MMA's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commitment

Mission and Vision

The Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) strives to improve the effectiveness of local government in the Commonwealth. The MMA brings municipal officials together with the purpose of fostering the development of a united municipal message and advocating for unified policies. The MMA is the voice of the cities and towns in Massachusetts.

The MMA strongly supports our members and municipal efforts to prioritize and uplift diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in their policies, practices and services. The MMA acknowledges the harms of systemic racism, and the role that racism and discrimination play in perpetuating inequities within government structures. The MMA is committed to institutionalizing and upholding the principles of DEI within the organization. The MMA strives to normalize and integrate DEI values and the application of using a racial equity lens as a core function of local government throughout the Commonwealth, supporting cities and towns by leading DEI policy advocacy and serving as a resource to the municipalities in Massachusetts.

The MMA acknowledges the importance of representation and is committed to ensuring that broad and diverse perspectives are reflected amongst staff, board members, and committee positions. We will work to implement new ways to broaden and enhance our outreach with the goal of expanding representation across the organization. Additionally, we are committed to promoting inclusion of diverse voices, perspectives, and imagery in our messaging and publications. The MMA will work intentionally to uplift, showcase and embrace the diversity of the Commonwealth, throughout all of our channels of communications.

The MMA will revisit, reassess, update and expand its efforts over time to sustain its commitment to DEI and the means of supporting municipalities in their efforts.

MMA's Guiding Values

- We value diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, justice 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.

What Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Means to MMA

DEI is much more than an acronym – it is the sincere belief that we all deserve to be appreciated, heard, and included in our workplaces and communities. The MMA defines DEI as the following:

> **Diversity** is the representation of differing characteristics that individuals and groups of people hold. Diversity can typically be measured through numbers and tracked by race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, religion, ethnicity, gender expression, socioeconomic status, etc. Diversity also includes different perspectives, values and ideas.

> **Equity** is the ongoing process of correcting historical inequities, in order to create opportunities for all individuals to access resources and what they need to thrive. Equity requires changing structures of power and privilege, and dismantling barriers that have prevented access and participation of individuals and groups, so that disparities of historically underrepresented groups are eliminated and outcomes cannot be predicted by specific groupings.

> **Inclusion** is centering marginalized groups and people who have been historically underrepresented, by affirming, celebrating and appreciating the diversity that they bring. Inclusion is creating an environment in which individuals are allowed to express their whole selves, and their voices, participation and presence is valued. Inclusion without belonging is tokenism, thus relationship building and authentic involvement in decision-making that impacts policies and practices of the environment are necessary.

DEI Advisory Committee

In August 2022, MMA formed its inaugural DEI Advisory Committee – composed of MMA municipal member officials, MMA staff, and municipal DEI practitioners. The committee is tasked with providing advice and insight on concrete ways that MMA can actively promote diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives among the municipalities of Massachusetts and internally as an organization. The committee supports both the Chief Equity Officer and MMA in providing opportunities for trainings for members, and advising on the DEI Strategic Action Plan process. The DEI Advisory Committee will continue to serve as a thought partner and conduit for advancing DEI and racial equity work across communities.

Partnerships

MMA works with colleagues in state municipal associations across the country, member cities and towns, municipal DEI professionals, regional planning organizations, and other mission-driven organizations in an effort to advance municipal DEI work. MMA will

continue to seek out partnerships that elevate DEI and prioritize racial equity in their work.

MMA's Role in Supporting Municipal DEI Efforts Across the Commonwealth

As a core part of its mission "to improve the effectiveness of local government," the MMA will work to develop tools and resources 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. Members, both 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.

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

The MMA will provide tools and resources for foundational learning to municipal leaders, and continue to support their work as DEI initiatives and efforts come to fruition and expand across communities. The Association will support its members as they seek to establish means of applying an equity lens to the work happening in their own communities. MMA is dedicated to working with towns and cities to build capacity and sustain their DEI work, and truly integrate these principles into the cultural fabric of their municipalities.

