



Washtenaw Literacy Three-Year Equity Plan

A strategic approach to addressing diversity,
accessibility, and inclusion

2025-2028

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Executive Summary

Washtenaw Literacy is excited to implement this three-year Equity Plan to ensure that all adults in Washtenaw County have equitable access to literacy resources and support and that we serve everyone in need. By prioritizing DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), we aim to create a welcoming and inclusive environment that respects and values the diverse experiences of our learners. We know that many adult learners did not receive the attention and support they needed for literacy success through traditional educational systems due to institutional racism, classism, homophobia, and lack of individualized attention to learning challenges. Our ESL (English as a Second Language) learners are transitioning to a new country and culture, and many experience the stigma, judgment, and discrimination of xenophobia. This plan will guide our efforts to help learners move beyond these systemic barriers, address their unique needs, enhance our programming, and foster a culture of belonging. Ultimately, embracing diversity and promoting equity enriches our organization and the community and improves literacy outcomes for everyone we serve.

We broke the plan into three areas: People, Programming, and Processes. Our People area includes several goals related to increasing the diversity of our tutors, Board of Directors (BOD), and staff and reaching unrepresented learners. It also sets goals for growing our internal expertise through expanded training and educational activities. Our Program area includes goals around learner involvement in reviewing program policies and expanding opportunities for their participation throughout the organization. The Process area focuses on reviewing and updating agency policies, e.g., hiring, marketing and outreach, and developing a glossary of terms so that we are all on the same page moving forward. In addition to goals, the plan identifies action steps, assigns responsible individuals or committees to each, and provides outcome measures to maintain accountability.

In addition to the Goals and Action Steps outlined here, we have included links to a one-page overview and the complete detailed plan. For information on data collection, see Appendix A. We are incredibly grateful to all the members of the Washtenaw Literacy community who participated in this process, especially learners

and tutors! Special thanks to Brandon Bond, whose commitment, expertise, and patience were invaluable in creating this plan.

Organizational Information

Mission Statement:

Washtenaw Literacy partners with adult learners to develop their skills and pursue their goals by providing free literacy support through a network of trained volunteer tutors.

Vision/Values Statement:

We believe literacy is a basic human right and the foundation for an equitable, inclusive, and thriving community. We envision a society where everyone has the literacy skills they need to succeed in all aspects of life, including family, education, work, community, and civic participation.

Goals and Action Steps

There are three priority areas: People, Programming, and (Business) Processes.

People Priority Area Summary Statement: To invest in people through outreach, recruitment, and retention processes that increase the involvement and visibility of under-recognized people while providing development and growth opportunities for all.

(Goals are numbered, action steps are lettered)

1. Increase the diversity of Washtenaw Literacy (WL) tutors through inclusive and intentional recruitment and retention of new volunteers within the demographics of age, zip code, and ethnicity. Statistics drawn from the

database will measure the increase of 5% annually in each of the next 3 fiscal years.

- a. Develop and conduct targeted marketing in a myriad of ways through more inclusive methods.
 - b. Conduct targeted marketing in 7 new locations per year.
 - c. Increase the flexibility of the *ABCs of Washtenaw Literacy* and Tutor Training formats to include more asynchronous and self-paced options.
 - d. Collect feedback from existing tutors within the identified target groups about what strategies and relationships we should employ in tutor recruitment and retention.
 - e. Collect feedback from learners about what diversity they want in tutors.
2. Develop fundraising strategies that ethically align with our learner-centric values by the end of fiscal year 2025-2026.
- a. Research a minimum of 10 resources for best practices in ethical storytelling and recruitment of diverse donors/funders.
 - b. Work with the Learner Team to implement best practices in ethical storytelling.
 - c. Implement best practices in our donor recruitment and stewardship by staff and the Development Committee.
 - d. Identify the 5 new opportunities to draw in different donors and deepen the relationship with existing donors.
3. We aim to have representation in as many categories from the Board diversity matrix as possible. Starting immediately, the Executive Committee will review annually so recruitment can be modified when needed.
- a. Create and disseminate the BOD diversity matrix/assessment in June 2024.
 - b. Review results of the diversity matrix within the Executive Committee to identify areas where improvement will be made.
 - c. Identify and implement at least 3 new and intentional recruitment efforts that will likely fill the gaps shown by the diversity matrix.
 - d. Recruit at least one additional learner to the BOD, bringing the total to a minimum of 2.

