



MMA's Municipal DEI Initiative

I. Framework

The Massachusetts Municipal Association stands with our members and commits to advocating for and strongly supporting efforts to ensure equity and racial justice, and to directly address systemic and overt racism and implicit bias. We are ready to assist local officials in this important work and will do our best to help make a difference.

What follows are concrete ways that we are addressing these issues. We will continue to update and expand these efforts over time.

DEI Advisory Committee. MMA is forming a DEI Advisory Committee – composed of MMA municipal member officials and staff, MMA staff, and partners – tasked with providing advice and insight on concrete ways that MMA can actively promote diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives among the municipalities of Massachusetts.

Partnerships. Working with our colleagues in state municipal associations, the National League of Cities' program on Race, Equity, and Leadership, the International City/County Management Association, the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, member cities and towns, municipal DEI professionals, regional planning organizations, and other mission-driven organizations, the MMA will broaden our partnerships in ways that will amplify all our efforts and help effect real change around these critical issues.

Education and Training. MMA commits to investing in additional membership training around topics related to implicit bias, racism, and equity at the municipal level. We will focus on two paths:

- 1) Resources and training to assist professional municipal managers to bring DEI training and frameworks to the internal operations of local governments, and to help advise elected and appointed officials on DEI frameworks and best practices; and
- 2) Resources and training to assist elected and appointed officials in their work to develop a shared understanding of DEI fundamentals and advance

DEI in the governance of communities, and training on best practices in public engagement to facilitate community awareness of the benefits of building more diverse, equitable and inclusive communities.

Resources. In addition to training and education initiatives, MMA will partner with experts, affected communities and organizations to provide a digital toolkit of resources and information available to members, partners, and staff.

Representation. MMA's goal is to have broad perspectives and diversity in staff, board, and committee positions. We will work to implement new ways to broaden and enhance our outreach.

Communications. We will continue our commitment to promoting inclusion of diverse voices, perspectives, and imagery in our messaging and publications. These efforts will be informed and supported by the work of our DEI Advisory Committee in finding ways to showcase and improve our practices around these issues.

II. Values to Guide MMA's DEI Initiative

- We value diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and dignity for all.
- We strive for civic excellence and recognize that our differences make our communities stronger.
- We acknowledge that institutional and systemic racism exist and that we must be intentional in dismantling them.
- We promote a culture of respect and recognize that words and actions matter, and the absence of action and words also matter.
- Every municipality shares the responsibility of creating equitable and inclusive communities.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion should be embedded in all aspects of local government.

III. Defining DEI

DEI is much more than an acronym – it is the sincere belief that we all deserve to be appreciated, heard, and included.

Diversity – Diversity looks at the full range of human and/or organizational differences and similarities in the same spaces, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, physical and mental attributes, religion, values systems, national origin, political beliefs, parental/family status, and cultures.

Equity – Equity is ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of communities most affected by systemic oppression.

Inclusion – Inclusive environments are places in which any individual or group is and feels welcomed, respected, supported, valued, and able to fully participate as their authentic selves. An inclusive and welcoming culture embraces differences, offers respect in words and actions for all people, fosters a diversity of thought, ideas, perspectives, and values, strives to create balance in the face of power differences.

IV. MMA's Role

As part of its mission “to improve the effectiveness of local government,” the MMA wishes to develop tools to assist municipalities in centering justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of local government.

MMA is a membership-based organization that provides services and resources to the municipalities of Massachusetts. Member elected and appointed officials (and staff) avail themselves of these benefits as they choose. MMA does not tell member municipalities what to do, but rather shares information, resources, and best practices to help communities as they move forward in advancing their own community-based DEI initiatives.

Our members are the cities and towns of Massachusetts. In furtherance of MMA's work, the organization staffs and administers membership associations for key municipal officials, including (in alphabetical order), the Association of Town Finance Committees, the Massachusetts Mayors' Association, the Massachusetts Municipal Councillors' Association, Massachusetts Municipal Human Resources, the Massachusetts Municipal Management Association, and the Massachusetts Select Board Association.

As an umbrella organization, MMA provides training across these associations, and works to learn from, share information, and identify best practices to assist these local officials in being the best they can be at leading their communities.

V. Potential Scope of Work

The MMA's DEI Initiative will assist municipalities in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in municipal operations, governance, and community engagement.

The MMA will investigate tools municipalities may need and how to develop them, as well as explore other ways the Association can support its members as they seek to establish a stronger culture of equity in their own communities.

In addressing the scope of work, MMA should be mindful of the following considerations:

- Municipal officials need practical tips and resources to engage in community conversations and requests for action.
- Municipal officials need tools to facilitate leadership on equity matters within their governing boards and their communities.
- In many cases, member municipalities may need help understanding equity and inclusion issues within their own government organizations and their communities and how to identify and prioritize action steps.
- The 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts are distributed across a wide spectrum. A few communities are deeply engaged in DEI work, many are beginning to engage, others are looking for resources to understand possible directions, and some are not yet engaged in DEI. All of these communities are highly respected members of MMA.
- Most municipalities lack the financial resources to add staff or engage in extensive customized training on a broad scale.

Within the scope of work are several core approaches that can be considered:

- Operational issues/best practices/standards.
- Training and education on DEI fundamentals, including implicit and explicit bias, racial equity, and how to engage in challenging yet safe

public discussions (separate tracks for municipal professionals and elected officials).