Education, Training and Resources

The MMA is mindful of the varying needs and capacities of its members, as every community is different. In seeking to support every member, the MMA is conscious of the following considerations:
- Municipal leaders and officials need practical tips and resources to engage in meaningful community conversations

- Municipal leaders and officials need guidance and support in order to lead 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, in addition to their communities and how to identify and prioritize addressing issues

- Across the state, the 351 cities and towns are all at different stages of engagement with equity work- some communities are deeply engaged in DEI work, many are discovering ways to engage, others are looking for resources to understand possible approaches, and some are not yet engaged

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- Financial resources to hire more staff or embark on extensive customized training on a broad scale is limited across municipalities, thus innovative approaches to learning and resource sharing are necessary

MMA is dedicated to investing in resources and providing foundational diversity, equity and inclusion training opportunities for MMA staff and members.

1. MMA Staff: MMA aims to embody and act upon its commitment to DEI by ensuring that all staff receive training and engage in ongoing learning opportunities. Understanding DEI values and the impact of systemic racism in our government institutions is essential to providing quality and equitable municipal services and programs. Training and educational opportunities will include topics related to essential key terms and definitions, history of racism in the United States and its present day implications, explicit and implicit bias, power and privilege, social identity, gender identity, accessibility, microaggressions and other topics related to equity at the municipal level.

2. MMA Members: Training, resources and opportunities for continued learning will be offered to members with the goal of providing local government officials with the knowledge and tools needed to advance DEI in local government. Municipal leaders will be able to develop a shared understanding of DEI fundamentals and best practices in how to build and sustain more diverse, equitable and inclusive communities and workforces.

In addition to training and educational initiatives, MMA will partner with experts, affected communities and organizations to provide accessible resources, guidance and information to assist members in navigating municipal diversity, equity and inclusion challenges and achieving DEI goals. The MMA DEI Strategic Action Plan will guide the organization in applying an equity lens to all facets of the institution, and it will provide members with tools, methods and approaches to advance DEI within their communities.

Using Shared DEI Language and Terms

Understanding terms and common words related to the principles of DEI is a key part of engaging in DEI work. Often words are used interchangeably, when they seem similar, but are in fact vastly different, which can cause confusion and sometimes be harmful. Building and using shared language allows everyone to communicate with each other more effectively and can mitigate instances of misunderstandings. The following terms and concepts are frequently used in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion work:

Ally: Someone who advocates for and supports a community other than their own. Allies are not part of the community they help, and should show they are an ally through action, not simply by naming it.

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, heard and validated and has the ability to thrive as their true authentic self.

Bias: An inherent reality of humanity, that no one is exempt from, in which people sort information into categories and create associations of one group and its members relative to another. Biases are formed to fill in the gaps of information, and are typically rooted in stereotypes, or socialized characteristics that are assigned to different groups.

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 one specific group of people.

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

Cisgender: A term used to describe people whose gender identity exclusively 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 one's 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.

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.

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, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status,

(dis)ability, physical and mental attributes, religion, values systems, national origin, political beliefs, parental/family status, and cultures.

Explicit Bias: An association, often negative, that is expressed directly, in which the individual is fully aware of the choice they are making in acting on their bias.

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

Equity: 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.

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 Expression: The ways in which a person publicly expresses their gender through clothing, hair, behavior, voice, body language and other aspects of their appearance. Gender expression does not always match a person's gender identity.

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: An association, often negative, that is expressed indirectly or automatically that people unknowingly hold and that affects our understanding, actions and decisions; also known as unconscious or hidden bias.

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, and strives to create balance in the face of power differences.

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. Intersectionality is the concept that oppressed identities compound each other, which is different from intersection of identities.

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 or questioning, intersex, and asexual. "+" represents all other identities that are not included in the acronym.

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): The preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man gender binary.

Prejudice: A preconceived judgment, opinion or preference, often based on limited information, 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 membership of 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." The word still gets used as a hateful slur, but in many instances it has been reclaimed.

Race: A social construct that divides people into distinct groups based on differences and similarities in characteristics in physical traits- such as skin color, bone structure, hair texture, etc., deemed to be socially significant.

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 is the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual group or institution.

Systemic Racism: A form of racism that is deeply embedded across systems, institutions, laws, policies, practices - both written and unwritten, that perpetuates unfair treatment, disadvantage and oppression of people of color. Systemic racism permeates all sectors and areas, and encompasses both structural racism and institutional racism.

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 themself.

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 Culture (WSC): 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. WSC refers to the dominant, unquestioned and normalized behaviors and ways of functioning embodied by most institutions, that are often difficult to identify because they are so ingrained in our customs. WSC values certain ways of thinking, behaving, deciding, and knowing – those from a white, western tradition – while devaluing or rendering invisible other ways.