



EMBRACING EQUITY

HOW TO TALK ABOUT EQUITY





As more organizations and communities make commitments to DEI work, the subject of equity is going to arise more often in everyday discussions. Here are some tips to help you engage in those conversations with confidence.

GET CLEAR ON WHAT EQUITY MEANS

Nothing derails a conversation more than confusion. When it comes to equity, clarity is even more important. If we aren't clear about what equity means, it could lead to:

- Doubt about the necessity of DEI initiatives, policies, and practices
- Fear about the way that equity work might impact those with privilege
- Accusations of 'reverse-discrimination' and unfair advantages
- Resistance and disruption from those who feel threatened by equity work

WHAT EQUITY WORK IS:

- ✓ Using data to identify the systemic and structural issues that are harming people who experience marginalization
- ✓ Critically assessing policies and practices to understand how they impede equity efforts
- ✓ Centring equity in policies, practice, and culture to address the identified inequities
- ✓ Providing resources, tools, and platforms to ensure equitable opportunities for people who experience marginalization

WHAT EQUITY WORK ISN'T:

- ✗ Blaming or punishing people who have privilege for the inequities that are harming people who experience marginalization
- ✗ Reversing' the inequities so that those who experience marginalization are unfairly advantaged
- ✗ Excluding people with privileged identities from decision-making or positions of leadership
- ✗ Taking opportunities from people with privileged identities and giving them to people who experience marginalization

EQUITY IS NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

Every organization that prioritizes equity may have the same primary goal – to address systemic and structural inequities. However, the strategies they use to achieve that goal must be based on the specific issues happening at the organization.

Identifying inequities not only guides our efforts; it also makes it easier to navigate conversations about equity. This allows us to:

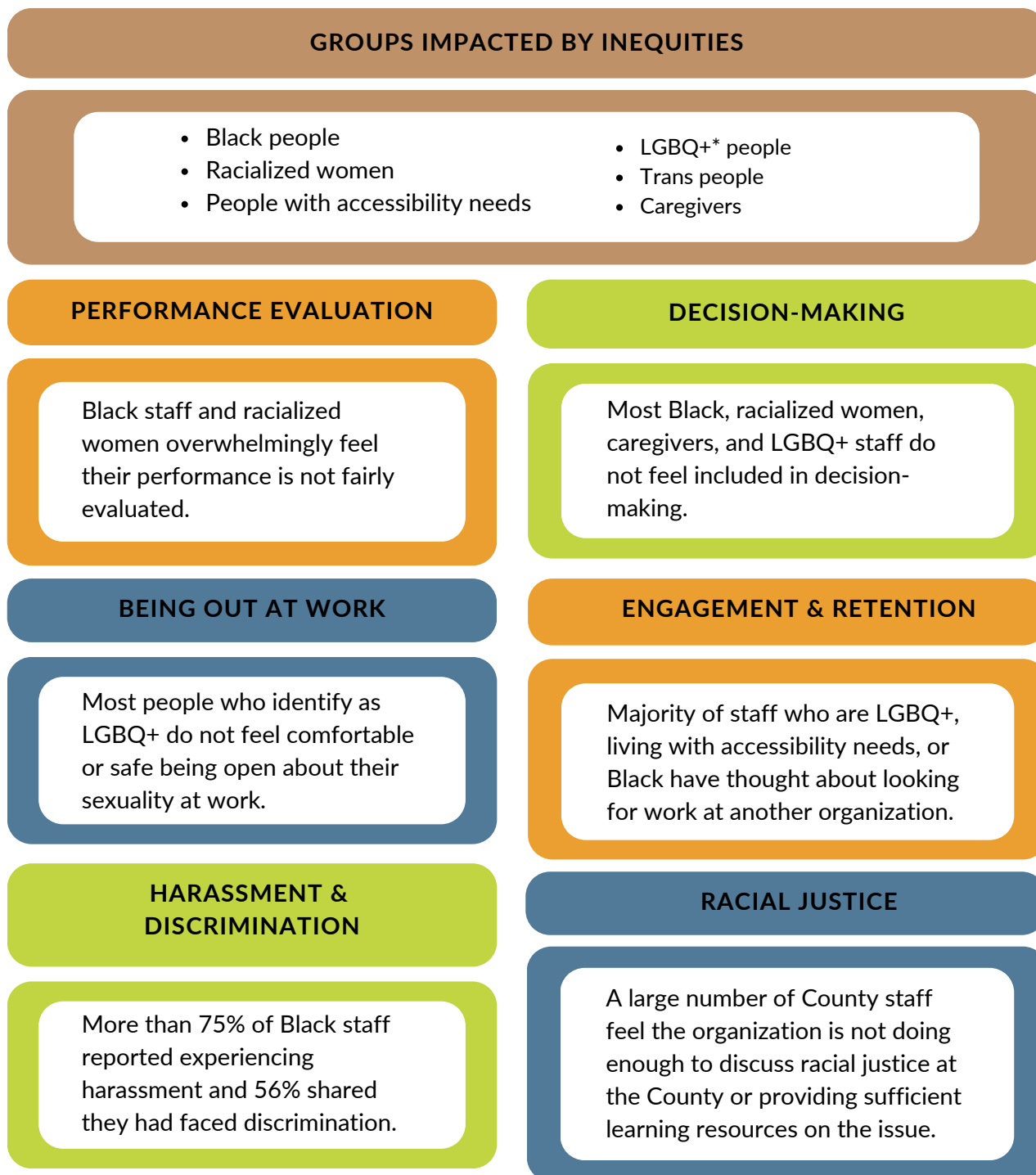
- Address questions and concerns about why equity work is happening
- Clarify why equity efforts focus on specific groups and demographics
- Confront and manage resistance to equity initiatives and practices



