



INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE

Suggested language to be more person-centered and culturally-responsive.

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Introduction

This inclusive language guide is intended to support CSW staff as we use and improve our use of person-centered language and culturally responsive terms and concepts. In its first iteration, the guide highlights language most recognized by the public (i.e., it does not necessarily identify language used within specific groups of people and communities). Instead, it is a starting place to support staff in using inclusive language, beginning with terms and concepts that staff members have suggested.

Each section includes an introduction to the terms and concepts covered in that section and a chart that covers the preferred terms/concepts, the problematic terms/concepts to avoid, and additional guidance to help you use the preferred terms/concepts and understand their use. A few principles, which APA and other sources recommend and resonate with the Racial Equity & Inclusion (REI) team, are relevant across all sections. For example:

- Unless it is impossible, we will ask people how they refer to themselves and use that language to refer to and describe them.
- We will help each other learn how to improve our use of inclusive, person-centered terms such as those included in this document, while being supportive of one another.
- When working with our clients and partners, we will commit to using inclusive, person-centered language and help our clients and partners learn to do the same.
- We will not default to uncritically using client/partner language, especially when this language crosses into the problematic.

As noted in the APA guide, “No group is a monolith.” We will take time to understand within-group differences, the intersectionality of identities, etc., as we decide on the language and terms we use to describe people.

When CSW staff are using inclusive, person-centered, and culturally responsive language to replace other commonly used terms (for example, stakeholder), it may help to include a few sentences – in a footnote or the front matter – to introduce the term and why CSW has chosen to use this language.

The recommendations for language use in this document may change over time. The guidance presented herein was last updated January, 2025.

Age

Being age inclusive with our language helps combat ageism and adultism. While ageism is typically associated with discrimination against older people, it can also impact young and middle-age people. Adultism is a form of ageism in which children and adolescents are discounted and discriminated against as a group.

In American society, we need a change in how we view the aging process. Traditionally, we associate negative, fatalistic qualities to aging and makes aging synonymous with decline, disease, or disability. This view presents aging as something to be resisted or battled and creates an ‘Us’ vs ‘Them’ dynamic where older people are a separate and lesser social group. These negative stereotypes have the power to impact policy, group attitudes, and the health of older adults. Instead, we should take a much more positive view on aging where it is normal, lifelong, and cumulative. The process of aging is a ubiquitous, continuous process of human development that extends across the life span and is not to be feared, fought, or looked down upon.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older adults • Older people • Older persons • Older patients • Older individuals • Person 65 years and older • The older population 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The elderly • Elders • Elderly people • The aged • Aging dependents • Seniors • Senior citizens
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Use precise language, provide information about age range, mean, and median. This recognizes that older adults are diverse and not a monolithic group.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older men and women • Men and women between the ages of 65 and 75 • Octogenarians 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old men and women
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Use precise language, provide information about age range, mean, and median. This recognizes that older adults are diverse and not a monolithic group.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People born between the years of XX and XX. 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational nicknames like “Boomers,” “Gen X,” “Millennials,” “Gen Z,” and “Gen Alpha”
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>These terms tend to overgeneralize a vast array of experiences, and can lead to negative stereotyping.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of older adults 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silver tsunami
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>When speaking about the increase in number of older adults, avoid fatalistic phrases that suggest it’s a disaster to be avoided</p>	

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who are receiving social security or Medicare benefits and are over the age of 62 (or another age that was included in the study) • People who are receiving social security or Medicare benefits due to a disability 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social security recipients • Social security beneficiaries • Medicare recipients • Medicare beneficiaries
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Explanation & Guidance

Social security and Medicare recipients or beneficiaries are not a specific age group because social security can begin at different ages and individuals with certain disabilities may receive social security and/or Medicare benefits.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescent • Young person • Youth • Young woman • Young man • Female adolescent • Male adolescent • Agender adolescent • Students 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kid(s)
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Explanation & Guidance

For an individual aged 13 to 17 years

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant (very young child) • Child, Children • Girl, boy, transgender girl, transgender boy, gender fluid child, students 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kid(s)
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Explanation & Guidance

For an individual aged 12 years and younger. Avoid vague terms without defining them first. For example, “this study enrolled two-week old newborns,” “this study involved children ages 6-12 years”

