

Valuing Diversity in the Nova Scotia Public Service

Glossary of Terms

A

Aboriginal People :

Aboriginal peoples, with their distinct cultural, spiritual, linguistic, civic, and political systems have occupied the territory now called North America for thousands of years. Aboriginal peoples include the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada as defined by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Mi'kmaq are the First Nation People of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, part of Gaspé, Quebec and part of the State of Maine, USA.

Access:

The right and opportunity to reach, enter or use a process, facility, program, or materials.

Affirmative Action:

Is a proactive approach for the purposes of increasing access and opportunities. The objective of affirmative action is the amelioration of conditions experienced by “disadvantaged individuals or classes of individuals” (Nova Scotia Human Rights Act). Affirmative Action programs or initiatives can be employment related but they can also address issues of access in such areas as post-secondary education, transportation, housing and recreation.

B

Bias:

A point of view about persons based on looks, lifestyle, identity, ability, or circumstances that may manifest through favoritism, dislike, prejudice and/or fear, etc.

Bona Fide Occupational Requirement:

One exception to an employers duty to accommodate is a “bona fide occupational requirement”. It refers to an essential task or objective required to perform a job. An employer must review tasks in job descriptions to determine if the tasks are essential for the position. If the task is not essential and is discriminatory, it must be removed.

C

Community Partnerships:

Community partnerships are relationships between institutions and community groups where the experiences of community members are equitably recognized, respected, and valued, and where all share in the decision-making process.

Culture:

Defined as the way we live our lives. When people think of their culture, they often reflect upon their values and beliefs, their heritage and forms of creative expression. Each of us experience Nova Scotia's culture differently because we have different life experiences shaped by language, race, ethnic origin and spirituality. Culture can be considered in the context of an iceberg analogy in that the small portion which is visible above the water line is "surface" culture and that which is below the water line (and forms the substantive piece of culture) is "deep" culture.

Cultural Imposition:

A belief that everyone should conform to the majority; "We know what's best for you. If you don't like it you can go elsewhere."

Cultural Denial:

Differences are ignored and one proceeds as though differences do not exist. "There's no need to worry about a person's culture."

Cultural Competence:

A set of "congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables the system or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. It is a continuum that moves through the following with cultural competence as the goal.

Cultural Sensitivity:

Reducing resistance and defensiveness during interactions, acknowledging bias that may influence one's behavior.

Cultural Awareness:

Appreciating and accepting differences between individuals as well as cultures.

Cultural Knowledge:

Deliberately seeking out a variety of world views and explanatory models of a situation in addition to viewing the event through one's own cultural lens;

Cultural Skills:

Practicing different ways to explain a particular issue from other perspectives, learning how to culturally assess a particular situation to avoid relying solely on written or preconceived "facts". Acquiring the skills to work effectively across cultures.

D

Disability: (Disabled Persons International definition - disability as a social construct.)

The loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equitable level with others due to physical and social barriers.

Disability Statistics Canada Definition:

Persons with disabilities are those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical, mental condition or health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do.

Disability Employment Equity Definition (CHRC):

Persons who have a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric or learning impairment and who;

- a) Consider themselves to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment, or;
- b) Believe that an employer or potential employer is likely to consider them to be disadvantaged in employment by reason of that impairment; and includes persons whose functional limitations owing to their impairment have been accommodated in their current job or workplace.

Discrimination:

Discrimination is an act of making distinctions due to actual and perceived, visible or invisible differences. Discrimination, backed by institutional power, results in the effects of withholding and limiting access to the rights, freedoms, privileges, opportunities, benefits, and advantages that are available to some. Discrimination also includes making a distinction intentional or not that imposes burdens, obligations or disadvantages not imposed on others.

Discriminatory Harassment:

Persistent, ongoing communication (in any form) of negative attitudes, beliefs or actions towards an individual or group which might reasonably be known to be unwelcome, with the intention of disparaging a person or group. Forms include: name-calling, jokes or slurs, graffiti, insults, threats, discourteous treatment, and written or physical abuse. It may be either subtle or blunt.

