A Guide to Inclusive Language

This document is designed to provide guidance for National Disability Institute (NDI) team members on the consistent use of inclusive language when completing all NDI work.

Equity and Inclusion is weaved within all projects, internal and external policies, and plays a major role in future work consideration. As a result, it is imperative that the entire team use consistent terminology and throughout all work.

As the leading organization to conduct research and raise awareness around intersectionality of race equity, disability, poverty and financial inclusion, NDI's materials must be intentional in helping all people with disabilities, without regard of race, gender, religion, age, etc. It is our responsibility to ensure that all the organization's tools and services are both obtainable and relatable to all communities of persons with disabilities no matter their economic status.

What Is Inclusive Language?

- Language that avoids the use of certain expressions or words that might lead to the exclusion of a particular group(s) of people.
- It acknowledges diversity and conveys respect to all people and promotes equitable opportunities.

Why Is Inclusive Language Imperative?

- Inclusive language is an intentional effort to ensure language that has a positive impact and makes people feel included and valued.
- It has the unique ability to make people:
    - become united or divided
    - feel included or excluded
    - feel welcomed or uncomfortable
    - feel heard or ignored
    - feel valued

What to Exclude When Using Inclusive Language:

Avoid the following:

- ✕ Ableism
- ✕ Bias
- ✕ Catchphrases
- ✕ Elitism
- ✕ Gender
- ✕ Race
- ✕ Religion
- ✕ Slang
- ✕ Stereotypes
- ✕ Prejudice

NDI's Recommended Terms for Race, Ethnicity and National Origin

Use the following terms:

- ✓ Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI)
- ✓ Black
- ✓ Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)
- ✓ Hispanic/Latino/x
- ✓ LGBTQIA+
- ✓ Native American

Use Person-First or Identity-First Language

Person-First Language:

The person is emphasized, not the disability or the chronic condition.

The statement should normally start with or have the word "person."

→ "I am a **person** with a disability."

Identity-First Language:

The disability becomes the focus, which **allows the individual(s) to claim the disability** or the chronic condition and choose their identity rather than permitting others to name it or to select terms with negative implications.

→ **"I am** disabled."

Use Gender Neutral Language

Gender Neutral Language avoids bias towards a particular sex or social gender.

For example:

→ Use police officer vs. policeman
→ Use spouse or partner vs. man / wife
→ Use staffing/capacity vs. manpower

Use Nouns Carefully

Using hyphenations (i.e., Irish-American) or terms such as illegal immigrants and aliens have a negative tone to them and are rooted in racial profiling methodology. While LGBTQ+ is an older term and is not as inclusive, LGBTQIA+ represents more distinct and unlisted identities and is the better term to use.

Inclusive Language While Using Translation and ASL Services

The English language can be complex and can be a challenge when translated into other forms of communication or languages.

Prior to working with a service to do American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation or translation ask:

- Do you have experience using Inclusive Language or gender-neutral terms in your work?
- At minimum, they should have at least two years of experience.

Understanding the Impact of Words/Sayings

Avoid violent language and catchphrases:

For example:

→ Instead of "Killing it!" → Use "Great Job!"
→ Instead of "Rule of Thumb" → Use "General Rule"
→ Instead of "I was blind to that" → Use "I was unaware"

How to Course Correct if a Mistake Is Made

First and foremost: Give yourself grace…everyone makes mistakes.

Follow these steps to remedy an error:

1. Someone identified a non-inclusive term or statement.
2. Listen to or read the complaint.
3. Reflect to gain understanding of the harm and impact of the term used
4. Apologize without an explanation – let the person know you will conduct research on the term(s).
5. Learn more about the term and share your experience with the NDI Equity and Inclusion team.
6. Follow-up by letting the person(s) know if changes have or will be made and why or why not.

When in Doubt, Use This Helpful Checklist

✓ Prior to finalizing material for projects do your research on current terms

✓ Speak to your colleagues on updated terms

✓ Check the NDI Equity and **Inclusion Resources Folder** for updated material

✓ Contact the Equity and Inclusion team for input when guidance is needed

✓ Check with a partner(s) or funder(s) and ask if they have preferences on which specific language to use

✓ Also keep in mind that terms change depending on sectors, geographical location and current climate of the U.S. and/or world.

Tools and Resources

- **NDI People/Person-First Language (External Use)**
- **American Psychological Association: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Inclusive Language - Guidelines**
- **University of South Carolina Aiken Department of Diversity Initiative: Inclusive Language Guide**