

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): The Significance for Municipalities

Kiana Pierre-Louis, Select Board Chair, Town of
Sharon, MMA DEI Committee

Michael Obasohan, Chief Diversity Officer, City of
Pittsfield, MMA DEI Committee Co-Chair

Introductions

TURN TO YOUR NEIGHBOR

- Name
- Pronouns (if you wish to share)
- What is currently bringing you joy?

Creating a Brave Space

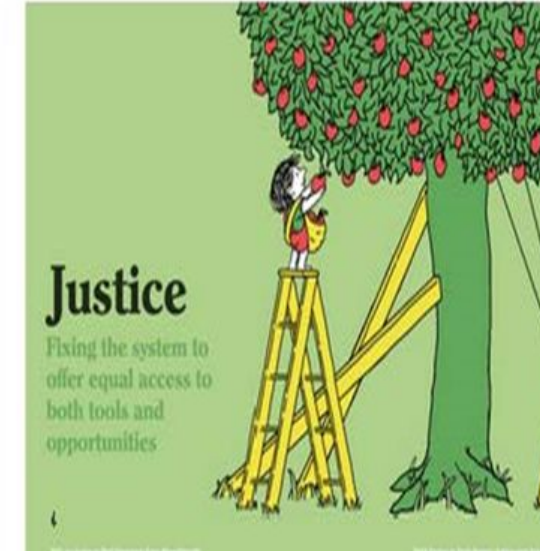
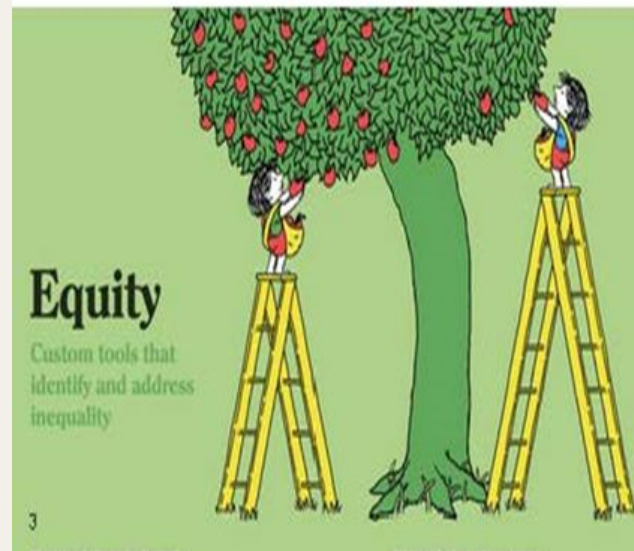
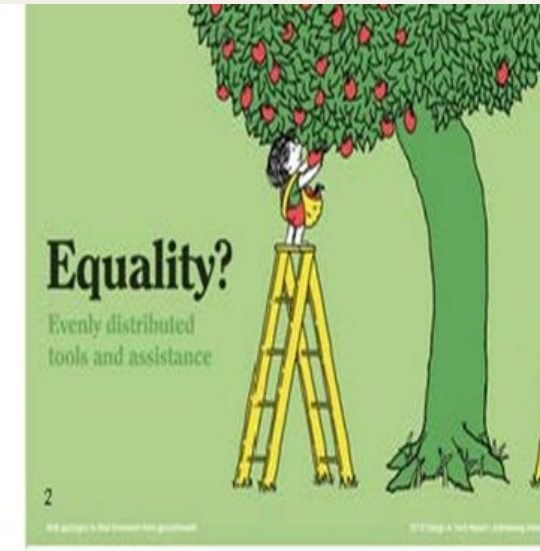
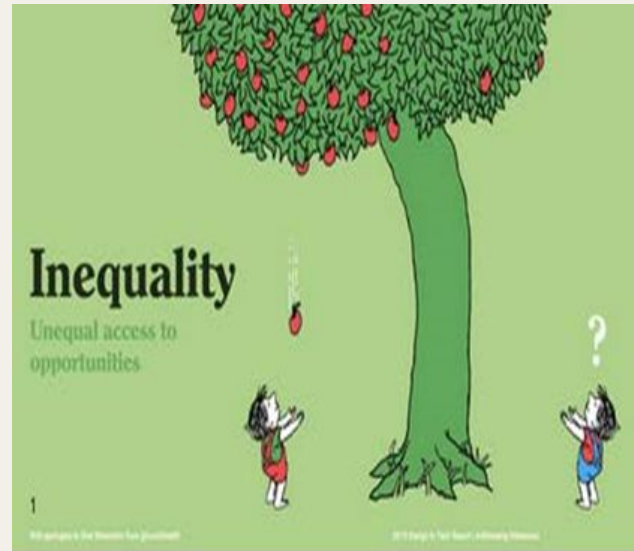
- Listen to understand, not to respond
- Mindfulness of everyone's path
- Freedom to start talking and learning
- Address the idea not the person
- It's okay to make mistakes and own up to them
- Assume good intent
- No forms of oppression or dehumanizing behavior will be allowed
- Speak from "I" perspective
- Take the learning, leave the details
- Show empathy
- Sit with discomfort
- Believe in change
- Make space to process, take care of yourself