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult • Woman • Man • Transgender man • Transgender woman • Genderqueer adult • Cisgender adult 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p>
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Explanation & Guidance

For an individual aged 18 years and older; Older adults are a subgroup of adults.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity youth (with further framing) • Untapped young adults • Transitional age youth • Historically excluded youth • Underserved youth 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At risk youth • Disconnected youth
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Opportunity Youth (emerged in 2012 White House Council for Community Solutions) increasingly preferred as is more positive and reflects the potential of these young people to become thriving adults if provided the right opportunities. Current research found that talking about opportunity youth without further framing can create misunderstanding and even backfire.</p> <p>Additional guidance/recommendations on using “Opportunity Youth”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use the <i>Plugged In</i> explanatory metaphor to build understanding of who opportunity youth are and how we can support their success and wellbeing. 2. Link opportunity youth to their communities early on and throughout. 3. Prevent othering by linking opportunity youth’s needs to what <i>all</i> young people need. 4. Use the <i>Steep Climb</i> metaphor to talk about the challenges opportunity youth face and the additional resources and supports they need to thrive. 5. Make it about healthy adolescent development. 6. Talk about how strong, supportive relationships help opportunity youth flourish using the <i>Roots of Success</i> metaphor. <p>Instead of using “Opportunity Youth,” some organizations use “untapped young adults,” “transitional age youth,” “historically excluded youth,” “underserved youth,”. All aiming to remove blame on youth and placing on oppressive systems that have failed them. General guidance is to prioritize people-first language for youth and young adults without additional labels that might reduce them to their circumstances and enforce harmful stereotypes (such as “at-risk” or “marginalized” as some funders use).</p>	

Sources

- [American Medical Association \(AMA\) Manual of Style](#)
- [American Psychological Association \(APA\) Style](#)
- [Annie E. Casey Foundation: Who are Opportunity Youth?](#)
- [Associated Press \(AP\)](#)
- [Association for Career and Technical Education \(ACTE\) Inclusive Language Guide](#)
- [Frameworks Institute March 2024: Connections and Communities: Reframing How We Talk About Opportunity Youth](#)
- [Frameworks Institute: “Finding the Frame: An Empirical Approach to Reframing Age and Ageism”](#)
- [Gerontological Society of America \(GSA\)](#)
- [Inclusive Writing for Writers](#)
- [National Center to Reframe Aging Initiative led/housed at the Gerontological Society of America \(GSA\)](#)
- [National Institutes of Health Style Guide - Age](#)
- [Washington University in St. Louis Center for Aging: “Age inclusive language: Are you using it in your writing and everyday speech?”](#)
- [White House Council for Community Solutions: 2012 Final Report Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth](#)

Disability & Mental Health

Language referring to disability can sometimes be isolating and offensive, even with good intentions. It is important to use person-first language when describing a person with a disability. While some individuals may provide information about their experience, some people may not be comfortable sharing details about their physical or mental conditions. In both cases, you should not make assumptions about their abilities or preferences; wherever possible, ask questions and respect the responses.

“People-first language is used to communicate appropriately and respectfully with and about an individual with a disability. People-first language emphasizes the person first, not the disability. For example, when referring to a person with a disability, refer to the person first, by using phrases such as, ‘a person who ...’, ‘a person with ...’ or, ‘person who has ...’” [Source: NH Statewide Independent Living Council](#)

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) • People with IDD • Person with a physical disability • Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, a mental health impairment, or a psychiatric disability • Person with a disability; people with disabilities. 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled, handicapped • Differently abled; special needs • Special • Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, spastic, slow, simple, moronic, defective, afflicted, insane, crazy, psycho, mania, nuts
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Explanation & Guidance

A person isn't a disability, condition, or diagnosis; a person has a disability condition or diagnosis. This is called Person-First condition or diagnosis. Emphasize the need for accessibility, not the disability, Use Person-First Language.

