

Intersectionality in Practice

Intersectionality is the idea that people hold more than one identity at once, and those identities combine to shape their experience in ways you cannot see by looking at any one of them alone. A Black woman with a disability does not experience race, then gender, then disability separately. She experiences all of them together, and the combination can create barriers that none of them would predict on its own.

Content

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Why it matters in our work. If we only ever look at one category at a time, we miss people who fall between them. A program that works for white disabled people and for non-disabled people of color can still fail disabled people of color, and our data may never show it if we never look at the overlap.

What it looks like in practice.

- Look at the overlap, not just the column. When you break down data, look at combinations, not only single categories, while protecting small numbers.
- Do not ask people to split themselves. A person should not have to choose which part of who they are matters today.
- Notice who falls through the cracks. The people served worst are often those at the intersection of more than one underserved group.
- Design for the margins. A service built to work for the people facing the most layered barriers tends to work better for everyone.

A caution. Intersectionality is not about ranking who has it worst. It is about seeing people in their full complexity so we do not design services that only fit the simplest case.

Real people are never one thing. Services that remember that reach more of them.

Notice who falls through the cracks. The people served worst are often those at the intersection of more than one underserved group.

Choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Intersectionality in Practice.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Intersectionality in Practice to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product.

Choose the sections of Intersectionality in Practice that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Intersectionality in Practice, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

Check the stated limitations and evidence status for Intersectionality in Practice; escalate when current authority or individual context is missing.

Review the result with the affected person, team, or community and revise the find and apply guidance approach when it creates a barrier or unintended effect.

For all staff, use Intersectionality in Practice to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product; use the guidance in the immediate task, check impact and access, and ask for help when authority is unclear. Start by notice who falls through the cracks. The people served worst are often those at the intersection of more than one underserved group.

Use cultural and community context to ask better questions, never to predict an individual or treat a group as monolithic.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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