

As Observed in the USA



Adapted from Sylvia Duckworth, Canadian Council for Refugees, and Olena Hankivsky, PhD

What insight does this provide on how you have been treated as a person of privilege or a marginalized person?

Which Identity brings you the most discomfort or confusion?

Intersectionality Wheel of Privilege: A Reflective Process for UniServ Director and Organizers

Effective UniServ Directors or Organizers help leaders develop confidence, strengthen organizing skills, broaden participation, and build the capacity of others to lead. When union staff and leaders differ by race, gender, job classification, age, geography, or other dimensions of identity, organizing does not occur outside of those differences. Power, experience, credibility, and communication are often shaped by social and organizational dynamics that can influence how feedback is given, received, and acted upon. Equity-minded union staff remain aware of these dynamics without making assumptions about another person's experience. They organize with curiosity, humility, and a commitment to understanding both individual circumstances and broader organizational realities. An equity-centered union staff person approach seeks to see the person, see the system, and see the interaction between the two. That balance creates the conditions for deeper growth, stronger relationships, and more effective leadership development.

Key Ideas to Hold

When union staff and leaders differ by race, gender, job classification, age, sexuality, class background, geography, or another identity, the goal is not to ignore the difference nor make it the center of every conversation. The goal is to understand that difference may influence trust, credibility, communication, risk, and how feedback is received.

1. Union Staff Work Is Never Separate From Power

The relationship is not just UniServ Director/Organizers ↔ Leader.

It is also:

- Race ↔ Race
- Gender ↔ Gender
- Staff ↔ Member
- Manager ↔ Employee
- HQ ↔ Field
- Older ↔ Younger
- Credentialed ↔ Non-credentialed

People enter union staff and member conversations carrying their lived experiences with power.

The purpose of this activity is not to measure who is more or less privileged. Instead, it helps UniServ Directors and Organizers develop greater awareness of how their identities, experiences, and relationship to power shape the way they listen, ask questions, interpret situations, and build trust with leaders. Self-awareness is a prerequisite for union staff to do their work with members across differences. UniServ Director and Organizers cannot effectively navigate power dynamics with others if they have not first explored their own relationship to

power and identity. To complete this, you will need to complete the Intersectionality Wheel that follows the directions and guided reflections. You will also need to plan about 60 minutes to complete the wheel and to journal through the guided reflections.

Step 1: Complete Your Intersectionality Wheel

Using the Intersectionality Wheel, identify the identities that are most relevant to how you move through the world. Examples might include:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Class background
- Education
- Job classification or professional role
- Age
- Ability/disability status
- Religion or faith tradition
- Geographic background
- Language and communication style

For each section of the wheel, consider where your identity may place you closer to societal privilege, marginalization, or a combination of both.

Step 2: Identify Where You Experience Power and Where You Experience Marginalization

Review your wheel and reflect:

- In which areas do I typically receive credibility, trust, or benefit of the doubt?
- In which areas do I have to work harder to be heard, respected, or understood?
- Where do I experience both privilege and marginalization depending on the situation?

Notice that you likely experience a combination of privilege and disadvantage rather than fitting into a simple category. It is highly likely that the people you work with will also have perceptions, behaviors, and experiences informed by a similarly complicated intersectionality.

Step 3: Reflect on How Your Identities Have Shaped Your Leadership Story

- What messages did I receive growing up about leadership, authority, success, and belonging?
- Which parts of my identity have opened doors for me?

- Which parts of my identity have created barriers?
- How have these experiences shaped the way I lead, communicate, and respond to conflict?

The goal is to connect identity to lived experience rather than treating identity as an abstract concept.

Step 4: Explore How Others May Experience You

Imagine entering a room as a facilitator, Organizer, or UniServ Director and Organizers. And reflect:

- Before I say a word, what assumptions might others make about me?
- Which aspects of my identity may increase my perceived credibility?
- Which aspects may lead others to question my expertise or authority?
- How might different people experience me differently?

Consider how your identities influence staff and member relationships whether you acknowledge them or not.