1. Ask to find out if an individual is willing to disclose their disability.
2. Emphasize abilities, not limitations
3. In general, refer to the person first and the disability second.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional needs • Education programs for students with disabilities 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special needs
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Explanation & Guidance

“The term ‘special’ in connection to people with disabilities runs the risk of euphemistically stigmatizing disabled people’s differences. The notion is that despite differences in everyone’s needs, referring to the needs of only disabled people as “special” carries an infantilizing connotation.” Source: [Stanford Disability Initiative Board](#)

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living with a mental health condition 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffering/struggling with a mental illness. • Mental illness/mentally ill
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Explanation & Guidance

Always allow for personal choice: If an individual with a mental health condition prefers to be referred to in a certain way, then that’s their choice, and we should respect it. Use more neutral people-first language such as “person with a mental health condition.”

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurodiverse • Neurodivergent 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-functioning • Low-functioning
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>“Experts recommend against using the terms ‘high-functioning’ and ‘low-functioning’ to describe conditions like autism. They often assume a person’s level of function based on how much they behave like someone who’s neurotypical. No two neurodivergent people are the same.” Source: Cleveland Clinic</p>	

Sources



- [The Arc Oakland County](#)
- [ADA National Network](#)
- [CDC](#)
- [Stanford University](#)
- [The National Center on Disability and Journalism](#)
- [JFF’s Language Matters Guide](#)
- [National Institute of Health](#)
- [Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital](#)
- [Harvard Business Review](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)
- [The Mental Health Coalition Language Guide](#)
- [The Cleveland Clinic](#)

Gender & Sexuality

Certain terms help us to be more inclusive when describing people, their gender identity, and sexual preferences in our work and day-to-day lives. Terms that may be particularly useful for our work are LGBTQ+/LGBTQIA+ and singular “they.”

LGBTQ, LGBTQ+ or LGBTQIA+ is an acronym embracing diverse gender and sexual identities often marginalized in society. It is important to note that there is a difference between gender expression and sexual orientation, and the acronym encompasses both. The acronym is comprised of multiple adjectives referring to people and communities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (for LGBTQ and LGBTQ+) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (for LGBTQIA+). The “Q” most often refers to queer when LGBTQ community member use the term. However, it can also refer to individuals questioning their gender and sexuality, and often does so in support of youth. The + holds space for non-straight, non-cisgender identities and the evolving understanding of these identities.



Singular “they” is a third-person singular pronoun encompassing forms like they, them, their, theirs, themselves/ themselves. It is intended to replace the use of other gendered, singular pronouns – especially, “he,” “she,” or “he or she” – to promote inclusion and prevent gender assumptions. Singular “they” has been utilized as a pronoun since the late 1300s and its evolution parallels that of the singular “you,” which emerged from plural form. Though once mistakenly frowned upon, the use of singular “they” is welcomed in formal academic writing and journalism.

<p style="text-align: center;"> Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) • LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual) 	<p style="text-align: center;"> Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homosexual • Using LGBTQ+ or any adjective contained therein as a noun - for example, “Jake is a transgender” and “Jake is transgendered.” Or, referring to “gays.”
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Explanation & Guidance

The + in both recognizes “the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used” by people. When using either version of the acronym – especially among audiences who may be confused or unfamiliar with acronym and related terms – it is usually helpful/necessary to initially spell out the acronym. Examples in use:

- There are a number of organizations that are working to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ people.
- Young people in the LGBTQ community face higher rates of rejection, violence, suicide and homelessness when compared to their peers.

<p style="text-align: center;"> Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They 	<p style="text-align: center;"> Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He, she; he/she
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Explanation & Guidance

Should be used to refer to people whose gender pronouns are unknown. Should replace other gendered, singular pronouns to promote inclusion. Examples:

- They: Casey is a gender-fluid person. They are from Texas and enjoy tacos.
- Them: Every client got a care package delivered to them.
- Their: Each child played with their parent.
- Theirs: The cup of coffee is theirs.
- Themselves (or themselves): A private person usually keeps to themselves [or themselves].

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-binary • Nonbinary • Gender non-conforming • Gender variance 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He, she; he/she • Assuming that people who are non-binary are transgender or intersex • Queer (when you have not confirmed that this is their preferred term) • Genderqueer (when you have not confirmed that this is their preferred term)
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Explanation & Guidance

When referring to gender in any capacity, it is crucial to recognize non-binary people – avoid binary assumptive language, creating questionnaires or reporting findings that use binary language (male/female).

