ALLIANCE
for the Chesapeake Bay

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Justice (DEIJ)

Terminology Communications Guide

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Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to provide communication guidance on commonly used DEIJ terminology for organizations operating in the environmental field. This document does not define all terms of inclusion, but provides conscientious, equitable language for commonly used or often confused terms. If you do not find a term you were looking for, or are looking for an extensive glossary of diverse terminology, we suggest The Language of Inclusion and the Allyship and Accountability Glossary.

Please Note:

This guide is not meant to be exhaustive, since language is continuously evolving. Alliance staff will review the document regularly and publish an edited version every 6 months. The date at the top of the document will reflect the most recent update. Comments and additions are welcome at any time and will be considered in the updates. Terms and definitions are based on extensive research from reputable sources as of the date of this document. However, always make sure you are listening to the community members you are speaking with about how they refer to themselves and their community. When in doubt, ask the person or audience you are interacting with.

Any questions or suggestions for this document can be sent to the Alliance's staff DEI Team, at dei@allianceforthebay.org or be submitted by anonymous comment form.

General Terminology

All terminology has a history and specific use for certain circumstances. Very few words can be adequately used as a blanket description for a group of people. Each of these terms has a purpose and correct use (similarly to how we want to use correct pronouns). None of them should be used indiscriminately but specifically to the topic you are discussing.

African American

Acceptable for an American person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa[1]. This term is to be capitalized in communication.

> "People of African descent have widely varied family histories, family experiences, cultural backgrounds or origins ranging from the Caribbean islands, Latin America, the United States, countries in Africa, or elsewhere. Some American people of African ancestry prefer "Black," and others prefer "African American"[3]
>
> The term African-American is generally accepted on a professional level but not necessarily interchangeable. For example, Americans of Caribbean heritage generally refer to themselves as Caribbean American. It is also helpful to remember, those who identify as Black may not necessarily identify as African American or vice versa.

Ally / Allyship

Allyship is a process, not an identity. It is an ongoing and lifelong process of listening and learning. Appropriate use: "doing ally work" to reference the fact that "ally" is an action, not an identity. Allyship can be in reference to justice for racial, LGBTQIA+, immigrant, differently abled, etc. peoples and movements.[6]

Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI)

"In the 2000 United States Census, the Federal Government defines; Asian American' to include persons having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. ; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander' includes Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian or Chamorro, Fijian, Tongan, or Marshallese peoples and encompasses the people within the United States jurisdictions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia."[12] Avoid using this acronym unless the person has identified themselves as AAPI. Allow your subject to continue

to self identify beyond AAPI according to their preference. Aim to be specific whenever possible.

Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC)

The term is acceptable when necessary in broad references to multiple races other than white. By specifically naming Black and Indigenous people we are recognizing that Black and Indigenous people face the worst consequences of systemic white supremacy, classism and settler colonialism. This term is also meant to unite all people of color in the work for liberation while intentionally acknowledging that not all people of color face the same levels of injustice. Be aware, however, that many people of various races object to the term for various reasons, including that it lumps together into one monolithic group anyone who isn't white. Referring to a race/ethnicity by its color variant/parallel can be derogatory and lead to a system of stereotyping/bias. Acknowledge your audience and remember that identifying by color can sometimes lead to bias. Be specific whenever possible.[2]

Black

Refers to a self-identified race with origins in various regions such as Africa or Oceania to name two. Use the capitalized term as an adjective in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense. Ex: Black people, Black literature, Black studies, Black colleges.

Brown

This term can be used as a self-identifier for either a racial or ethnic identity. This is a personal descriptor that should only be used if a person self-identifies and wants to communicate as such. This is a newer term that can address a shared sense of oppression and help oneself create racial authenticity. However, Brown can also be taken as a derogatory term and should not be applied generally to groups or cultures.[8]

Culture

The collective behavior patterns, communication styles, beliefs, concepts, values, institutions, standards, and other factors unique to a community that are socially transmitted to individuals and to which individuals are expected to conform.[1] While an ethnicity may relate to culture, culture does not relate to ethnicity. An ethnic group has the power to define their socially inherited or adapted culture.

Bias and biases can emerge when generalizing or using improper statements to communicate culture and cultural traditions. This may be seen when using the term culture to talk about shared interests (ex: bro-culture), or using the term culture to fuel stereotypes of a group of people (ex: Black culture).

