being told you were sick, but not being able to discuss the specific area of concern. It does not work in the medical field and it does not work in DEI efforts.

But by naming the issues, we also need to address the socio-political climate we are seeing across our country and this leads us to the second area to address. It is important to note [that according to public opinion polling](#), most Americans support equity work and strengthening protections against civil rights discrimination. At the same time, however, we are seeing states banning the discussion of "uncomfortable topics" in schools that include discussions of race, racism, gender identity while several states are pushing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. FPRA must understand that continuing to focus on its DEI efforts will make some of its members uncomfortable and backlash will come. FPRA must be prepared for this and focus purely on actions, outcomes, and impact. Explaining *the why* to your membership has power, and explaining that the work of DEI will benefit all of its members personally, professionally, and financially. FPRA must commit to the idea that progress cannot be denied because of the lack of comfort of some its more privileged members. Uncomfortable discussions will arise and it is important to work in unison when having those conversations. This work will not be easy, but will have benefit for all members of your organization and could have an impact on your industry as a whole.



# Steps

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Finally, Facing Change would like to leave you with other areas to potentially explore. Along with the focus on diverse leadership, Facing Change has identified other steps to take or potential areas to investigate. Once again, this is not a checklist, but some patterns we noted from our discussion with individuals, our retreat, and the survey.

- Collect demographic data
- Level-set vocabulary by developing a working definition of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for FPRA
- Create an FPRA DEI statement that is a LIVING document
- Set goals for representation using data of Florida/area represented
- Determine root causes for identified issues which may mean more surveys, focus groups, listening tours
- Incorporate DEI into all professional development presentations along with specific professional development on best practices in PR
- Conduct a self assessment of the organization/chapters
- Review existing by-laws with an Equity lens
- Consider intentional chapter formation in diverse areas
- Redesign FPRA marketing and public presentation (website, conferences, etc.)
- Leverage the youth expertise to create additional perspectives and platforms
- Requiring an Equity committee for each chapter
- Create a repository of equity resources for all members
- Define an accountability structure to ensure the implementation, documentation, and evaluation of equity work
- Identify accountability partners
- Develop financial investment plans for equity work
- Design a safe feedback loop outside of the surveys
- Consider redesign of fee structure that incentivizes participation by students and takes length of time in the industry into account
- Create educational and experiential pathways for diverse youth and young adults into the PR Industry
- High School partnerships to build PR professionals of the future
- Community College Partnerships
- Expand Four Year College/University Partnerships, with an intentional focus on HBCUs
- Partner with community organizations youth programs/academies



# Appendix-A

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## Resources Cited

[Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in US History](#) | The New York Times

[Corporate America's \\$50 billion promise: A Post analysis of racial justice pledges after George Floyd's death reveals the limits of corporate power to effect change](#) | Washington Post

[What Has — And Hasn't — Changed Since George Floyd Was Murdered](#) | FiveThirtyEight

[DEI Gets Real](#) | Harvard Business Review

[FPRA Survey Analysis](#)

[How to write a cultural autobiography.](#)

[18 Cognitive Biases that Can Impact Public Relations Work](#)



[Understanding Implicit Bias and Its Impact](#) | Kirwan Institute Ohio State

[How Cognitive Bias Affects Effective Communication](#) | SecondNature

[Equity Literacy Definition and Abilities](#) | Dr. Paul Gorski

[Public Relations Specialist Demographics](#)

[US Economy Lost \\$16 Trillion Because Of Racism, Citigroup Says](#) | NPR

[5 Whys Problem Solving](#)

[2021 National Poll on Reimagining Rights and Responsibilities in the US](#) | The Carr Center for Human Rights - Harvard Kennedy School

[Drafting a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Statement](#) | Faculty Innovation Center

[Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Self-Assessments](#) | Center for Nonprofit Management & Leadership, Midwestern State University



### Additional Resources for Further Growth and Development

[What It's Like to Be Black in PR | PRWeekUS](#)

[Structural Racialization: A Systems Approach to Understanding the Causes and Consequences of Racial Inequity | Kirwan Institute Ohio State](#)

['Sum Of Us' Examines The Hidden Cost Of Racism - For Everyone | NPR](#)

[Employee Demographics Don't Have to Be at Odds with Employees' Identities | Harvard Business Review](#)

[How Employee Demographic Collection Empowers Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)

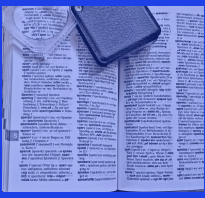
[Being Anti-Racist | National Museum of African-American History and Culture](#)

[Why Lead With Race | The City of Seattle and the Seattle Office for Civil Rights](#)

[Beyond Diversity An LGBT Best Practice Guide for Employers | A Great Place to Work and Pride at Work Canada](#)

[How to Make Workplaces More Welcoming For Employees With Disabilities | Forbes](#)





## Glossary of Terms Used

Term	Definition
<i>Diversity</i>	All of our human differences these can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. which exist along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. (Queensborough Community College)
<i>Equity</i>	Working actively to challenge and respond to bias, harassment, and discrimination. Being committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all persons and not discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, religion, height, weight, or veteran status. (U. of Michigan)
<i>Inclusion</i>	Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. (U.of Manitoba)
<i>Intersectionality</i>	A lens for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. (Crenshaw)
<i>Equicentricity</i>	Creating an environment where we are not simply "accommodating;" rather, we are transforming how we operate, and acknowledging everyone's voices. (Aguada-Hallberg/Santiago)
<i>Privilege</i>	Unseen, unconscious advantages that a person, or group of people may have, over others. (Learning for Justice)
<i>Racism</i>	When a racial group's collective prejudice is backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control, it is transformed into racism, a far reaching system that functions far from the intentions or self-images of individual actors (DiAngelo)
<i>AntiRacist</i>	One who is actively working against racism. It is making a commitment to resisting unjust laws, policies, and racist attitudes. AntiRacism is how we get free from centuries of living in a racialized society that keeps us separated and oppressed. (Jewell)
<i>Good/Bad Binary</i>	False dichotomy that breaks all racism/discrimination into either a good (not biased/not racist) or bad (biased/racist) framing. (DiAngelo)
<i>Equity Lens</i>	A process for analyzing or diagnosing the impact of the design and implementation of policies on under-served and marginalized individuals and groups, and to identify and potentially eliminate barriers. Such groups may include: race/ethnicity, religious expression, veteran status, nationality, including underrepresented groups and new immigrant populations, people who identify as women, age, socio-economic, people with both apparent and non-apparent disabilities, people of various gender and sexual identities and expressions, American Indians and other indigenous populations. (Minnesota State Office of Equity and Inclusion)
<i>Social Justice</i>	Action taken that minimizes conflict and focuses on changing the attitudes and behaviors of a dominant group by reducing prejudice; promotes collective action against inequality; raises consciousness; and focuses on improving conditions for under-represented groups. (Learning for Justice)