

# EQUITY TOOLKIT

A RESOURCE GUIDE



COMPILED BY

*Project*  *FINE*

*Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education*



# INTRODUCTION

Diversity, equity and inclusion are often discussed in our institutions, agencies and businesses. In Southeastern Minnesota, our population has become increasingly ethnically diverse and we anticipate that trend will continue. Newcomers are attracted to the opportunities for employment, education and safety that we offer and are looking to build a life in our communities. This growing diverse population brings both opportunities and challenges, and we often need to adjust our approach to foster effective engagement.

It is our hope that this toolkit will provide practical resources you can utilize to build understanding and evaluate your practices and policies to ensure that they are equitable and effective. This is not a comprehensive list, but a starting place on your journey to building inclusion. There are many more resources available that are not included in this guide, but it is our intention that this will serve as a starting point. If you'd like any additional information please contact us at [info@projectfine.org](mailto:info@projectfine.org).

# ABOUT PROJECT FINE

Project FINE (Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education) is a nonprofit organization that has been serving Winona County and the surrounding area since 1990. We serve as a connection point for refugees and immigrants, helping build contributing individuals, healthy families and a stronger, more respectful community for all. Our work is two-fold: we provide educational programming and services to assist refugees and immigrants as they build a new life in our community; and we provide opportunities to develop cross-cultural relationships and gain a greater understanding of diversity in our community. To learn more, visit [www.projectfine.org](http://www.projectfine.org)

**Our Mission:** to strengthen and enrich our community by facilitating the integration of people who are ethnically diverse.

**Our Vision:** to create a respectful and sensitive community.

**Our Values:**

- We work to build bridges across cultures.
- We work to build respect and trust in the community.
- We carry out our work with passion.
- We honor partnership and collaboration.

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# GETTING STARTED

Choosing where to begin on the path to a more inclusive workplace, school, business or community can be a daunting task. Working to build equity and inclusion is more relevant than ever as our interactions with individuals from other countries becomes more common. There are many different approaches to this work, and our advice comes from our experience serving refugee and immigrant populations and developing partnerships across sectors.

Diversity, equity and inclusion are often used interchangeably, but each is a distinct concept. We have included a wonderful resource on page 4 that provides definitions of each. The best advice we can give when working to further equity and inclusion is to be open-minded, sincere and ready for change. Whenever we learn about a new concept, especially one that involves reflection and reaction, it can be challenging but the benefits are plentiful. Having a sincere and open approach will foster growth. Developing concrete goals and a plan of action are also important to ensure progress and help measure accomplishments.

To begin, take time to consider your specific gaps, challenges or opportunities. This can be difficult to identify from within, and using tools such as a self assessment, policy checklist or other resources included in this guide can help that process. Or, you may already have specific areas you'd like to improve such as increasing your overall cultural competency or learning about a specific cultural group to be able to better serve their needs.

Once you have defined goals, create a timeline and budget. Pursuing this type of work takes time and it can be more personal than other types of training because it often involves self-reflection and realization. Plan a little extra time for your team to process, either together or individually, after training sessions or assessments. Scheduling time for your team to discuss their experiences and perspective can strengthen your learning and help increase buy-in.

Having a team or committee of people who will champion your diversity, equity and inclusion work is very beneficial. The role of this group can be to track progress toward your goals, select trainings or other educational resources, and provide motivation for their peers. They can also provide accountability and model equitable and inclusive practices by reviewing your action plan to ensure these concepts are built into your process and activities.

Team Dynamics ([teamdynamicsmn.com](http://teamdynamicsmn.com)) has several questions to consider to help you build these concepts into your plan (a full list is available on their website).

Diversity questions to ask your team:

What are the differences making a difference here and now?

Which perspectives or lived experiences are we missing or not considering?

Equity questions to ask your team:

How might we find out what different people need?

How could we better support participation from our team?

Inclusion questions to ask your team:

What could we do to ensure that each person gets to contribute?

In what ways are we willing to be changed by new perspectives?

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION: *definitions + distinctions*

Language in the fields of racial and gender equity are regularly evolving. Understanding key terms can prove helpful when working to develop strategies, standards, and practices that align with our most deeply held values. **Diversity, equity, and inclusion are each distinct concepts.** Understanding each element can help you forge a path and a plan to honor and support the unique contributions that each of your team members can make. Rather than jumble a conversation about the impacts of our identities on our lives by using an acronym (ex. DEI or EDI), we encourage learners and leaders to talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion as distinct and related concepts each with their own specific goals.