Default Culture

In reference to organizational culture, default culture is the underlying values, beliefs and principles that serve as a foundation for an organization's management system, as well as the set of management practices and behaviors that both exemplify and reinforce those principles.[1] Your default culture can influence your messaging and communications in an inequitable or exclusive manner. *Better understanding your organization's 'default culture' and creating a foundational understanding of diversity will allow your organization to communicate different topics with intention.*

Multicultural

People can be multicultural to varying degrees. Multiculturalism within individuals is the degree to which they know, identify with, and internalize more than one culture. It includes national cultures, societal cultures that span nations, regional cultures within nations, hybrid, and intersecting cultures. Multiculturalism can reflect one's identity or knowledge.[4]

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ)

Also commonly framed as DEI, JEDI, EDI, REI, or READI: This acronym is used as a noun identifying a concept, effort, initiative, or foundation for enhancing social justice in organizations or communities. Common words included in these acronyms may be diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, race, and access.[1]

See definitions for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Race, and Environmental Justice.

Disability

A functional limitation that affects an individual's ability to perform certain tasks. A person can *have* a disability but they do not *suffer from* a disability. When discussing people with disabilities it is important to use person-first language which emphasizes the individual first, not the disability.[11] For example: a person with a disability or a person who uses a wheelchair. However, many deaf people whose first

language is sign (be it ASL, BSL, etc.) consider themselves part of the deaf community and may describe themselves as Deaf, with a capital D, to emphasize their deaf identity.

> Avoid using language that implies disability as inability or language that implies a medical diagnosis is shameful. Use "accessible" instead of "handicapped" and avoid the term "normal" when speaking of someone without a disability. Also, avoid communicating a disability as a source of inspiration such as "they overcame their disability" as it can further an 'inability' stereotype. Following these practices would decrease the possibility of creating an ableist narrative.

Diverse/Diversity

For the purpose of this guide, the term diversity is defined within the realm of social justice. Diversity is the differences of people found in our workforce, our customers, and in the community in which we serve.[1] It is the demographic mix of peoples taking into account dimensions of human difference (e.g. racial and ethnic groups, income, rural to urban settings, sexual or gender orientation, people with disabilities, etc). Diversity incorporates different perspectives but must be paired with inclusivity for an equitable impact. In other words: "Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance."

> Organizations should be conscientious of avoiding a toxic environment when communicating the term diversity. An example of misuse of the term diversity is intentionally or unintentionally communicating one group as the "default" and alternative groups as the "other", which can lead to the tokenization of staff or partners. To authentically incorporate diverse messaging into your organization's communications strategy you must first assess your organization's default culture.

Ethnicity

Refers to shared cultural characteristics of a population such as, but not limited to, language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs. Ethnic groups or identities can change overtime due to personal preferences or preferred designations.[3] Ethnicities, as identified, should be capitalized and used as proper nouns.

Heritage

Refers to the acquisition of certain cultural beliefs or practices from an individual's predecessor. While ethnicity is influenced by heritage, heritage does not define ethnicity. As you communicate heritage it is important to not assume the heritage of an individual represents an overall ethnic culture.[17]

Equity

The promotion of justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Avoid confusing equity and equality, as equity refers to fairness and justice while equality refers to 'sameness.'[1]

Indian

This word should be used to describe people of the South Asian nation of India. Do not use the term as a shorthand for [Native American.](#)[3]

Inclusion

Refers to the degree to which groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed, and equally treated. When communicating inclusion do not confuse or muddle it with diversity. While an inclusive group uplifts and supports the diversity and uniqueness of each individual, a diverse group may or may not be inclusive.[1]

Justice & Injustice

Justice is a practice that makes our communities more diverse, equitable, and just. It is the dismantling of barriers to resources and opportunities in sovereignty so all individuals and communities can participate fully and thrive. Injustice is the quality of unfairness and undeserved outcomes. When communicating these terms, justice should be indicated as an actionable outcome of equity.

Latino, Latina

Latino is often the preferred noun or adjective for a person from, or whose ancestors were/are from, Latin America. Latina is the feminine form. Latina/o/x is an [ethnicity](#), not a race, yet is often racialized as a group in the US. Use more specific identification when possible, such as Cuban, Puerto Rican, or Brazilian.[3]

The recently coined LGBTQIA+ term 'Latinx' was created to be inclusive of all gender types, not just male and female. Alternatively, 'Latin@' was created to be used in written language to indicate an inclusive or gender-neutral word form but may exclude non-cisgendered individuals. Usage of any of these terms should be treated as a proper noun and capitalized. [3] **Hispanic** refers to people of Spanish ancestry or Spanish speakers.

LGBTQIA+

The first seven letters in the acronym stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and ally or asexual. Alternately, you might see LGBTQQ, LGBTQQI, and LGBTQQIA. More letters could be added to this acronym so to encourage inclusivity, some will stop at LGBTQ and add a plus sign to signify the unlisted identifiers.[9]

> **+** - A denotation of everything or anything on the gender and sexuality spectrum that letters and words cannot yet describe.[1] It also recognizes that some people may fall in this spectrum but do not want or feel comfortable in a specific label.