Definitions

Developing common language

Definitions

- Diversity
- Equity
- Inclusion
- Belonging
- Justice
- Intersectionality
- BIPOC
- Antiracism



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



DI·VER·SI·TY

All the ways in which people differ.



EQ·UI·TY

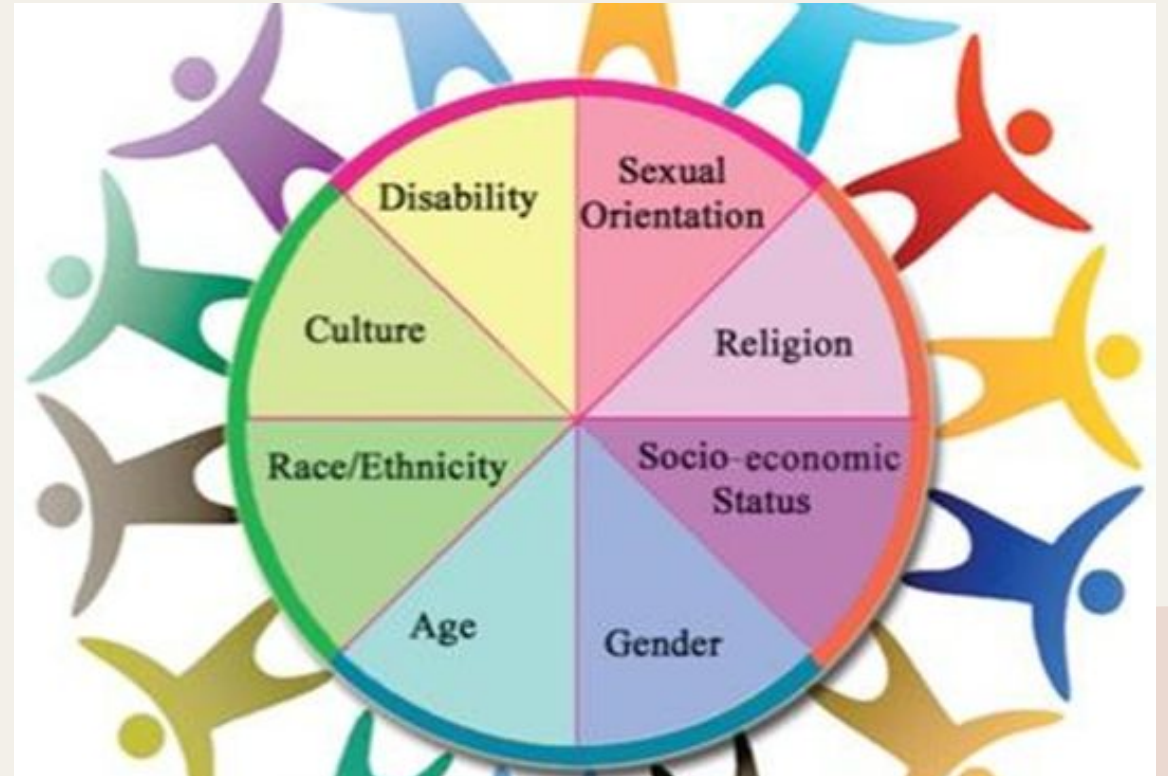
Fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people. One's identity cannot predict the outcome.