4. Within the next 3 years, we will support and retain diverse BOD and Committee members within identified demographics through intentional methods.
 - a. Conduct an annual survey for the BOD that evaluates their sense of inclusion and engagement and the effectiveness of the BOD's capacity to be flexible and adaptable.
 - b. Identify and implement up to 3 new and intentional retention efforts that will likely maintain the BOD's flexible and adaptable inclusion practices.
 - c. Ensure learners complete their term by providing adaptable support specific to each learner.
5. Provide a minimum of 15 yearly DEI training opportunities (in-person, virtual, asynchronous) to new and experienced volunteers (BOD, tutors, AmeriCorps members, and learners) and staff.
 - a. Seek non-WL experts to conduct 33% of professional development sessions.
 - b. Hold 5 sessions/semester in combination with training, listening circles, workshops, and Lunch & Learns.
 - c. Do an annual weeklong equity challenge.
 - d. Commit to at least two DEI-focused book groups/year.
 - e. Publicize opportunities for DEI training by trusted partners outside of WL (free or not free).
6. Over the next three years, increase WL's DEI expertise through BOD leadership and partnerships that promote and expand our DEI work.
 - a. Immediately search for DEI leadership for the BOD - Establish internal agency DEI leadership by creating a DEI lead on the Board of Directors (by January 2025) to keep DEI on our radar and oversee the DEI plans.
 - b. Create an inventory and partnerships with 6 organizations that can support providing external expertise and facilitation on conflict resolution and restorative justice efforts.
 - c. Establish a framework for an ad hoc DEI committee, which the BOD DEI lead will facilitate as needed.

*For People goals regarding learners, see Programming priority area.

Programming Priority Area Summary Statement: To foster a culturally sensitive, inclusive environment in all agency activities, including enhancing staff and volunteer expertise, diversifying marketing efforts, and implementing effective progress tracking.

(Goals are numbered, action steps are lettered)

1. Increase marketing to learners in under-represented demographics through trusted community partners identified by learners by 10% each year for the next 3 years.
 - a. Work with learners to identify trusted partners.
 - b. Increase Literacy Referral or Literacy Sensitivity training for partners to 6 per year.
 - c. Send additional mid-semester messages to partners, including marketing/flyers.
2. Create an annual process guaranteeing learner input on all program policies and implementation procedures by June 2025.
 - a. Create a Learner Handbook with feedback opportunities for all learners.
 - b. Build the Learner Team into the annual program policy review and implementation process before changes go to the Board.
 - c. Engage the Learner Team in reading/revising Plain and Inclusive Language versions of policies.
3. By July 2025, implement 3 new methods of presenting information to tutors and the Board regarding learner—and tutor—reported goals, challenges, and accomplishments.
 - a. Post the annual program census to the website.
 - b. Hold "Semester Update" Lunch & Learn to engage tutors.
 - c. Publish relevant Semester Update results in Hello Tutors each semester.
4. With input from the Learner Team, provide 6 new leadership opportunities for learner involvement in Washtenaw Literacy by January 2026.
 - a. Coordinate opportunities for tutors and learners to socialize.
 - b. Increase budget for food, transportation, stipends, and other learner team supports and incentives.

- c. Identify BOD slots for learners.
- d. Transition Stars editing to Learner Team.
- e. Provide training for learners as site coordinators.

*For goals regarding tutors and training, see the People priority area.

Business Process Priority Area Summary Statement: To create, modify, and implement administrative policies and procedures that promote transparency, inclusivity, and fairness while holding ourselves accountable to our invested partners, particularly our learners.

(Goals are numbered, action steps are lettered)

1. In year one, the committees/learner team/staff will conduct a structured review/audit of all agency policies and procedures, with a final review by the DEI consultant to ensure DEI compatibility. Ongoing reviews will be conducted every two years.
 - a. Develop standards of accessibility regarding the ability to locate and understand messaging.
 - b. Using our accessibility standards, review written communication and revise it to be increasingly inclusive, respectful, and accessible through plain language.
 - c. Share Strategic plans, plan evaluations, and monthly financial statements on the website.
 - d. Conduct a semi-annual review of the DEI plan to monitor progress and adjust the plan.
 - e. Create and implement a formal process for tracking how people (tutors, learners, BOD) learn about or are referred to WL.
 - f. Develop standards of data collection and tracking to ensure data availability for future planning.
 - g. Review and update the grievance process—document final steps.
2. Increase staff diversity* through 3 new inclusive processes in every hire that demonstrate continuous improvement and implementation of best DEI practices.
 - a. Diversify methods (electronic, video, flyer, etc.) and posting locations to