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Inclusive Occupational Language (firefighter, chairperson) 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender marking in job titles (e.g., fireman, firewoman) and role titles (e.g., chairman, chairwoman) • Gender references to jobs (“male nurse,” “female judge”) because they reinforce outdated/harmful assumptions about gender of people in these professions.
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Explanation & Guidance

Use gender neutral occupational titles when describing jobs, such as “Firefighter,” “Chair,” “Chairperson,” rather than “Fireman,” “Chairwoman.” Avoid noting gender when describing a job (“male nurse,” “female judge”) because it reinforces outdated/harmful assumptions about the gender of people in these professions.

Sources

- [Gender Sexuality Resource Center – LGBTQIA+ 101](#)
- [Purdue OWL’s Gendered Pronouns & Singular “They”](#)
- [Merriam Webster Singular ‘They’](#)
- [Out & Equal Workplace Advocates Glossary of LGBTQ Terms](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign Glossary of Terms](#)
- [An Ally’s Guide to Terminology](#)
- [Welcome, Singular “They”](#)

Individuals Impacted by the Criminal Legal System

Dehumanizing language has been used for decades to help justify the United States swollen prison system, which accounts for 25 percent of the global prison population as of 2019. Terms like felon, convict, and offender are intentionally dehumanizing, define persons based upon a single perceived qualifier, and are often affixed for life, even beyond sentence completion and the return to society. These labels disproportionately affect Black and Brown populations who are policed, prosecuted, and incarcerated at rates that far exceed their White counterparts.

As the providers of essential human services, it is critical that we use language that humanizes rather than terms that stigmatize. Below are some suggested language recommendations deeply informed by a literature review and our 18 months of work with legal system impacted individuals and organizations providing reentry services throughout Michigan.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with legal system involvement 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offender • Inmate • Felon • Criminal • Convict • Prisoner • Delinquent
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Labels like offender and convict are dehumanizing and stereotype people. We should instead use words that reflect people's full identities.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with a history of legal system involvement • Person who was formerly incarcerated • Re-entry population 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex-offender • Ex-con • Ex-offender • Ex-prisoner
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Terms like ex-offender or ex-con define people by their conviction history and not their full identity.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person under judicial supervision 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parolee • Probationer • Detainee
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Terms like parolee and detainee marginalize people and do not acknowledge their full identity.</p>	

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young person with legal system involvement • Young person impacted by the legal system 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juvenile offender • Juvenile delinquent
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>It is important to define somebody as a person first, instead of by perceived temporary qualifier.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carceral system • Criminal legal system 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice system • Legal justice system
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Criminal legal is a more accurate descriptor of a system that is unjust, and disproportionately surveys, arrests, and punishes people of color, particularly those experiencing poverty.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with criminal legal system involvement 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice-involved • Justice-impacted
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Criminal legal is a more accurate descriptor of a system that is unjust, and disproportionately surveys, arrests, and punishes people of color, particularly those experiencing poverty.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning citizen
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Citizens carry many rights, including the right to vote, run for office, or access subsidized housing, that are not always bestowed upon persons who are formerly incarcerated. Resident is a more accurate population status descriptor.</p>	

Sources

- [Fortune Society's Humanizing Language Guide](#)
- [Fortune Society's We Are More Than Just a Label](#)
- [Underground Scholars Initiative Language Guide](#)
- [NYTimes Editorial Board's Labels Like Felon Are an Unfair Life Sentence](#)

Race & Ethnicity

Race is often defined as a social classification or association based on a person’s ancestry, ethnicity, and perceived inherited physical characteristics (hair, skin color, etc.) (ex. White, Black, Asian, etc.). National origin is the state, country, or nation from which a person or their ancestors were born. (ex. A person born in Venezuela is Venezuelan). Ethnicity is a social construct that defines a set of people by their shared common cultures and traditions, including but not limited to race, nationality, or religion. (ex. Jewish, Japanese, Creole).

