

Intersectionality: why one category at a time misses people

Race, disability, language, gender, age, class, and immigration status shape people's experience together, not one at a time. A program that reviews outcomes by one category can look equitable while failing the people at the intersections.

Why it matters

Legacy data and program rules were built around single categories. Intersectional thinking changes what you disaggregate, who you engage, and which burdens you notice.

Content

The idea. Coined in legal scholarship to describe how discrimination against Black women was invisible to claims that looked at race or sex alone. The same pattern appears in services: a deaf Somali elder's experience is not the sum of three separate briefs.

In data. Ask the data owner what can be disaggregated by more than one category with small-group protection. Where numbers are too small, use qualitative evidence and say so.

In engagement. Ask who is missing at the intersections, and plan access for people who face more than one barrier at once, such as interpretation and captioning together.

In design. Test a process against the person with the least margin: the person who needs an interpreter, an accessible format, transportation, and a daytime alternative all at once.

In the workplace. Advancement barriers and climate problems land differently on people who hold more than one marginalized identity. Ask, do not assume.

Next steps

- **Structural racism and institutions** — program page </library/lm-structural-racism-and-institutions>
- **Measuring without surveillance** — program page </library/pn-measurement-without-surveillance>