- increase the number of diverse applicants.
 - b. Implement an inclusive interview experience to engage applicants with diverse characteristics. Considerations include interview location, interview style, and sending questions beforehand.
 - c. Retain a diverse staff by maintaining job flexibility and ongoing adaptive job crafting and accommodations.
3. Create and implement a multipronged marketing outreach strategy to increase and improve access and inclusion during FY 2024–2025.
- a. Develop and launch a new website.
 - b. Add QR codes to all learner and tutor recruitment and flyers.
 - c. Develop new branding on all materials so materials are cohesive and create brand recognition.
 - d. Engage the learner team in a discussion of terminology used in materials.
 - e. Post in 25 physical locations twice/year.
 - f. Increase electronic distribution to 100 organizations.
 - g. Find 6 new places to distribute materials that will specifically target underserved learners.
 - h. Find 6 new places to distribute materials that will reach diverse volunteers.
 - i. Provide all learner-facing marketing in plain language.
4. By July 2025, create a common language (glossary) for DEI terms in orientation and training for all agency employees (BOD, committee members, staff, learners, tutors).
- a. To inform our glossary, identify sources that align with best DEI and adult literacy practices. Include feedback from invested parties.
 - b. Determine key terms needed for understanding the DEI plan. Create and distribute terms and definitions.
 - c. Create and distribute a full glossary of common language by July 2025.
 - d. Audit existing agency documents to ensure compliance with common language.
 - e. Engage the learner team in the review process to ensure understanding.

- f. Review and update terms as language best practices evolve.

The Equity Plan is ambitious but achievable. All the stakeholders in our Washtenaw Literacy community – learners, tutors, staff, and BOD – will play a role in our ongoing evaluation and success. Guided by the new Board Equity Lead, we will conduct regular reviews of our process and outcomes, and we are committed to incorporating these priorities throughout our work at all levels. This is a good start on a long-term commitment to hold ourselves accountable for our organizational values and vision of a more just and inclusive community. We appreciate everyone's participation and ongoing feedback. 2025 will be an exciting year for Washtenaw Literacy, and this plan will lay important groundwork for our future.

Appendix A:

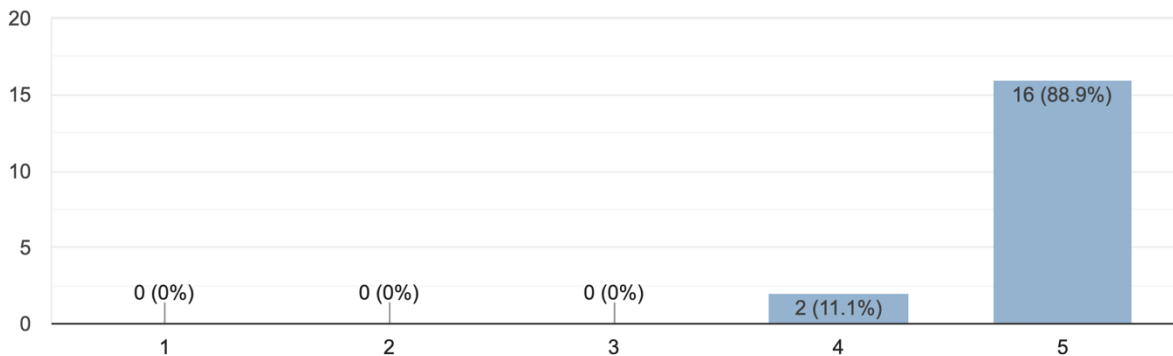
Background, Data Collection Methods, and Accessibility Considerations

Over the last 18 months, a small committee of Washtenaw Literacy staff and Board, led by consultant Brandon Bond, developed this plan through a multi-step process to gain input and feedback from our four stakeholder groups: Learners, Tutors, Staff, and Board. This process included surveys, listening circles, meetings, one-on-one conversations, a literature review, a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), and the identification of best practices.

The team conducted five listening circles with staff, learners, tutors/mentors, and BOD members. We received data from 35 tutor surveys and 18 learner surveys. The team also conducted a literature review about collecting data from ESL and low-literacy learners, best consumer involvement practices, and metrics best used to promote learner empowerment, engagement, and organizational belonging. Limited data were available, but sufficient literature made us feel confident in moving the project forward.