“Race is a social construct not rooted in biology. Official racial designations have changed over time. The U.S. Census Bureau defines race as a person’s self-identification with one or more social groups, including White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander or another race. Ethnicity also is a social construct not rooted in biology, referring to the social characteristics people may have in common such as language, religion, regional background, national background, traditions and culture. Examples include Hispanic, Haitian, Korean and Cherokee.” Source: [Structural Racism and Health Equity Language Guide](#)

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black • African-American 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minority
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>“Acceptable for an American Black person of African descent. Black also is acceptable, but only as an adjective. (Example: Black people, not Blacks.) African American and Black aren’t necessarily interchangeable. Follow an individual’s preference, if known. This is extremely important because the legacy of discrimination affects some Black people’s feelings of connectedness to America. If preference is not known, use Black. Specificity is best when known. For example, Americans of Caribbean heritage often prefer Caribbean American.” Source: Structural Racism and Health Equity Language Guide</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caucasian
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>Capitalize racial identities such as “Black” and “White” (avoid using “Caucasian”) when referring to people.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native American • Indigenous • American Indian 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>“Some tribes and tribal nations use member; others use citizen. If in doubt, use citizen. In Alaska, Indigenous groups are collectively known as Alaska Natives. First Nation is preferred by some tribes in Canada. Do not use Indian as shorthand for American Indian. Avoid casual use of words such as wampum, warpath, powwow, teepee, squaw and off the reservation, which are disparaging and offensive. Also avoid the casual use of tribe, such as describing a group of friends this way.” Source: Structural Racism and Health Equity Language Guide</p>	

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latino/Latina • Latine or Latinx (use only if client-preferred) 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latino • Hispanic
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Explanation & Guidance

“Hispanic and Latino are increasingly seen as outdated terms to refer to people of Latin American heritage for several reasons. Hispanic is often insulting to many people of Latin American heritage, as it centers the heritage of the colonial powers responsible for the slaughter of Latin America’s 56 million Indigenous people during the largest genocide in history.

Latino, on the other hand, refers to everyone from Latin America. Like other romance languages, the Spanish language traditionally uses the masculine configuration of words to refer to a group of people. The -o and -a endings of nouns and adjectives in the Spanish language are masculine and feminine, respectively, which the queer and trans community especially have pointed out as not inclusive to all genders.” Source: [A Brief Explainer on Latine and Latinx](#)

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Color) 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minority
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Explanation & Guidance

Acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Recognizes that people who are not White have different experiences and deal with different types of injustice. Opponents argue it establishes an “us” vs “them” binary.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MENA (Middle Eastern or North African) 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minority
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Explanation & Guidance

Acronym for Middle Eastern or North African (MENA), which includes people who identify with Middle Eastern or North African groups such as Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, Jordanian, Kurdish, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian and Yemeni. These groups were formerly included in the designation of “White” on US government documents.

Sources

- [A Brief Explainer on Latine and Latinx](#)
- [American Heart Association: Structural Racism and Health Equity Language Guide](#)
- [NPR “Next U.S. census will have new boxes for ‘Middle Eastern or North African,’ ‘Latino’”](#)
- [NPR “The U.S. census sees Middle Eastern and North African people as white. Many don’t”](#)
- [“Rethinking the Use of “Caucasian” in Clinical Language and Curricula: a Trainee’s Call to Action”](#)
- [United States Census Bureau](#)
- [Scientific America “Too Many Scientists Still Say Caucasian”](#)

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status tends to refer to a combination of factors related to an individual’s social class. This typically includes education, occupation, and income. Socioeconomic status is complex and encompasses quality of life attributes and is a consistent predictor of a vast array of life outcomes.

Words are a powerful tool that can provide clarity and context. Words can affirm people, yet also demean. When using language, be intentional about using person-first language and avoid reducing human beings to their social conditions. Doing so contributes to the othering of people and whole communities.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People living on low incomes • Low economic status • Participants/students/workers from low-income backgrounds • High economic status • Participants/students/workers from high-income backgrounds • Middle economic status • Participants/students/workers from middle-income backgrounds • Low-wage workers 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower class • Low-class people • Underprivileged • High class • High-class people • Upper class
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Explanation & Guidance

Shift the focus from the people (where something is inherently wrong with the person) to the systems that create inequities. Don’t reduce people to their social conditions

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People living under the poverty line • People experiencing poverty • People made vulnerable to poverty • People disadvantaged by the system 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The poor • Poor people • Impoverished • Disadvantaged • At-risk
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Explanation & Guidance

