**Brief Definitions of Justice and Community Action terms**

Assembled by Tegan Kehoe, adapted from NEMA 2016 session “Museums at the Intersections”

Note: These words have been chosen because we feel that they help to provide a useful framework for conversations, and because they come up in resources you may find (or may help you find resources). It’s not an exhaustive list.

**Intersectionality**

Different social issues affect one another. More specifically, a way of looking at community and justice issues, rooted in social science. While the ideas intersectionality covers have been around longer, they were first brought together under one word in the 1980s by civil rights activist, legal scholar and critical race theory scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Intersectionality describes the fact that, for example, a white woman and a black woman are going to have different experiences, even though they share some of the experiences of being a woman in our society, because both race and gender affect their lives.

**Anti-oppression work**

Any advocacy or change that works against the “-isms” and “-phobias” (racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, etc), especially in combination rather than in isolation from one another. Anti-oppression has the connotation of being anti-paternalistic and in favor of people having their own say in how they are treated, and in favor of equity rather than simply equality.

**Equity**

Has meanings in finance, law, and community justice senses. In community justice, it means fairness, encompassing situations where equality is fair, and situations where you need something more than equality to be fair. An oversimplified example is museum admission: equality is charging everyone the same price, equity is offering a discount to low-income families, and removing a barrier would be not charging admission.

The cartoon with equality and equity, deconstructed:


**Structural inequities**

The “isms” and “phobias” discussed above cause harm, not solely because a number of individuals have prejudiced views and treat others poorly. They cause harm to people because they are, often to a larger extent than we realize, baked into how our society works. They are de facto, and sometimes de jure, institutionalized. (De jure: the opposite of de facto, put in place by law rather than custom)
**Microaggression**
Anything that wouldn’t necessarily be a problem or a big deal in a vacuum, but is harmful because of the context of structural problems it’s a part of. This could be an insult that’s meant as a joke, an offhand comment based on a stereotype, or an assumption that ignores people’s lived experience.

To use a simplified example, if your history presentations start with “Everyone here remembers learning about the Battle of Bunker Hill in 4th Grade,” that might not be hurtful towards immigrants in your town who didn’t go to 4th grade in the US, unless your town is currently experiencing a debate about the role of immigration or displaying a lot of anti-immigrant sentiment, and then it would be a reminder that people see them as outsiders.

**Privilege**
Everyday advantages that we have because of structural imbalances of power. Many people credit W.E.B. DuBois with first identifying the social role of these advantage. Everyone has some privilege, although some have more than others. Not all privilege is bad, but it can frequently make it harder for us to see past our own experiences.

Another term you’ll hear is “the invisible knapsack,” which is a metaphor for privilege originated by feminist and anti-racist educator Peggy McIntosh, from an essay in which she lists advantages she carries with her as a white woman. For the most part, they aren’t things to apologize for or that white people shouldn't have, they’re things that all people should have, for example, “I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.” But, some of the advantages of privilege are being able to ignore certain justice issues without personal consequences.

**Accessibility**
Sometimes used in museums to mean “approachability,” but in community justice circles, accessibility is almost always about whether people with various disabilities and abilities are able to get inside, use, and fully participate in the same things abled people can. Sometimes the term accessibility is used to talk about other barriers, such as financial accessibility.

“ADA” (as in, the Americans with Disabilities Act) is sometimes used as a shorthand for accessibility, but it isn’t a good idea to use these interchangeably. The ADA tends towards providing a bare-minimum standard, mandating that everyone can get inside and that safety measures and restrooms are accessible, but in most cases it doesn’t say anything about whether anything is actually useable to people once they’re in the door.