IN·CLU·SION

A variety of people have power, a voice, and decision-making authority.

Sourced from City of Portland Office of Equity and Human Rights, The Independent Sector, and UC Berkeley.



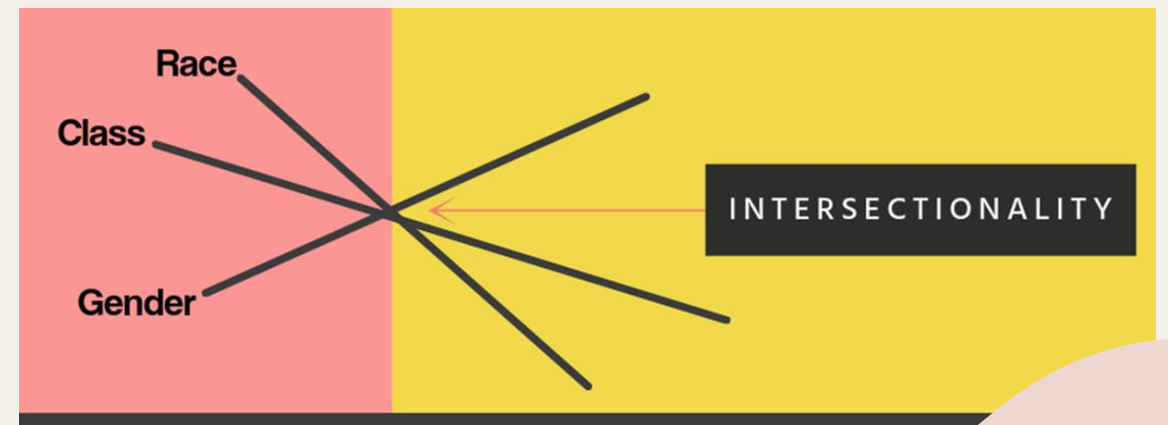
Belonging and Justice



What is Intersectionality?



- The way our unique traits and identities interact with each other to impact our lived experience
- For some intersectionality results in compounded discrimination
- Inclusive organizations recognize the importance of intersectionality



Intersectionality Cont.

“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”

DeGraffenreid v. General Motors

Moore v. Hughes Helicopter, Inc.

Payne v. Travenol

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.



Anti-Racism

Antiracism refers to the practice of identifying and actively opposing racism. The goal of antiracism is to actively change policies, behaviors and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions. Embedded in its principles is the understanding that the injustices arise from structural racism, xenophobia and colonialism that have existed throughout the history of the United States. Antiracism requires acknowledging the ongoing, systemic and perpetual racial and societal injustices embedded in the past and present, including through legal systems that have facilitated discrimination against many historically excluded people.



The background features a dark grey field with a series of vibrant, multi-colored diagonal stripes in shades of purple, blue, green, and gold. Interspersed among these stripes are various circular shapes in matching colors, some solid and some with a dotted pattern. A light yellow curved shape is visible in the top left corner, and a pinkish-red curved shape is in the bottom right corner.

*Why is all this significant
to your municipality?*

History of the Role

Corporate → Higher Education → Municipality

- The Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) is a leadership position dedicated to diversity initiatives and climate transformation
- The scholarship on academia reveals that the development of CDOs on college and university campuses occurred simultaneous to the advancement of chief diversity officers in the corporate sector (Gose, 2006; Harvey, 2014; Leon, 2010 & 2014; Williams & Wade Golden, 2013).

