



## Our community statement

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Our vision - *Everyone who lives here thrives* - is the essence of our equity statement. It is our north star. Our commitment means we continually examine our practices, policies and ways of being to assess whether our intentions align with our impacts. If not, we adjust. And if need be, we do all that we can to make right our wrongs.

We are committed to incorporating the insights and perspectives of our neighbors, particularly those placed furthest from opportunity, so that every aspect of our work - from grantmaking to practices and policy work, investments and beyond - reflect our values and further our vision.

## The underpinnings

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We respect the dignity and fundamental worth of every human. We appreciate all that each person, if properly resourced and given the opportunity, can contribute to the community. We also recognize that everyone does not start from the same place. Each person's circumstances – social origins, characteristics, resources, experiences, current position in society - vary and that has an impact on their prospects in life. Individual circumstances can determine health outcomes, economic prospects and even life expectancy. That means multiple factors over which people have no control can set them on a path that does not reflect their potential or their aspirations and does not even acknowledge their inherent worth.

That is not right.

A person's race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, socioeconomic class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age, geography, and other characteristics should not chart their course in life.

When people are far from opportunity, it is generally the result of design. Sometimes there is evidence of design motivations. Absent evidence, we can't know what was in the minds of those who designed any of our systems. What we can determine is the consequences of many of those design choices. Systems set up – intentionally or otherwise – to advantage some automatically disadvantage others. Benefits like Social Security that are generally thought of as universal originally excluded almost half the U.S. workforce because agricultural and domestic workers were not covered by the program until the mid-1900s. And while Social Security was established generations ago, there is ample research demonstrating lower incomes often have negative impacts across multiple generations.

The communities of Whatcom County are made up of a host of different experiences and perspectives which is part of what makes this a great place. It can also make it difficult to communicate and, more importantly, to connect. For some people, the word 'equity' conjures images of fairness and opportunity. For others it connotes the potential loss of resources or even power. To quote *Miami Sound Machine*, sometimes the words get in the way. That is why we try to bring the conversation back to the basics. Back to simple ideas that most people agree on: mutual respect, shared values and hopes for families and communities.

## For our part, we ask ourselves questions that help us keep our eye on the north star:

- What are the intended outcomes, and do they support fairness and belonging?
- Whose voices and perspectives are included? Who is not included and should be?
- Who is most impacted? Do they have voice, agency and power in this situation?
- What might be unintended outcomes? How might we mitigate them?
- How will we communicate this decision in a culturally responsive and equitable way?
- How did this decision increase (or decrease) equity and inclusion?
- If we erred, what can we do to make things right or at least better?

## What we mean

The following terms are defined based on the Whatcom Community Foundation's current understanding and use. We recognize that language evolves, and language can hold different meanings for different groups, depending on age, experience and other factors. We commit to continuing to connect with communities across Whatcom County to seek feedback, stay informed and evolve our understanding and use of these terms based on our ongoing learning.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** The design of products, devices, services, vehicles, or environments to be usable by people with disabilities. *Accessibility removes barriers and creates opportunities to benefit from a system or entity.*

**BELONGING:** People feel welcome and comfortable and have agency in the society. *Having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of political, social, and cultural structures that shape one's life — the right to both contribute and make demands upon society and political institutions. At its core, structural belonging holds a radically inclusive vision because it requires mutual power, access, and opportunity among all groups and individuals within a shared container (such as a society, organization, club, etc.).*

**DIVERSITY:** All the ways in which people differ, adding value to and strengthening our communities. *It encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another: race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, political views, religion, education, marital status, appearance, perspectives, values, etc.*

**EQUALITY:** The state of being equal or like, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. *Everyone, regardless of their circumstances, is given the same resources and opportunities. Being perceived as equal and experiencing equality are two different things.*

**EQUITY:** Everyone has access to what they need to thrive. *Opportunities, resources, and power are distributed fairly based on current and historical contexts. People are free from disparities. They are treated fairly, regardless of their characteristics. Differences do not determine life outcomes.*

**EQUALITY VS. EQUITY:** Equality means everyone receives the same resources or opportunities, while equity recognizes that people have different circumstances and allocates resources and opportunities to achieve fair outcomes for all.

**INCLUSION:** Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities and decision/policy making in a way that shares power. *It involves embracing and sharing all aspects of identity based on individual choice and without subjugation, resulting in a true sense of belonging and full access to opportunities.*

**JUSTICE:** The restorative act of correcting unfairness, inequity or other wrongs. *Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities.*