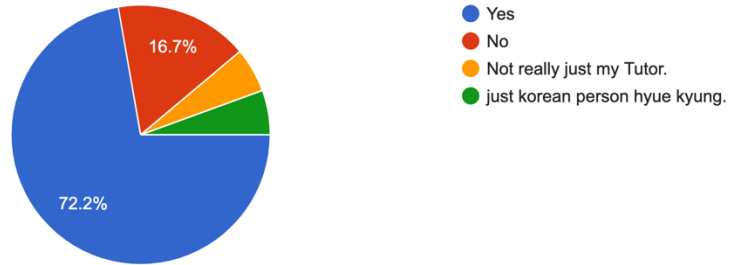
Examples of data collected from the learner survey:

How welcomed do you feel at Washtenaw Literacy?
18 responses



Have you made friends with other learners at Washtenaw Literacy?

18 responses

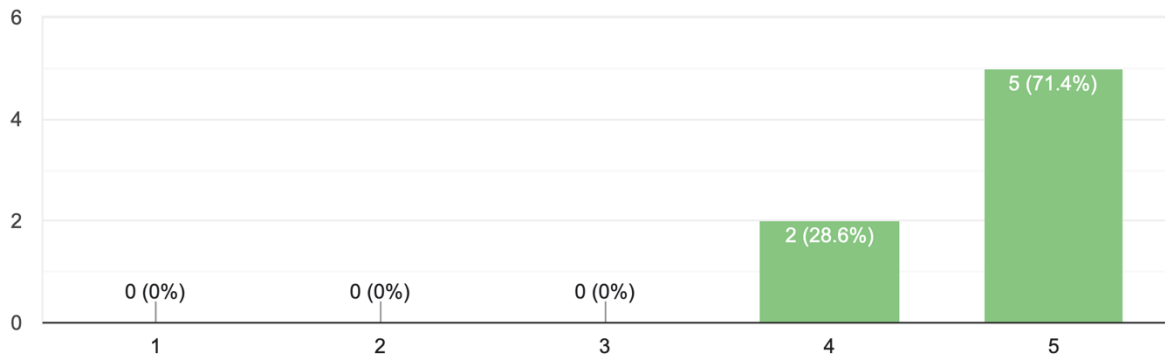


Examples of data collected from the tutor/staff/BOD survey:

BOD:

How welcomed do you feel at WL?

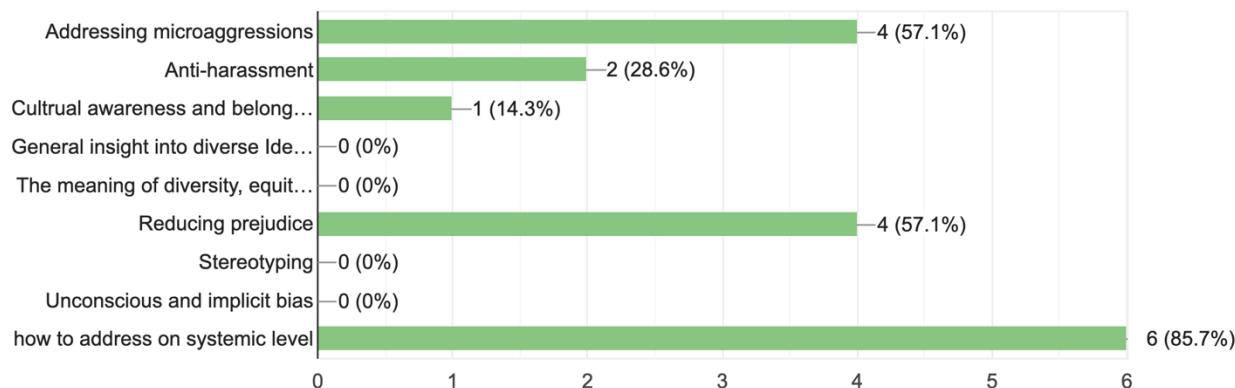
7 responses



Staff:

What DEI topics do you feel least knowledgeable on? (Please check all that apply)