Corporate → Higher Education → Municipality

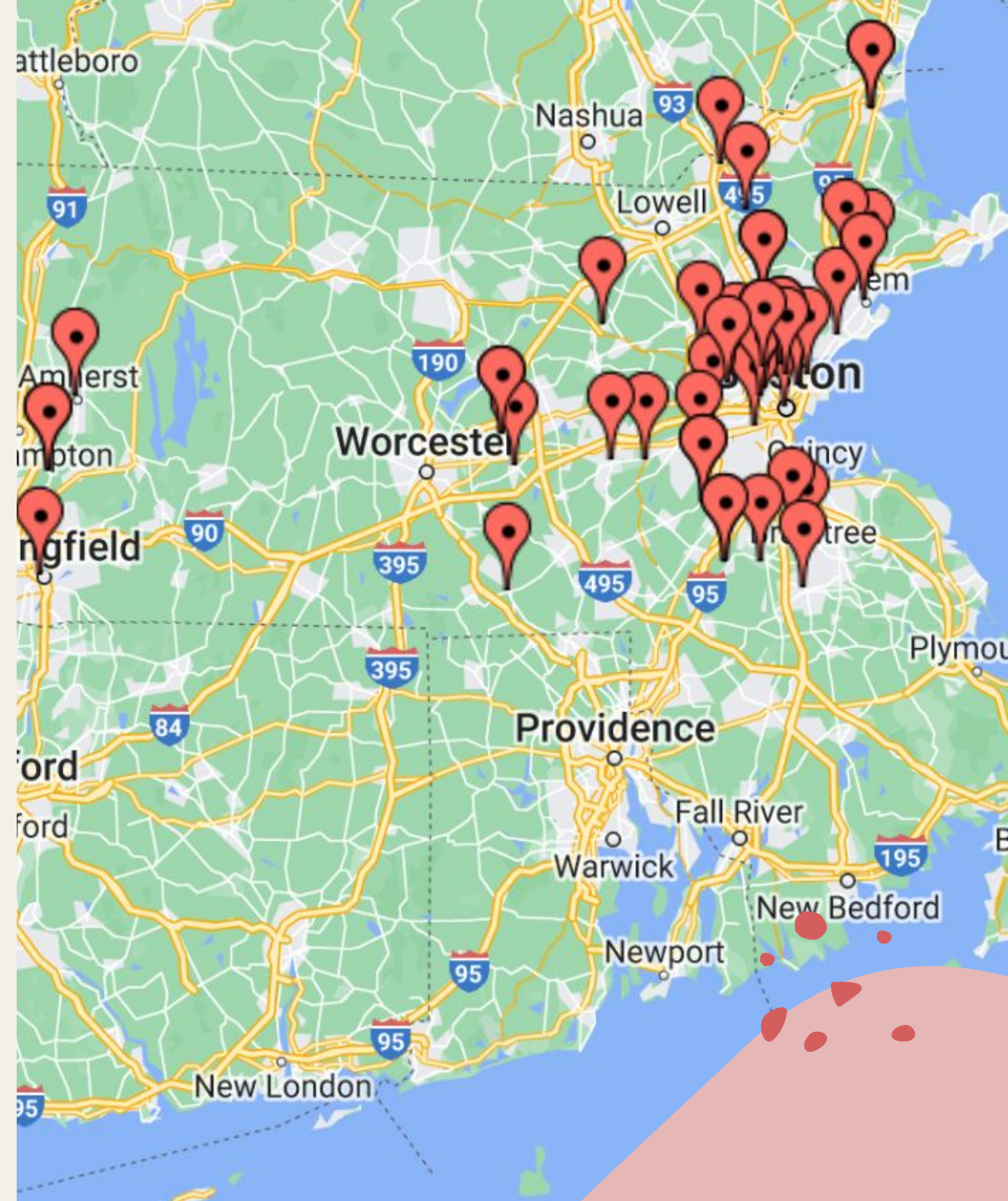
- Following the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act employers were advised to establish programs to “manage” racial diversity effectively in the workplace, and as legal cases of racial and gender bias persisted, organizations turned their focus to redefine affirmative action initiatives as the management of diversity in efforts of increasing job satisfaction (Grim, Sanchez-Parkinson, Ting, & Chavous, 2019; Kellough & Naff, 2004).
- The rise of CDOs has most recently grounded its roots in the field of higher education. Seventy-two percent of CDO positions were newly created between the years 2008 and 2013 across at least 60 colleges and universities as a position of leadership who is devoted to diversity planning and implementation (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