### DIVERSITY:

The fact of human difference. The mix. Identities present. A mix of identities present does not automatically result in equity. Whenever two people are present, a “diversity” of identities is present. But not every aspect of our mix of identities has the same impact. For example, our difference in race is more impactful than our difference in height or hair color when it comes to the social determinants of health.

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### EQUITY:

Acknowledgment that we do not start on a level playing field. Achieving equity would mean that our outcomes were no longer predictable by identity group.



Different people have different needs. An equity framework encourages creativity – what solutions are required and possible? Striving towards equity encourages us to acknowledge the realities of power dynamics and the truth about the ways in which each of us face barriers and are afforded opportunities. Instead of one-size-fits all solutions, strive to learn about and meet the distinct needs of your team.

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### INCLUSION:

Inclusion is about decision-making and willingness to actually change policies, protocols, and practices. How difference is utilized as an asset when we make decisions.

Inclusion is about how we are all willing to do things differently based on the additional perspectives, lived experiences, and ideas that our friends and colleagues contribute. Inclusion is not about simply having “a seat at the table.” If I have a need that you don’t have, are you still willing to make sure my need gets met so I can be my best self for our team?

Measuring inclusion is about people from non-dominant and target identity groups self-reporting that their contributions were considered.



# SELF-ASSESSMENT

Conducting a self-assessment can help identify areas for growth and give you a picture of where your team and organization is currently. There are many self-assessment tools available online and we have also included one developed by Project FINE for both an organizational and a self-assessment.

Online self-assessment resources:

<https://www.d5coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/DEI-Self-Assessment-10.28.13.pdf>

[http://culturesect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/diversity\\_assessment\\_tool.pdf](http://culturesect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/diversity_assessment_tool.pdf)

<https://www.blcf.org.uk/assets/pdfs/DEI-Self-assessment.pdf>

## Project FINE's Organizational Assessment

Statements	Yes	Somewhat	No
1. Do you have a clear mission statement of the importance of providing culturally competent service and support?			
2. Do you have policies and procedures that support and incorporate cultural diversity in the delivery of services to culturally and linguistically diverse groups?			
3. Do you have basic demographic information (e.g. ethnicity, primary language spoken) to assist and determine the cultural and linguistic needs of the people being served?			
4. Does your administration and managers demonstrate a commitment to developing and maintaining a culturally diverse workforce?			
5. Does your organization regularly examine your structure, policies, procedures, and practices that contribute to the provisions of culturally competent services and support?			
6. Administrators and staff are interested in and supportive of cultural diversity.			
7. The organization has and enforces policies against discrimination and harassment.			
8. Do your recruitment and hiring processes are support building a diverse staff?			
9. Have you arranged to provide materials and services in other languages for those who have limited English proficiency (e.g. brochures, marketing materials, forms)?			
10. Have you identified and used community resources that can exchange information and provide services to diverse clients?			
11. Is there a system in place to reward and recognize employee efforts to provide culturally appropriate services and supports?			
12. Are employees or clients aware of how to communicate complaints or grievances?			
13. The organization encourages staff to attend or participate in cultural activities.			
14. Is there a protocol available to respond to complaints of clients?			
15. Do you conduct intentional outreach to recruiting staff of different cultures?			
16. Does the organization encourage to draw on the expertise of people of different cultures to provide services to individuals of those backgrounds?			
17. The organization encourages staff to become aware of their own culture.			
18. Staff understand and respect the communication and other behavioral implications of a client's culture.			
19. The organization values client feedback on its services and its cultural competence.			

## Project FINE's Self-Assessment

The following survey has been developed to help your agency better understand the working environment and climate of the organization. Your completion of this survey will help your organization better understand its employees' needs and concerns. All administrators and staff members have received this survey, and are asked to take a few minutes to complete it.

Participation is voluntary. Your responses to this survey will remain anonymous.

Statements	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always
1. I treat all of my clients and co-workers with respect for their culture, even though it may be different from my own.			
2. It is acceptable to impose my beliefs and value system onto my clients, coworkers, and their family members.			
3. I think about my own cultural diversity and how it affects my relationships.			
4. I understand the dimensions of culture that shape human behavior.			
5. I believe that it is acceptable to speak a language other than English.			
6. I am driven to respond to others' insensitive comments or behaviors.			
7. I am comfortable giving constructive criticism to someone of another race and/or ethnicity.			
8. I have spent significant time in my life interacting and getting to know a person (s) who comes from a vastly different background than mine.			
9. I usually have a preset point of view of different cultures.			
10. It bothers me to see people discriminated against because of age, gender, race, or any other diversity dimension.			
11. Comparing cultural norms inside the United States and beyond is interesting to me.			
12. I understand the difference between a communication disability and a communication difference.			
13. I understand that people who have limited English skills and/or accents have the same intellectual capacity as anyone else.			
14. I give equal attention to all those I work with regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status, or physical ability.			
15. I am comfortable interacting with people who have different cultural identities.			
16. I evaluate my own use of language to see if I use terms or phrases that are degrading or harmful to another group.			
17. I'm comfortable with my own cultural biases.			
18. I value a wide range of views and attitudes.			
19. I can create a non-threatening, high trust working environment.			
20. I do not participate in insensitive comments or behaviors.			
21. I respect the various family structures of those I serve (e.g. divorced parents, grandparents as caretakers, etc.)			

# LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

There are many wonderful resources for training and education related to diversity, equity and inclusion. We have included information about several below. This is not an exhaustive list, however it includes resources available in our area and those that Project FINE has utilized and found to be valuable.

## Intercultural Development Inventory© (IDI©)

The IDI© is a tool that can be used to assess intercultural competence (the ability to shift perspective and adapt to cultural differences and commonalities). It consists of a 50-item questionnaire that asks you to reflect on your own experiences, culture and mindset. The IDI© is meant to be a starting point on a journey towards intercultural competence and is a highly effective tool. Although the assessment is individual, it is typically taken by a group at the same time and results are shared via de-briefs with both the group and the individual. The IDI© helps to build understanding of your perspective and how you view others, and will also provide insight into the perspectives of other members of your team so you can support each other on your journey. They also have an Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory© available, which can be used to improve communication and conflict resolution across cultures. Project FINE staff are trained as qualified administrators of the IDI©. Contact Project FINE for more information or visit [www.idiinventory.com](http://www.idiinventory.com).

## Winona State University Office of Equity & Inclusive Excellence

The Office of Equity and Inclusive Excellence is dedicated to creating a more welcoming, equitable and just university. In addition to providing opportunities for students, they sponsor events to bring members of the WSU community together to raise awareness of injustices, respond to current issues, and celebrate the cultures across our campus and in our community. These events are open to everyone, and we invite you to attend to help expand your perspectives. Most events are free of charge - to learn more about their office or current schedule of events, visit [www.winona.edu/equity/default.asp](http://www.winona.edu/equity/default.asp)

## Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

This statewide organization provides resources and training primarily related to nonprofit practices, however they do offer several events each year that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion. Most events are available in an online format and have a registration fee. To learn more, visit [www.minnesotanonprofits.org/events](http://www.minnesotanonprofits.org/events)

## Online Courses

There are many resources available online to further your understanding. Coursera and FutureLearn are two sites that have offerings related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Project FINE staff have participated in several of these courses, including Voices of Social Change, Race & Cultural Diversity in American Life & History, Understanding Diversity & Inclusion and Developing Your Cultural Intelligence. They follow a typical university-level course format, with video lectures, tests and homework. We have found the courses to be most effective when paired with time for your team to discuss and reflect together.

## Poverty Institute

While this training does not directly focus on diverse populations, it is a wonderful resource to deepen your understanding of poverty and its effects on people's lives. The training builds understanding of poverty and helps build skills to effectively eradicate its impacts. We recommend this training, as it provides insight into the challenges faced by those in poverty and presents strategies to build more inclusive and equitable programs, services, schools and businesses. There is a fee and more information is available at [www.combarriers.com/povertyinstitute](http://www.combarriers.com/povertyinstitute)

## Project FINE

In addition to the resources on the previous page, Project FINE also provides Diversity Training for businesses, schools, organizations and service providers. Training sessions are flexible and designed to meet the specific needs of each requesting agency. We have included additional information below about Diversity Training options and our most commonly requested presentations.

# Project FINE

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## Diversity Training Options

Diversity is the encouragement and inclusion of each person's ideas, perspectives and life experiences. As our world becomes increasingly global, the need to value and embrace all individuals has become essential to the success of our businesses and organizations. Project FINE's Diversity Training sessions offer opportunities to grow both professionally and personally through education, discussion and dialog.

Training sessions are customized to meet your needs, and will help develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to thrive in diverse communities. Several of our training options are outlined below and additional presentations are available. We suggest a minimum of two hours per session to allow for interaction and conversation. For additional information, please contact Fatima Said, Executive Director at 507-452-4100 or [fatimas@projectfine.org](mailto:fatimas@projectfine.org).

### ***Building a Cultural Competency***

This presentation provides an overview of culture, including "What is Culture", values & stereotypes, implicit bias and how our experiences affect our perspective. We will also provide tips for interacting with other cultures, providing a welcoming environment, and utilizing interpreting services.

