

Seneca Washington's Foundational Beliefs about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

In our ongoing effort and vision with serving all of our communities in equitable ways, and to maintain the integrity of DEI work, we have created a list of foundational beliefs that we try to remain connected to while engaging participants in conversations (and movement) about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Oppression is learned and we believe it can also be unlearned.
- Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.
- It takes sustained, rigorous effort and action to change systems. We will not 'naturally' evolve toward greater diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- People learn at their best when they embody humility and believe that they always have more to learn, remaining curious and engaged.
- Relationships are fundamental and at the heart of DEI work.
- Experiencing discomfort is a key component of transformative learning/authentic social change.
- We believe in a commitment to creating language, actions, and systems that embody DEI principles and practices will create more humane, sustainable environments and truly inclusive communities.
- Hurt people hurt people.
- Most people are well intentioned, even while they unconsciously hurt others. Impact and outcomes matter more than intention.
- There are no easy fixes or magical solutions for DEI work.
- DEI work means having the courage to name and transform oppressive issues, including but not limited to: sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, adultism, etc.
- When our communities are truly diverse, inclusive, and equitable, we all benefit and are stronger/healthier because of it.
- Change is possible and necessary. There is hope.

Cultural humility is one framework for understanding and developing a process-oriented approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion work. While some older constructs related to diversity, equity, and inclusion relied heavily on understanding 'the other', stressing the importance of primarily learning about communities different than our own, the cultural humility model focuses inward, on understanding our own biases, false conditioning, and actions as we work with communities and individuals different than us. It is a framework that invites us to understand, on a deepened level, how this same internalized bias and misinformation can unintentionally and negatively impact the communities we are supposed to be serving and supporting. Cultural humility is different from 'cultural competence'. Where cultural competency assumes that there is an endpoint – a final destination, a finish line – cultural humility invites a more humble and dynamic approach: an ongoing, lifelong process of listening, learning, questioning, and transforming ourselves and the world related to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Cultural humility also recognizes and is intentionally mindful of the complexity and historical (and current) context of these pervasive issues of oppression and dehumanization. This practice invites both the time and commitment necessary to transform these complex systems and ourselves into something new and more liberating.

Embracing cultural humility requires several commitments: (1) a commitment to understanding our own self-identity, rigorous self-evaluation, and self-critique; (2) a commitment to identify and transform power imbalances and oppressive systems; and (3) a commitment to advocate and ally with the communities we are serving, and in partnership with persons and organizations seeking similar social change.