How Did We Get Here?

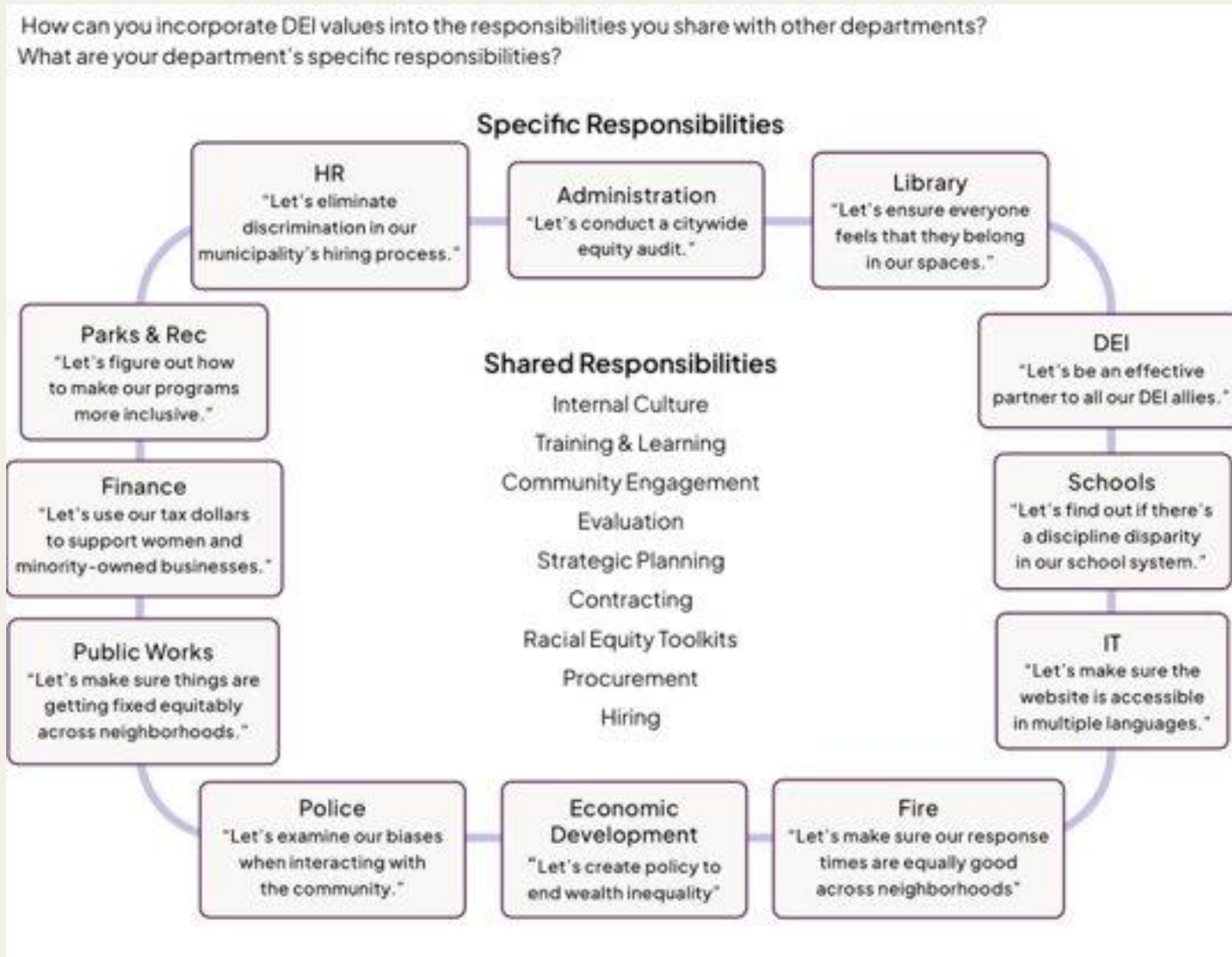
- Pandemic Disparities
- Racial Awakening
- Lack of Representation in Municipal Workforce
- Growing Diversity – Changing Demographics
- Linguistic Challenges

