



EMBRACING EQUITY

# CONFRONTING RESISTANCE



As Dufferin County has continued its commitment to equity, we have had to learn how to confront and navigate resistance to change. While resistance can take many forms, it is generally characterized by refusal to accept equity work, as well as actions meant to impede or disrupt these efforts. Resistance is a typical part of equity work and one that we should all be prepared to manage in ourselves, our peers, our workplaces, and our community spaces.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “COMMUNITY SPACES”?

By “community spaces,” we are referring to spaces governed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s anti-discrimination policies. This includes:

- Stores, restaurants, and bars
- Hospitals and healthcare centres
- Schools, universities, and colleges
- Religious and faith-based spaces
- Public spaces like recreation centres, malls, and parks
- Public transportation
- Government offices and service centres

It is important that resistance is addressed quickly, carefully, and effectively. If left unchecked, it can derail equity efforts or stall the progress of DEI initiatives.

There are some key actions you can take to manage resistance to equity:

## UNDERSTAND WHERE RESISTANCE COMES FROM

Not all resistance is ill-intended. People may be hesitant to embrace DEI initiatives because:

- **Equity work challenges their worldview**  
Equity asks us to be critical about the behaviours, beliefs, practices, and policies we’re accustomed to. It requires us to examine how the way we operate may oppress or harm people who are marginalized. This kind of reflection is understandably uncomfortable and may cause some people to disbelieve evidence of inequity or resist the initiatives created to address it.
- **They don’t understand what equity work is**  
Many people who fear equity work do so because they misunderstand what this work means or aims to accomplish. Some fear that equity work is about ‘reversing’ discrimination or creating unfair advantages for people from communities that are marginalized. They often worry that their experience will be negatively impacted by policy changes.



## LEARN WHAT RESISTANCE LOOKS LIKE

Just as there can be multiple reasons for resistance to equity, it can also take many forms. Resistance doesn't always look or sound like speaking out against equity work. It can also look like:

- Subtly sabotaging equity efforts
- Questioning the validity of equity data
- Refusing to participate in equity-related activities
- Disrupting training and conversations about equity
- Playing 'devil's advocate' in equity discussions
- Suggesting that equity work is 'reverse discrimination'
- Labelling those who speak up about inequity as "troublemakers" or "divisive"
- Expressing animosity towards those who champion equity efforts

Learning to recognize the ways that resistance shows up equips us to name it and address it.



## PRACTICE EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO RESISTANCE

Equity is a responsibility for all of us. You do not have to be a manager at your job or a leader in your community to champion this work. Here are some ways you can respond when you recognize resistance in yourself or those around you.

IF RESISTANCE COMES FROM...		THEN...
Disbelief in the necessity of equity work...	→	Focus on beginning from a place of belief in the data and experiences of people who are facing marginalization
Confusion about why equity work is necessary...	→	Consider education and training opportunities to deepen knowledge of the importance of equity work and the data about inequities impacting people who are marginalized
Frustration that equity initiatives focus on specific groups...	→	Understand that equity work is responsive to and guided by data that demonstrates who is impacted by inequities
Disbelief that equity benefits everyone...	→	Share the <u>benefits of equity work</u> for <u>everyone within an organization or community</u> , including people with privileged identities
Fear of being punished for privileged identities...	→	Acknowledge that equity work is not about condemnation or judgement but about creating equitable outcomes for all peoples
The misconception that equity is only about individual attitudes and behaviour...	→	Remember that equity also works to address the systemic and structural issues that produce and uphold inequitable outcomes

## NOT ALL RESISTANCE CAN BE RESOLVED WITH A SIMPLE CONVERSATION

There are some cases where resistance is more deep-rooted. In those instances, resistance may not be about fear, apprehension, or confusion. Some people are resistant because...

- They fundamentally disagree with the concept of equity and hold discriminatory beliefs
- They feel that equity is a political issue that does not belong in public spaces like the workplace



When a person is resistant to equity work for reasons like these, a conversation may not be enough to resolve the issue. Here are some actions that can be helpful:

- Point the person to studies, data, and other resources that can help them understand what equity work is, what it does, who it benefits, and why it is necessary within organizations
- Acknowledge that while people are entitled to their personal beliefs and feelings, they are expected to adhere to company policies, procedures, and practices around equity
- If the person you are engaging with is either vehement in their resistance or actively discriminating against you or others, it is your right to distance yourself or disengage if that feels like the safest choice