### ***Newcomers and You: Working Effectively with Immigrants and Refugees***

Through this training, staff will learn how to recognize cultural differences and interact with customers and co-workers in a respectful and inclusive manner. We will also cover best practices for cross-cultural customer service and overcoming communication barriers.

### ***Creating an Inclusive Workplace***

Recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce can be a wonderful asset for your organization. This presentation begins with a short reflection on workplace culture, existing barriers and potential solutions. Participants are then encouraged to dig deeper and discover the implications and benefits of developing a culturally competent organization.

### ***Specific Cultural Presentations***

As diversity in our community continues to grow, there is an increasing need for training on specific cultural and ethnic groups. Through cultural presentations, attendees will learn about the heritage, traditions and values of a specific group. Sessions also include tips to communicate and work effectively with diverse individuals.

# WORKPLACE PRACTICES

Project FINE has been addressing workforce issues for many years, partnering with employers to meet these needs and provide information and resources. Please note that the advice and best practices included below are specific to our experience of working with refugee and immigrant populations, however the basic principles can increase access for other marginalized populations.

## Pre-Hiring

Before pursuing a strategy to recruit diverse employees, it is beneficial to examine your own policies and practices to ensure your work environment and culture are welcoming and inclusive. We recommend developing an internal Equity Policy (see sample on next page) and reviewing your current policies using an equity lens. This review consists of examining your policies to examine their potential impact, ensure that language and procedures are inclusive, and make changes if necessary. Project FINE can assist with this process and there are also online resources such as: <https://www.minnstate.edu/system/equity/docs/Equity-Lens-to-Policy-Review1.pdf>  
[https://haas.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/EGAL\\_DEIChecklist.pdf](https://haas.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/EGAL_DEIChecklist.pdf)

## Hiring

Traditional methods of recruiting such as newspaper ads, social media and placement agencies are often not as effective for diverse populations, especially those with limited English language skills. We have found that word-of-mouth or direct referrals are the most effective method of outreach to diverse populations. Working with those who have existing relationships is a wonderful way to share information about positions and requirements. Project FINE has assisted many employers to recruit local refugee and immigrant populations with much success. Encouraging current diverse employees to share with their family and friends also works well. Increasing access by providing interpreters for your application, interview and screening processes is also an effective strategy.

## Training

During the orientation and training process, we recommend providing interpreters and to plan for additional time for hands-on demonstration and learning. Some local employers have created teams or groups of employees who speak the same language so they can communicate and learn from each other. Utilizing employees who are bi-lingual can be effective for communicating information about specific job duties or changes. When meeting with employees to discuss issues related to Human Resources, personnel conflicts or complaints, outside interpreters should be used to maintain appropriate boundaries between co-workers and management.

## Retention

After you have hired and trained employees, there are several strategies that we have found to be effective for retention. Examining your internal culture and environment to ensure that new employees feel welcomed and appreciated is the first step. You may need to provide training for current employees or express your leadership's firm commitment to inclusion to begin shifting this internal culture. Creating a schedule for ongoing communication is also beneficial - one local employer utilizes interpreters for each of their mandatory trainings and also hosts quarterly "town hall" meetings with their CEO, leadership and employees. During these meetings, they share updates and provide an opportunity for employees to share ideas or concerns.

# Project FINE

*Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education*

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## Equity Policy

### I. Policy Statement

Project FINE is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in principle and practice, recognizing that they are central to our current and future success. We value and celebrate the unique experiences, characteristics and perspectives that make each person who they are. We also recognize the importance of respecting all voices in the community and working to ensure that our policies, systems and services are equitable, inclusive and accessible.

### II. Definitions

- a. Equity is an approach that ensures everyone has access to the same opportunities, while recognizing that not everyone starts from the same place because of barriers and challenges in our systems and society. It is a process that acknowledges uneven starting places and seeks to correct the imbalance. Diversity and inclusion are outcomes, but equity is an intentional process to ensure fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people.
- b. Diversity encompasses all the characteristics that make one individual or group different from another, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, physical appearance, perspectives, and values. We recognize that individuals affiliate with multiple identities.
- c. Inclusion is the act of creating an environment in which any individual or group can feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.

### III. Procedures

Project FINE shall abide by the following action items to further equity in our organization:

- a. Develop policies and practices that present opportunities to demonstrate our commitment to equity.
- b. Pursue cultural competency by providing learning opportunities for staff and board members.
- c. Provide opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to share their thoughts, ideas and contribute their skills and experience to help us respond effectively to community needs.
- d. Identify and address barriers to participation in our programs, services or operations.
- e. All eligible persons shall have equal opportunity for employment and advancement on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for work.
- f. Foster an inclusive environment that values the unique contributions of all individuals so that we can collectively and effectively further our organizational mission and vision.