Shift the focus from the people (where something is inherently wrong with the person) to the systems that create inequities. Don’t reduce people to their social conditions

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People experiencing homelessness • Unhoused people • People in transitional housing • People in emergency shelter 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The homeless • Homeless
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Explanation & Guidance

Shift the focus from the people (where something is inherently wrong with the person) to the systems that create inequities. Don’t reduce people to their social conditions

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school dropouts • Being poorly educated • Having little education
Explanation & Guidance	
Adopt a strengths-based perspective; avoid deficit-based and pejorative language that focuses on what people lack and falsely feeds into negative stereotypes.	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities facing barriers • Underserved communities/students/workers 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghetto • Slums • Inner city
Explanation & Guidance	
Adopt a strengths-based perspective; avoid deficit-based and pejorative language that focuses on what people lack and falsely feeds into negative stereotypes.	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled trades workers 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-skilled workers • Unskilled laborers • Blue-collar workers
Explanation & Guidance	
Shift the focus from the people (where something is inherently wrong with the person) to the systems that create inequities. Don't reduce people to their social conditions	
<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undocumented immigrants • Unauthorized immigrants • Undocumented workers • Illegal Immigration • Unauthorized immigration 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal immigrants • Illegal aliens • Undocumented aliens • Illegals • Illegal workers
Explanation & Guidance	
Use terms that respect human dignity and have considered full due process and a person's constitutional rights.	

Sources

- [Writing About Race, Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, and Disability](#)
- [Inclusive and Empathetic Language Use Guidelines](#)
- [APA Styles Bias-Free Language Guide](#)

Other Terms

Certain terms, in this case “stakeholder” and “target population,” are only more recently being recognized as problematic. These terms are unique as well for their ubiquitous usage in much of our, and our peers’, work. However, as more thought and research is put toward understanding the value of inclusive language, it is becoming apparent that “stakeholder” and “target population” are both problematic and alternatives should be applied whenever possible.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributors • Community, community members • Community impacted, community affected, • Coalition members • Allies • Colleagues • Clients • Advocacy groups • Interested parties/groups • Implementing partners • Working partners • Funders • People affected by [policy/program/practice] • Partners • Collaborators • Contributors • Allies • Vested parties, vested partners • Key players, key actors 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders
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Explanation & Guidance

Some outlets have indicated that the origin of stakeholder may invoke connotations of colonialism and extractive capitalism, but broadly this term is seen as neutral. The term “stakeholder” originated from colonial context when a person or country might claim a land by physically planting a stake in the ground. Therefore, “stakeholders” were those who claimed to own property despite other indigenous groups originally living there.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific population • Group of focus • Participants • Subjects • Specific group (patients, clients, etc.) 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target population
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Explanation & Guidance

The noun and verb meanings of “target” may convey violent images and intent when viewed through the lens of structural racism. The word target conjures an object or person to shoot. Also in Merriam Webster entries include “a mark to shoot at,” “a target marked by shots fired at it,” “something or someone fired at or marked for attack,” “an object of ridicule or criticism,” and in the context of U.S. law, a person against whom a federal prosecutor has evidence of involvement in criminal activity.

<p style="text-align: center;">✔ Preferred</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veteran • Active Duty • [Military/Airforce/Navy/etc.] service member 	<p style="text-align: center;">✘ Problematic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not confuse “veterans” with “active duty” as these describe separate statuses for military service members.
<p>Explanation & Guidance</p> <p>“The term ‘veteran’ means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom. The term “active duty” means service as a cadet at the United States Military, Air Force, or Coast Guard Academy, or as a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy.” Source: Adult Suicide Intervention & Prevention Plan</p>	

Sources

- [Adult Suicide Intervention & Prevention Plan](#)
- [As An Evaluator, Do I Use Words That Can Be Harmful to Others?](#)
- [National Library of Medicine - Banishing the Term “Stakeholder”](#)
- [Words Matter: Calling on the Community of Research to Recognize, React to, and Remove Racializing Research Rhetoric](#)
- [National Institute of Health “Person-first and Destigmatizing Language”](#)
- [Center for Disease Control “Global Health Equity: Global Terminology Considerations”](#)
- [US Department of Veterans Affairs](#)