Designated Groups:

The designated groups have been identified as those groups of people who face disadvantages or discrimination when they look for work, when they are in the workplace, and when they are seeking promotion. The Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission defines these as:

- Aboriginal Persons;
- Persons with Disabilities;
- Racially Visible Persons;
- Women.

Diversity:

Recognition of each of our characteristics and what makes us distinct from each other, including, age, language, culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, abilities and religious or spiritual beliefs.

Diversity Management:

Diversity management is an organizational competence that emphasizes managerial skills and policies needed to optimize every employee's contribution to the organizational goals. Within the Nova Scotia government, diversity management is primarily aimed at building a public service which is culturally competent and representative, at all job levels, of the diverse public it serves.

E

Equity:

Fair treatment of people by acknowledging and making provision for their differences in a process that is free of systemic barriers.

Employment Equity:

Describes approaches to achieving equality in employment for all groups in Canada. The primary focus of employment equity is the identification and removal of discriminatory barriers in an organization's hiring, training, promotion and income policies and practices. Employment equity redresses the effects of historic and continued discrimination, and affirms appropriate representation of designated groups. An employment equity program usually involves:

- review of all existing employment policies, procedures, and practices;
- identification and removal of all discriminatory policies, procedures, and practices;
- development and implementation of equitable policies, procedures, and practices;
- setting goals and timelines in order to ensure that defined objectives are met by a specific date.

Ethnicity:

Used to describe groups which share a common language, race, custom, lifestyle, social view, or religion. Everyone belongs to an ethnic group. The term is often confused with "minority". Ethnic, however, refers to those traits which originate "from racial, linguistic, and cultural ties with a specific group".

Ethnocultural Group:

An ethnocultural group is a group of people who share a particular cultural heritage or background. Every Canadian belongs to an ethnic group. There are very different and distinct ethnocultural groups among people of African, Asian and European descent and Aboriginal peoples of North, Central, and South American descent in Canada. Some Canadians experience discrimination because of their ethnocultural affiliation (ethnicity, religion, nationality, language).

Ethnocentrism:

Inability to accept another culture's world view; "My way is best."

Eurocentricism:

A view of the world based on European values and ideas.

F

Fairness:

An accessible, consistent and transparent process that is impartial based on principles of merit and equity.

First Nations:

The First Nations of North America, in a broad sense, are those peoples that were here before European settlement. In a more narrow sense, the term First Nations refers to people who have legal status under the Indian Act. The narrow use of the term leaves out non-status Native people and both leave out the Métis people, a distinct culture that emerged from inter-marriage of French men and Aboriginal women during the early years of colonization of what is now Manitoba. Just as Black people's term of self-definition has moved from Coloured to Black to African-Canadian/African-Nova Scotian, First Nations people have moved from Indian to Native or Aboriginal to First Nations, although many non-status and Métis people prefer the term Native or Aboriginal.

G

GLBT (or LGBT):

Abrieivation for Gay / Lesbian / Bisexual / transgendered (or sometimes reversed Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual / Transgendered.) This term may also be seen as GLBTI. The I referring to the term "intersex" or someone who has been born with a "developmental sex disorder".

H

Heritage:

Broadly understood as the natural and cultural inheritance of a community that defines its identity. This can include cultural heritage (the products of humankind), natural heritage (the products of the environment), tangible heritage (structures, arts and everyday objects) and intangible heritage (including oral histories, beliefs, languages and attitudes).

Heterosexism/Homophobia:

Heterosexism refers to the structures of society that favour one kind of loving—between one man and one woman in a monogamous marriage with children—over all others. Heterosexism oppresses gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, transgendered and transsexual people, two-spirited people, single people, one-parent families, unmarried couples, childless couples, and anyone else who does not fit the ideal mold. Homophobia is an individual reaction to gay, lesbian, and bisexual people—a reaction of hatred, fear, or discomfort—acted out through discrimination and violence.

Human Rights Legislation:

Human rights are the equal and inalienable rights of every person to inherent dignity and equality. Human rights legislation is a framework of laws that ascribe, measure, and enforce the entitlements of a people in a given society.

I

Inclusive Organization:

Refers to a representative organization, at all levels, that engages and supports organizational decision making and includes perspectives from diverse points of view, from within and without the organization. All employees feel valued and a sense of belonging in an organization that applies the principles of equity and fairness in all aspects of its policies, practices and procedures.