# ENGAGING CONSTITUENTS

When pursuing improvements in diversity, equity and inclusion, many businesses and organizations recognize the need for deeper engagement of constituents as one of their goals. This can be very valuable, providing accountability and deepening the relationship between leadership, staff and those served.

Project FINE developed an advisory group in 2018, made up of 17 refugees and immigrants from Winona, Goodview, Rollingstone, Lewiston and Altura and in 2021 created a second advisory group of refugees and immigrants from St. Charles. These advisory groups meet monthly in both locations, providing feedback on the effectiveness of our programming and insight into emerging needs in the community. Advisory group members are also ambassadors of our organization, encouraging others to get involved. In addition, they have collaborated with staff on several special projects, including community dialogues, participating in a visit by the Minnesota House of Representatives and working with Winona's Creative Laureate to develop a series of murals focused on cultural identity. The advisory group has also served as an effective model for cross-cultural integration, as refugees and immigrants from different backgrounds come together to share ideas and develop relationships with each other.

Based on our experience working with our advisory group, we have developed a checklist of steps to help you form a constituent group, as well as some best practices to build equity and inclusion into the group activities and dynamic. Your constituent group may function differently based on your specific goals, but this is meant to serve as a starting point for consideration before forming a group or asking constituents to participate. Two types of constituent groups, consultative and transformational, are described below, and the following page includes a series of questions to consider before selecting which type of group you'd like to convene.

## Two Types of Constituent Groups

While each constituent group is as unique as those you serve, with varying needs, goals and levels of engagement, there are two main reasons they are formed: for consultation or for transformation. Either type of group can be a valuable resource depending on what you'd like to accomplish (see questions on next page for more information).

### Consultative Groups

This type of group provides feedback or advice related to programs, services, specific projects, or even the organization as a whole. It may be convened for a set time period and is primarily designed to provide a mechanism for reflection, recommendations or advice. Usually, information collected from this type of group is used for reporting or to affect changes that are made by staff or leadership.

### Transformational Groups

This type of group may also serve to offer feedback or advice, but the organizational response to the feedback is different. Organizations that convene transformational groups address recommendations by allowing the group to choose a course of action. There is less organizational control with this type of group, but also a greater opportunity for changes that will have a lasting effect on constituents.

When planning a constituent group, you should have clear goals that support the development of positive trusting relationships and respect the experiences and opinions of members. Discuss the following questions with your team to help develop your constituent group. The questions are meant to serve as a starting point and are not exhaustive. If you are not sure where to start, there are online resources available, or contact Project FINE to learn more about how we can help.

1. Why do we want to engage constituents?

\_\_\_ Feedback or advice about how you can improve (consultative), or to  
\_\_\_ Allow the group to develop changes and be in control (transformative), or

2. Who would we like involved?

Are there specific demographics or groups? \_\_\_\_\_

Participants of a specific program or service? \_\_\_\_\_

3. How will you engage constituents?

What is your ideal constituent group size? \_\_\_\_\_

What existing relationships to you have with your target members from question 2?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Will that be enough for a group? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, what strategies will you use to develop those relationships? People are more likely to participate if there is a basis of trust and if they feel you value their input and experience.

\_\_\_\_\_ How will you invite potential group members? How do they prefer to be contacted?  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What are their barriers to involvement?

What could get in the way of their participation? Think about transportation/child care/language access/meeting time and place/meeting format/stipends or incentives.

\_\_\_\_\_ How can you address those barriers?  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What cultural norms and values need to be taken into account?

There are many cultural expectations or norms that are not visible or obvious. Working with a cultural consultant or a staff member or constituent who represents the demographics you want to engage can help you build cultural competency and ensure constituents comfort.

Cultural norms we are aware of \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural norms we should ask about or address \_\_\_\_\_

6. How can we make people feel welcome and safe?

Plan out your meeting, beginning with room layout, considering these questions:

Does anyone need to be close to childcare? Have mobility, vision or hearing challenges? If using interpreters, should those who speak the same language be seated together? Will someone take notes, if so who and where will they be placed?

Start out the meeting by asking the group to introduce themselves or have an icebreaker.

Empower the group to create their own guidelines for interaction (ground rules).

7. Who will begin the conversation? Who will keep it going?

If your group is consultative, the conversation will likely be more formal and led by staff.

If transformational, it is still helpful to have an outline or topics to use as a starting point.

8. What strategies can we use for continued engagement?

How will you maintain contact with the group \_\_\_\_\_

How will you report progress to the group \_\_\_\_\_