Where are we now?

- Over 40 municipalities has a department or position dedicated to DEI advancement
- MMA DEI Committee
 - I. 13 Members representing city and towns throughout Massachusetts
 - II. Meet the second Wednesday of each month since October, 2022.
 - III. Racial Equity Group
- MA DEI Coalition
 - I. Consist of over 50+ members of DEI practitioners
 - II. Meet bi-weekly for shared ideas and resources



DEI Guide: How can you incorporate DEI values in the responsibilities you share with other departments?



Tips for making DEI shared work in your municipality

There are many ways to establish DEI work as a collective responsibility in your organization.

Steps to take may include:

Create space for dialogue. Hold space within the organization to discuss diversity, equity and inclusion as a set of shared values, and to discuss why these values matter.

Establish top-down leadership. Ensure DEI values come from the top of the organization, and that they are reflected in the words and actions of municipal leaders and department heads.

Create departmental roles. Identify a DEI leader within each department, and unite these people through an internal DEI committee. Note: this person doesn't have to be a director.

Update hiring practices. Incorporate DEI practices into hiring practices for every department. This could include using interview questions such as "What do you know about DEI?" and "What have you done to advance DEI where you worked before?"

Evaluate. Use DEI-related metrics in staff evaluations, and to determine promotions and raises.

Practice patience. Understand that while institutional culture change is urgent, it is also slow and persistent work. Recognize that many people within the organization will be slow to change.

Meet people where they are. Prepare for the fact that people will be at different places in their journeys. Plan for how you will meet people where they are while ensuring that they engage with this work.

Treat DEI work as cultural work. Remember that DEI work means a change in behavior as well as policy.

Lessons Learned

Challenges

1. Huge learning curve - municipal government and how it functions
2. Too many expectations and unrealistic to meet!
3. Emotionally demanding and draining work:
 - ❖ High burnout rate
 - ❖ Wellness & self-care are critical
 - ❖ Supervision understanding of the role & support needed

Lessons Learned

Emerging Best Practices

- DEI positions need to be at the leadership level and not just in title but in practice
- Needs to be internal facing and external facing with staff/committee support
- Financial investment - need to have a budget
- Common practice – starting with an equity assessment or community equity audit
- Seems to start with a task force -> committee -> hiring 1 person -> hiring Department
- Schools & Municipalities need their own DEI



Resources to get started



Massachusetts Municipal DEI Coalition

DEI Guide
2022

- Introduction & Defining DEI
- Getting started
- Sharing your work
- Establishing a DEI role/department
- Establishing a volunteer group
- Evaluating DEI within a municipality
- Wellness
- Templates/Appendix



Questions

The image features a dense field of 3D question marks. The central focus is a single, bright white question mark that stands out against a background of many other question marks in various shades of gold, bronze, and dark grey. The lighting is dramatic, with the central white question mark casting a soft glow on the surface below it. The overall composition is layered, with some question marks appearing closer to the viewer than others, creating a sense of depth.

Thank You!

Contact Info:

Kiana Pierre-Louis, Town of Sharon
Select Board Chair

Kpierre-louis@townofsharon.org

Michael Obasohan, Chief Diversity Officer,
City of Pittsfield

mobasohan@cityofpittsfield.org

Phone: 413-449-5545