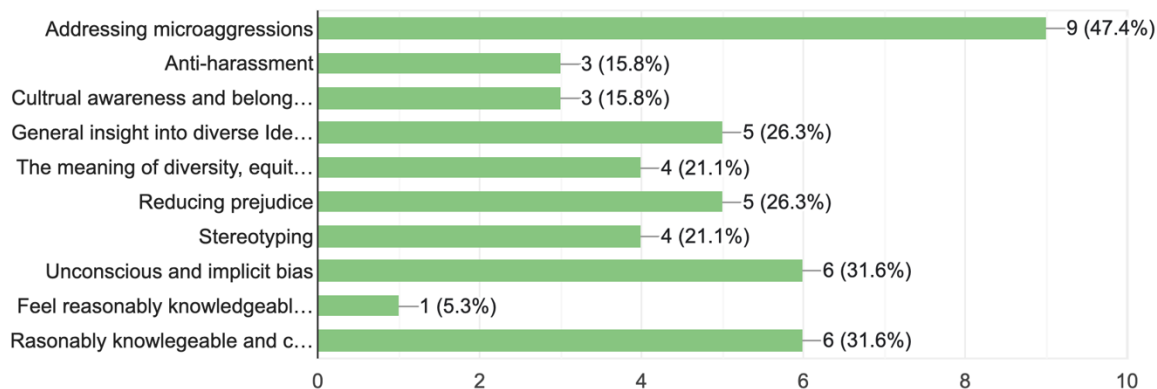
7 responses



Tutors:

What DEI topics do you feel least knowledgeable on? (Please check all that apply)

19 responses



Through these discussions and surveys, we significantly increased our internal expertise, and the process also enabled us to implement some low-hanging policy and procedural changes that we could make immediately, for example, some changes to our hiring practices to make them more accessible.

This plan will be a living document with regular monitoring and updates. There are roles for all stakeholder groups outlined with responsibility for implementation, timelines, and key performance indicators. One of the action items in the plan is to

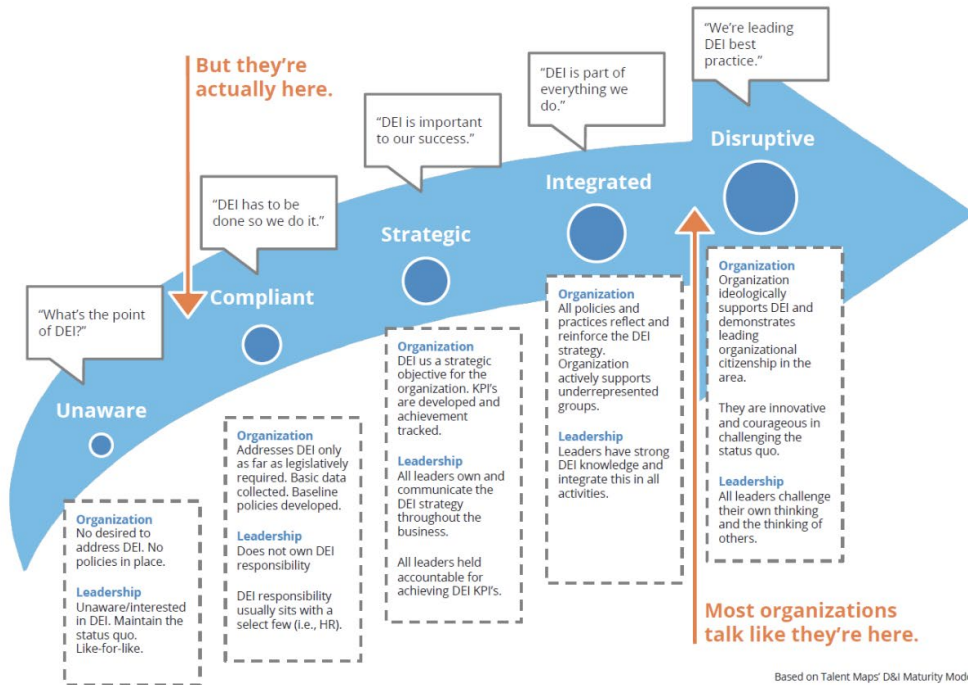
create a standing DEI Lead role on the Board. This Lead will be responsible for monitoring progress in meeting our DEI goals and working with the stakeholder groups as needed to ensure fidelity to the plan. The Board Lead and the DEI planning committee will provide semi-annual reports to all stakeholders with updates on progress and opportunities for further input. These reports will be made at two BOD meetings per year, at two Learner Team meetings per year, and through Hello Tutors, the newsletter, twice a year. The plan will be posted on [the website](#) DEI page under "About."

Appendix B:

Diversity and Inclusion Maturity Model:

[Link to the website](#)

Diversity & Inclusion Maturity Model



Appendix C:

Summary of Listening Circles (Board of Directors and Staff):

Q&A Highlights:

- The population being served strongly needs to have a voice in the organization.
- There is a gap between learners being involved in leadership and conversations.
- This organization should foster a sense of belonging and belief that any individual deserves to have a voice and take up space.
- A DEI-informed organization entails recognizing diverse cultures and perspectives, not just people, and having a structure to respond to issues.
- The organization should maintain a curious and adaptive mindset and create a safe space for addressing problems.
- There's a need for support for sensitive topics, diverse staff, and ongoing DEI training.
- Strategies to achieve DEI goals include offering stipends for low-income tutors and involving the community in program development.

