

Pets for Life recognizes the biases that people in underserved communities and communities of color often face. There is an immense need for animal welfare to take a deeper look at systemic issues that create barriers to pet services and how the demographics of our field influence programming, policy making, and overall effectiveness. To achieve a more equitable industry, varied backgrounds and perspectives must be considered and embraced.

With PFL's mission to address inequities in access to pet resources, this summary sheet and the soon to be released DEI in Animal Welfare Guide will be focused on areas of race, ethnicity and socio-economics. We acknowledge our tools are not exhaustive and do not encompass all the ways in which inequities show up throughout animal welfare work. The road to a more just and fair animal welfare field is an ongoing process that requires a collaborative and sustained effort. We aim to provide thoughtful suggestions and practical ways to further engage in advancing your organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is the result of mental associations that have formed by the direct and indirect messaging received, often about different groups of people. Constant exposure to certain identity groups being paired with certain characteristics, can trigger automatic and unconscious associations of identities with those characteristics, whether or not the association aligns with reality.¹

Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

Implicit Bias – An example of implicit bias is when chief health complaints by black patients are not taken as seriously by some medical professionals as the chief health complaints of white patients. This bias is rooted in centuries of myths and mainstream messaging, generalizing an entire community of people which leads to institutional discrimination and racism.

Institutional Discrimination – Since the implicit bias is that chief health complaints of black patients² are taken less seriously, then an institutional response may be to interpret symptoms differently and provide less medical treatment to black patients which leads to systemic discrimination.

Systemic Discrimination – With a racial disparity in medical response and treatment, people of color are less likely than white people to be given appropriate medical care for a variety of illnesses and ailments. For example, black women are three to four times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related complication as compared with white women.³

As with all areas of society, animal service providers have implicit biases that impact programming, policy work, and decision making. Acknowledging and addressing implicit bias is crucial to eliminating current institutional and systemic discrimination in animal welfare and preventing further inequitable outcomes.



Graphic adapted from The ACLU of WV: Implicit Bias training (2018)



Definitions

Diversity: Having people with a range of backgrounds in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic, and culture as well as various identities, experience, and interests.

Equity: A fair and just distribution of resources and opportunities.

Inclusion: A process of involvement and empowerment where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized.

Cultural Humility: The humble and respectful attitude toward individuals of other cultures that pushes one to challenge their own cultural biases, realize they cannot possibly know everything about other cultures, and approach learning about other cultures as a lifelong goal and process.⁴

Oppression: A systemic and institutional abuse of power by one group at the expense of others and inflicting harm on others.

Social Justice: A world which affords all individuals and groups fair treatment and an equitable share of the benefits of society; eradicating unjust systems and unfair privileges.⁵

Ally: A person who uses their privilege to advocate on behalf of someone else who does not hold the same privilege.

Privilege: Unearned, non-merited advantages granted to members of a group by powerful social, institutional, and cultural systems. Privilege allocates resources, value, immunity, benefits or access to social power to some people as a result of their membership in a dominant social group. The absence of discrimination and oppression is one form of privilege.⁶

1 Adapted from The Ohio State University: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

2 Source: <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain>

Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1924616/>

3 Source: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28697109/>

4 Adapted from The Community Technical Assistance Center of New York (CTAC) and the Managed Care Technical Assistance Center of New York (MCTAC)

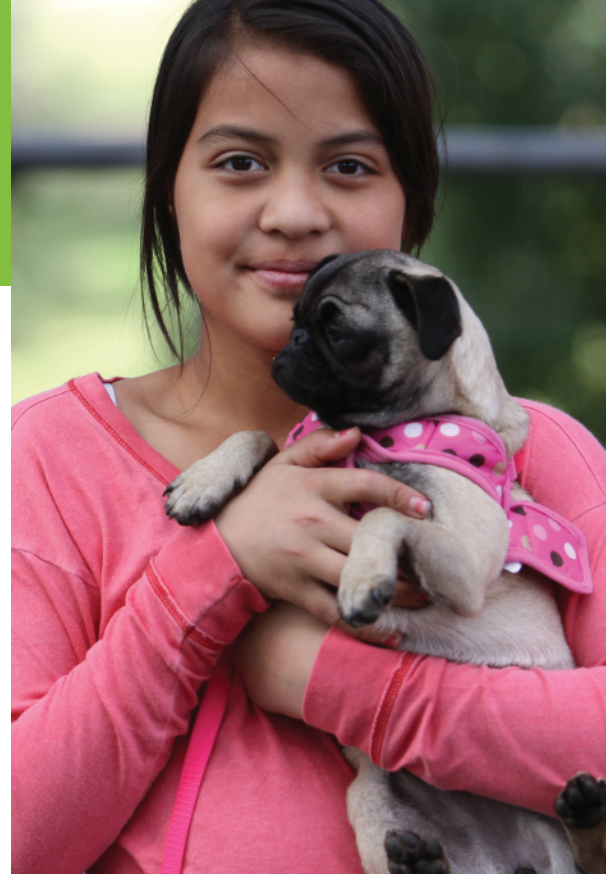
5 Adapted from definitions published by Ingham County Health Department; Interaction Institute for Social Change; Human Rights Campaign; Southern Poverty Law Center Teaching Tolerance project; VISIONS Inc., and Michigan Department of Community Health Division of Health, Wellness and Disease Control Health Disparities Reduction and Minority Health Section.

6 Adapted from Undoing Racism: The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

How to Be an Ally

Allyship is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. Most importantly, allyship is not self-defined—work and efforts must be recognized by those you are seeking to support or uplift.

- An ally listens
- An ally takes action
- An ally is not a self-proclaimed identity, rather, the community you are supporting chooses you
- An ally does not take breaks
- An ally constantly seeks information
- An ally does not need to be in the spotlight
- An ally holds accountable those who share their identity
- An ally apologizes and takes accountability when criticized or called out for a mistake
- An ally does not make it about themselves or monopolize the emotional energy of others



Steps for Change in Animal Welfare

Successful DEI work in animal welfare requires internal organizational development as well as external facing strategies that impact society at-large. Both shifts are important, and one cannot occur genuinely and effectively without the other.

Inward Facing Shifts

- Equitable hiring practices
- Inclusive job descriptions and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) language
- Strong commitment to searching for qualified candidates from underrepresented backgrounds
- Diversity at every level of leadership, not just entry-level or non-salary positions
- Employee retention practices that value different perspectives, marginalized backgrounds, and include non-retaliatory grievance policies
- Space for upward feedback
- Safe and culturally competent work environments in which all employees can thrive
- Board Development that is inclusive
- Avoidance of tokenism
- Update of organizational culture and values
- Recognition of and addressing workplace micro-aggressions, implicit bias, white privilege, and white fragility
- Assessment of organizational policy for equitable service provision (i.e. return-to-owner, open adoption, and owner present euthanasia practices)

Outward Facing Shifts

- Input from underrepresented communities in animal welfare is welcomed and valued
- Full participation and shared power of all identity groups in decision making
- Disparity in consequences from policy making is considered – how low income and/or communities of color experience disproportionate law enforcement
- Short and long-term goals for programming and policy work consider “intent vs. impact” on communities of color and/or low-income communities
- Metrics of success are based on comprehensive community engagement and support services
- Narratives do not perpetuate stereotypes or myths and bring people together instead of creating divisiveness
- Intentional fundraising that honors the human-animal bond across demographics and does not present a limited definition of compassion
- Support for and collaboration with equity work in other movements outside of animal welfare