For example, at Dufferin County, we have been consistently following an Equity Strategic Plan based on an Equity Audit completed in 2022 that allowed us to identify inequities impacting staff in the organization. Here's an example of some of the issues that Audit revealed.

AT A GLANCE - Inequity at Dufferin County

Data drawn from the 2022 Equity Audit



**Please note that the County of Dufferin separates the T (Transgender) from the LGBTQ+ acronym to acknowledge the distinction between gender identity and sexuality, as well as centre trans experiences when discussing those communities as a way to combat their erasure in the broader LGBTQ+ movement*

This data makes it clear why Dufferin County is pursuing equity work and why those efforts are focused on supporting the success, safety, and engagement of staff who are Black, racialized women, caregivers, LGBTQ+, or living with accessibility needs.

MANAGE FEAR AND DOUBT AS THEY ARISE

Fear and doubt are normal parts of equity work, but it is important to understand how to manage them.

IF YOU...

Notice fear or doubt about equity work arise in yourself or someone you're speaking to...



THEN...

Refocus the conversation on how equity creates better outcomes for both people facing marginalization and organizations and communities as a whole.

Are afraid of misspeaking in a conversation about equity...



Use resources from trusted equity organizations and thought leaders to support your knowledge and confidence.

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS OVER JUDGEMENT

Equity work is not about judging an organization or community for inequitable outcomes. Instead, reflections are focused on acknowledging the actions and inactions that led to those outcomes and creating solutions to ensure those issues are not repeated going forward.

The ultimate goal of equity work is to understand and address inequities so that all people, especially those who have been marginalized, are able to have equitable experiences. Conversations about equity should take the same approach.

SOME EQUITY ORGANIZATIONS & RESOURCES WE TRUST

- [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [The 519](#)
- [Egale](#)
- [Feminuity](#)
- [The Get Real Movement](#)

MORE HELPFUL TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT EQUITY



Whether you are engaging in conversations about equity at work, at home, or in community spaces, these practices can help ensure discussions are productive:

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

- Enter discussions with the goal of developing shared understandings about equity and the importance equity work
- Avoid using labels like ‘good’ or ‘bad’ to describe people based on (in)equitable behaviours; instead, identify and share opportunities for more equitable actions
- Be kind but firm in acknowledging the feelings of those struggling to accept equity efforts while clarifying that those emotions do not exempt them from equitable behaviour
- Encourage critical reflection by exploring ways to reframe or replace policies, practices, or cultural norms that have been shown to be inequitable