Barriers to DEI Work:

- By not including the folks the organization serves, it lacks the appropriate knowledge necessary to serve the community.
- There is a barrier to accessibility. For example, some tutors do not have a car.
- There are great conversations with a lot of ideas but no formal direction of action.
- There is a struggle to reach people in our community who could be served but are not currently.
- The organization is now tackling difficult issues and needs structural direction to turn ideas into action.
- Part-time staff face limitations in communication and time.

- Structural issues and funding disparities affect DEI efforts.
- Assumptions about people based on characteristics hinder DEI progress.
- The focus should be on qualifications and diversity of experiences, not just visual diversity.

What Staff and Learners Should Know:

- A strong emphasis that their voices and opinions are valued, heard, and needed.
- The learners are the stakeholders of the organization.
- The BOD is grateful for honest feedback.
- Their voices deserve to be heard and to have the space and microphone to speak.
- The BOD is committed and wants to get it right, even though they do not always.

Considerations for Leadership and Board of Directors (BOD):

- Address structural issues, such as funding disparities, to facilitate DEI work.
- Ensure that diversity efforts consider all layers, not just surface-level diversity.
- Prioritize mentorship, training, and intentional hiring for diverse staff and BOD members.
- Empower diverse voices, even if they may not bring in as much funding.
- Focus on diversifying both tutors and learners and provide training for tutors.

Future Hopes for DEI at WL:

- DEI is represented across our groups – staff, learners, BOD, and donor base.
- Washtenaw Literacy is an example of a DEI-oriented organization.
- DEI efforts are innate in all actions.
- Everyone feels comfortable and welcome to walk into any room.
- Seek community partnerships to diversify tutors and learners.
- Highlight the importance of funding for effective DEI work.

- Collaborative efforts, diverse board leadership, and unification are strategies that have shown promise.

Appendix D:



Three Year Equity Plan

2025 - 2028

We commit to the strategic integration of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in all agency functions.

Priority Areas	Summary Statements
#1 People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in people through outreach, recruitment, and retention processes.• Increase the involvement and visibility of under-recognized people.• Provide development and growth opportunities for all.
#2 Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster a culturally sensitive, inclusive environment in all agency activities.• Enhance staff and volunteer expertise, diversify marketing efforts, and implement effective progress tracking.
#3 Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create, modify, and implement administrative policies and procedures that promote transparency, inclusivity, and fairness.• Hold ourselves accountable to our invested partners, particularly our learners.



Want to learn more?
info@WashtenawLiteracy.org

[Link to full report](#)

Appendix E:

[Link to the full Equity Plan](#)

Appendix F:

Glossary

Diversity: The presence of differences within a given group or setting. It can include such demographics as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, etc.

Equity: Ensuring fair treatment, opportunities, and advancement for all individuals, addressing imbalances and systemic barriers.

Inclusion: Creating environments where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued.

Accessibility: The practice of designing products, services, and environments so that they are usable by everyone, including people with disabilities. In the context of communication, it means ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, can access and understand information.

Under-Represented People: Groups of individuals who have historically had less visibility or influence in society, institutions, or industries. This may include racial or ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others who face barriers to full participation or recognition.

The Learner Team: A group of Washtenaw Literacy learners (anyone may join at any time) who meet monthly to plan activities, practice skills, provide input and feedback to Washtenaw Literacy, and assist by telling their stories at WL events.

Board of Directors (BOD): The group of individuals who oversee the financial and legal governance of Washtenaw Literacy, set strategic direction, and manage executive leadership. Our Board has several standing committees, including Executive, Finance, Marketing, and Development (fundraising).

Inclusive Language: The use of language that reduces bias, stereotypes, or exclusion based on characteristics such as race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.

Cultural Sensitivity: Awareness and respect for the differences in values, norms, and practices of various cultures. It involves recognizing that people from diverse backgrounds may have different beliefs, customs, and experiences and adjusting behavior or communication to accommodate and respect those differences.

Plain Language: Clear, straightforward, and easy-to-understand communication. It avoids complex terms, jargon, and overly technical language, aiming to make information accessible to a broad audience, including people with varying literacy levels.

Affinity Group: A group formed around a shared identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) to provide support and advocacy.