Indigenous:

Indigenous by definition means "belonging to," "native of," or "first"; therefore, it has long been considered that Canada's indigenous people are the Aboriginal People of this country. However, in recent years the African Nova Scotian population has used it in reference to the first Africans to arrive in Nova Scotia.

Institutional Racism:

Institutional racism is the exercise of notions of racial superiority by institutions and organizational structures through their policies, practices, procedures and organizational culture and values, either consciously or unconsciously. Institutional racism results in the unequal treatment of, or discrimination against, individuals or groups with non-dominant identities.

Internalized Racism:

Is racism turned inward. When an oppressed individual consciously or subconsciously believes inaccurate stereotypes and images of themselves.

L

Lesbian/gay/bisexual/heterosexual:

There are lively debates, among people of all sexual orientations, about what exactly defines lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and heterosexuals. Put very simply, lesbians are women who relate, emotionally and sexually, primarily to other women. Gay men relate intimately primarily to other men. Bisexual people are men or women who relate with equal depth to either men or women. Heterosexuals are men or women who relate intimately primarily to people of the opposite sex. See Heterosexism/homophobia, Transgendered, Transsexual and Two-Spirited.

M

Multi-Culturalism:

Presence of diverse racial and ethnic groups who define themselves as distinct. It is important to distinguish at least three different uses of the term: as a description of the reality of socially and culturally diverse populations; as a philosophy or ideology of pluralism; and as a specific category of social policy. Sometimes used interchangeably with 'cultural diversity'.

Multicultural Health Care:

Culturally, racially and linguistically sensitive and responsive health care; it includes concepts of ethnic and race relations, cross-cultural care, human rights and equity.

O

Oppression:

Use of political power and domination to maintain an unjust system against an identified group of people. Commonly felt and expressed by a widespread, if unconscious, assumption that a certain class of people are inferior.

P

Politically Correct:

A backlash term, intended to reduce struggles for justice and equality to a matter of enforced false politeness. Originally a self-deprecating term used by people involved in social change in the 1970s, the term in the 1990s came to be seen negatively as “excessive virtue.”

Prejudice:

Prejudice is the process of pre-judging a person or group negatively. Frequently, prejudices are not recognized as false or unsound assumptions. Through repetition, they can come to be accepted as "common-sense notions" and, when backed with power, result in acts of discrimination and oppression.

Pluralism:

A state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization.

R

Race :

Common ancestry or descent of people based on physical characteristics. A social category used to classify humankind according to common ancestry or descent and reliant upon differentiation by general physical characteristics such as colour of skin and eyes, hair type, stature, and facial features.

Racially Visible People:

A term defined by race or color only and not by citizenship, place of birth, religion, language or cultural background. The term applies to people who are Black, First Nations, Chinese, South Asian, South East Asian, Filipino and Latin American Canadians among others. These terms are generally regarded as positive identities as opposed to “non-whites”, “minorities”, “visible minorities”, or “ethnics”.

Racism:

Racism is prejudice or discrimination stemming from beliefs in superiority and in the ability to exert power over a person or a group because of a difference of racial, cultural or ethnic background.

Racial Profiling:

The use of race as a consideration in suspect profiling, or other law enforcement practices.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION: Human Rights legislation requires that employers have a duty to accommodate by providing reasonable accommodation to support the special needs of all employees, for example, improving accessibility to the workplace, religious observance, and alternative work arrangements. "Reasonable" imparts a duty to accommodate unless it would impose undue hardship on the employer.

S

Sexism/Misogyny:

Sexism is the political/economic/social/ideological system that oppresses women; misogyny is hatred, fear, and mistreatment of women by individual men.

Sexual Orientation:

is the direction of sexual feelings or behavior toward individuals of the opposite sex (heterosexuality), the same sex (homosexuality), or some combination of the two (bisexuality).

Straight:

This is a common term for heterosexual people.

Social Class:

Social class is a hierarchical social order of society based on wealth accessed, acquired, exercised, controlled, and maintained through family, occupation, education, ownership of property/resources, and financial/political powers.