- Peer-to-peer training by municipal DEI professionals who can share their experiences and insights with municipalities that are starting their own DEI journey.
- Municipal recruitment, hiring, and human resources practices, including recruitment for volunteer positions on boards and commissions.
- Supporting the emerging DEI Coalition as they work to build their network as a safe space for peer support, encouragement, and problem solving. *[This item is internal to MMA at this time]*
- Curate a list of high-quality and trusted vendors/consultants with experience working with municipalities and government agencies.
- Provide education to DEI consultants and new municipal DEI staff on local government in Massachusetts to help them learn the context they will be working in.
- Equitable budget processes.
- Effective citizen engagement.
- Municipal communications (municipal websites, public notices, forms, advertising, information sharing).
- Community development, including planning, housing, businesses.
- Data collection and data-driven decision making.

VI. Common DEI Language and Terms

Ally: Advocates for people from underrepresented or marginalized groups. An ally takes action to support people outside of their own group.

Belonging: One's physical, emotional and psychological safety; the indescribable feeling of being welcome. It is the experience of being a member of an organization or group in which one feels supported and validated and has the ability to thrive at their true authentic self.

Bias: An inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned. A bias is an unreasonably negative feeling, preference, or opinion about a social group. It is grounded in stereotypes and prejudices.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color: this term is specific to the United States, and is used to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous lives and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color. The order of the acronym is intentional, and the term should not be used when referring to an individual or an issue that affects a specific group of people.

Cisgender: A term used to describe people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Often abbreviated to cis.

Color Blind: The belief that everyone should be treated “equally” without respect to societal, economic, historical, racial or other difference. No differences are seen or acknowledged; everyone is the same.

Cultural Competency: A process of embracing diversity and learning about people from other cultural backgrounds. The key element to becoming more culturally competent is respect for the ways that others live in and organize the world and an openness to learn from them.

Cultural Humility: A conscious, lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique that allows one to learn about others’ cultures, beginning with an examination of our own beliefs and cultural identities.

Cultural Appropriation: The non-consensual/misappropriate use of cultural elements for commodification or profit purposes – including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. – often without understanding, acknowledgment, or respect for its value in the context of its original culture.

Culture: The values, beliefs, traditions, behavioral norms, linguistic expression, knowledge, memories, and collective identities that are shared by a group of people and give meaning to their social environment.

DEI: An acronym for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (each of these terms is defined above in Section III).

Disability: A physical or mental impairment that affects a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Discrimination: The unequal treatment of members of various groups, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favors one group over others on differences of race, gender, economic class, sexual orientation,

physical ability, religion, language, age, national identity, religion and other categories.

Equality: Treating everyone the same way, often while assuming that everyone also starts out on equal footing or with the same opportunities.

Ethnicity: A category of people who identify as a social group on the basis of a shared culture, origin, social background, and traditions that are distinctive, maintained between generations, and lead to a sense of identity, common language or religious traditions.

Gender Identity: Distinct from the term “sexual orientation,” refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female, neither or both. Since gender identity is internal, one’s gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender Non-conforming: An individual whose gender expression or appearance does not hold to cultural and societal expectations related to gender.

Harassment: The use of comments or actions that can be perceived as offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning or unwelcome.

Implicit Bias: A negative association expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold and that affects our understanding, actions and decisions; also known as unconscious or hidden bias.

Intersectionality: The intertwining of social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity, which can result in unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers.

Justice: The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all.

LGBTQIA: An inclusive term for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual.

Marginalized/Marginalization: The process by which minority groups/cultures are excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community. A tactic used to devalue those that vary from the norm of the mainstream, sometimes to the point of denigrating them as deviant and regressive. Marginalized (groups) have restricted access to resources like education and healthcare for achieving their aims.

Microaggression: The verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs, insults or actions, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based solely upon discriminatory belief systems.

Neurodiversity: The concept that there is great diversity in how people's brains are wired and work, and that neurological differences should be valued in the same way we value any other human variation.

Non-Binary (also known as Genderqueer): A category for a fluid constellation of gender identities beyond the woman/man gender binary.

Prejudice: A preconceived judgment or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment and can be rooted in stereotypes, that denies the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized.

Privilege: Exclusive access or access to material and immaterial resources based on the membership to a dominant social group.

Queer: An umbrella term that can refer to anyone who transgresses society's view of gender or sexuality. The definitional indeterminacy of the word Queer, its elasticity, is one of its characteristics: "A zone of possibilities."

Race: A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly race), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, and ethnicity.

Safe Space: An environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule or denial of experience.

Social Justice: Active engagement toward equity and inclusion that addresses issues of institutional, structural, and environmental inequity, power, and privilege.

Stereotype: A form of generalization rooted in blanket beliefs and false assumptions, a product of processes of categorization that can result in a prejudiced attitude, critical judgment and intentional or unintentional discrimination. A stereotype is typically negative, based on little information, and does not recognize individualism and personal agency.

Structural inequality: Systemic disadvantage(s) of one social group compared to other groups, rooted, and perpetuated through discriminatory

practices (conscious or unconscious) that are reinforced through institutions, ideologies, representations, policies/laws and practices. When this kind of inequality is related to racial/ethnic discrimination, it is referred to as systemic or structural racism.

System of Oppression: Conscious and unconscious, non-random and organized harassment, discrimination, exploitation, discrimination, prejudice and other forms of unequal treatment that impact different groups. It sometimes is used to refer to systemic racism.

Systemic Racism (a.k.a. structural racism or institutional racism) A system and structure that have procedures or processes that disadvantage African Americans, Indigenous people, Latinx people, and people of color.

Tokenism: Performative presence without meaningful participation. For example, a superficial invitation for the participation of members of a certain socially oppressed group who are expected to speak for the whole group without giving the person a real opportunity to speak for her/himself.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their assigned sex at birth (i.e., the sex listed on their birth certificates). Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies through the use of hormones and/or gender affirmation surgery, or after transition. (Use "transgender," not "transgendered.")

White Supremacy: A power system structured and maintained by persons who classify themselves as White, whether consciously or subconsciously determined; and who feel superior to those of other racial/ethnic identities.