Social and Economic Inclusion:

The capacity, willingness, commitment and investment necessary to ensure that all community members have the opportunity to become engaged and are able to access its social and economic benefits. This means taking into account gender, race, culture, language, social and economic status, age and ability.

Social Justice:

Social justice is a concept based on the belief that each individual and group within a given society has a right to equal opportunity, civil liberties, and full participation in the social, educational, economic, judicial, institutional, and moral freedoms and responsibilities of that society.

Stereotype:

A stereotype is the result of attributing certain characteristics of individuals in a group to all members of the group. Stereotyping exaggerates the uniformity within a group and the differences among groups.

Systemic Discrimination :

Systemic discrimination is the process of exclusion of individuals whose lived reality has not been acknowledge by the system. It is propagated by the dominant culture which chooses/cannot acknowledge alternate realities. It includes policies, practices, and procedures that have an exclusionary impact on various groups of people with shared identities, such as race, age, disability, and/or gender. barriers, for example, job postings, hiring procedures or unrealistic/irrelevant entrance requirements may have the unintentional effect of excluding specific groups.

T

Tokenism:

A dominant group sometimes promotes a few members of an oppressed group to high positions, and then uses them to claim there are no barriers preventing any member of that group from reaching a position with power and status. The people promoted are tokens, and the process is called tokenism. Tokens can also be used as a buffer between the dominant and oppressed groups. It is harder for the oppressed group to name the oppression and make demands when members of their own group are representing the dominant group. Tokenism can also be used more generally to describe change that is cosmetic, disguising a deeper resistance.

Transgendered:

This is a term that includes a wide variety of people who do not fit clearly into the male/female gender division of Western culture. Some people included in this group are: transsexuals (see definition below), cross-dressers/transvestites, drag queens, androgynes (people with physical traits of both male and female), bigendered people (people with cultural traits of both male and female) and intersex people (people with primary sex characteristics of both male and female; that is, chromosome, hormone or genital features, formerly called “hermaphrodites.”

Transgendered people can also be referred to as gender variant or gender queer.

Two-Spirited:

In the belief systems of some First Nations, there are more than two genders. Some have seven genders, some nine. Each of these genders involves a different combination of the characteristics Western society defines as “masculine” or “feminine.” In the middle of this range of genders come people who are equally “male” and “female.” These are the “two-spirited” people. In many Native cultures, two-spirited people were held in high esteem. In some, they were thought to have particular spiritual gifts and were trained to be spiritual leaders and healers. Many two-spirited people are what the mainstream culture would define as gay/lesbian/bisexual, but not all. These terms do not define the same thing. A two-spirited nature encompasses much more than just sexual orientation. Some two-spirited people are comfortable with the term “transgendered” and others are not. Two-spirited people have a complete, unique gender identity in a specific cultural context.

Transsexual:

Some people have a strong sense that they have been born into the wrong body. Their identity is female, but their body is male, or the other way around. Such people are referred to as “transsexual”. Some choose to live publically as the gender indicated by their body, some choose to dress and live as the gender of their identity, in spite of the sex of their body. Some pursue medical treatment, such as hormones and surgery, to change their body to fit their identity. Transsexual people suffer from the oppression of heterosexism. They can share in some issues with gay/lesbian/bisexual people, but in other cases, their issues are separate.

U

Undue Hardship:

One exception to the duty to accommodate requirement is “undue hardship”. It is determined on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration many factors which include, safety, financial cost, employee morale, operational requirements and the impact on collective agreement provisions. It is recognized that the use of the term "undue" implies that some hardship is acceptable.

W

Workforce Diversity:

The varied perspectives and approaches to work to which members of different identity groups contribute. A diverse workforce brings different, important, and competitively relevant knowledge and viewpoints concerning how to actually do the work: how to design processes, reach goals, frame tasks, create effective teams, communicate ideas, and lead.

V

Valuing Diversity:

Valuing diversity means being aware of, sensitive to, and appreciating differences of: age, gender, race, spirituality, culture, mental or physical abilities, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and lifestyle. It implies cultural competence in deliberately seeking out and/or enabling a variety of views in addition to viewing a program, policy or service situation through one's own cultural lens or perspective.

Visible Minority - Employment Equity Definition:

According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission the term "visible minority" means persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.