As for the preferred terminology and acronyms, that will depend on the individual person. There is no one singular perspective among LGBTQ+ people.[9] The terminology used in these identities is extensive as it gives added ability for personal identification and labeling (labels are not all bad - some are very affirming).

Preferred vs problematic LGBTQ+ words and terms:[10]
- Use the word 'gay' or the appropriate identifier for the individual (ie: lesbian, bisexual, queer) and avoid the term homosexual.
- Use the term 'sexual orientation', avoid the phrase sexual preference.
- Use the words transgender or transgender people, avoid the terms transgenders, transgendered, transgenderism, or sex-change.
- Avoid the phrases gay lifestyle or gay agenda when discussing the lives, laws, or views of LGBTQ+ people.
- Always avoid defamatory, derogatory, or inappropriate language. Referencing 'LGBTQ+' as 'alphabet soup' can be insulting and harmful.

Minority

The term is only acceptable as an adjective in reference to demographics or a noun in the singular to describe an unpopular position. This term should never be used to

identify or classify an individual or race. Do not describe or refer to person as 'a minority.'[3]

Native Americans or Indigenous Peoples

"In North America, the collective terms "Native American" and "Native North American" are acceptable (and may be preferred to "American Indian"). Specify the nation or people if possible (e.g. Cherokee, Navajo, Sioux)."[3] Other acceptable terms include First Nations, Indigenous Peoples, or Indigenous Americans. Always capitalize the term Indigenous when used to refer to original inhabitants of a place.

> Some tribes and tribal nations refer to themselves as 'members' or use the term 'citizen'. Some nations generally refer to themselves by geographical location such as *Alaska Natives*. Avoid language that furthers cultural stereotypes and generalizations, which can be disparaging and offensive.

People of color (POC)

A generally acceptable term to describe a group of people that identify as multiple races other than white in the United States. Avoid using 'people of color' when referring to one racial group. If used incorrectly, the term 'people of color' can be an inappropriate generalization or umbrella term. However, the inclusivity and solidarity of the term 'people of color' can be legitimately useful given the appropriate situation.[1]

Race

Refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant.[3] Language that essentializes or reifies race is strongly discouraged and is generally considered inappropriate. For example, phrases such as "the 'Black race' and the 'White race' are essentialist in nature" portray human groups monolithically, and often perpetuate stereotypes.[3]

Race vs ethnicity

Remember, race refers to the inherited physical/biological attributes an individual possesses while ethnicity refers to the inherited/learned cultural system of identification.

Multiracial

People who identify with two or more races. Individuals often (but not always) self-identify with one race over the other depending on multiple factors. Not all adults with a mixed-race background consider themselves multi-racial.[4] Avoid language that groups races together in a general sense according to the perceived, and often stereotyped, geographical origin.

Racism

"An assumption that there is an inherent purity and superiority of certain races and inferiority of others. It denotes any attitude, behavior, or institutional structure that subordinates persons or groups because of their race or ethnic background."[1] Recognize and understand harmful racial stereotypes to avoid communicating "covert racism" within your messaging. Be intentional about your messaging in an effort not to reinforce racial narratives or race dominance.

Underprivileged, Underrepresented, Under-Resourced, & Underserved

Each of these terms has a specific definition and use, none of the terms should be used as a blanket statement for an unengaged community.

Use **underprivileged** when referring to a group having less money, education, resources, and so forth than the other people in a society and may refer to individuals or subgroups in any racial or ethnic group.[3]

Use **underrepresented** when discussing any subset of a population that holds a smaller percentage within a significant subgroup than it holds in the general population. This term has been widely accepted for professional use, however, some communities prefer the terms 'historically excluded' or 'untapped'.[18]

Use the phrase **under-resourced** as a way to frame resource inequities such as leadership, physical assets, money, power, political will, institutions, community cohesion, and services. When using the term 'under-resourced' we must also recognize the cultural history, knowledge of a community, tremendous resourcefulness among all peoples from whom we can learn.[16]

Use **underserved** only when talking about populations that receive inadequate or inequitable services. There are negative connotations regarding

'underserved', we suggest steering clear from this term unless a partner or community self identifies as such.[16]

Vulnerable vs. Marginalized

"Vulnerability is the exposure of individuals or collective groups to livelihood stress as a result of the impacts of environmental change. Marginalization is often an outcome of exclusion/inclusion of certain groups in developmental activities."[14] When communicating the terms 'vulnerability' or 'marginalization', be conscientious of their distinctions so as not to use them interchangeably.

White

A person having origins in Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa or who self-identifies their race as "White". The term derives from the concept of race but is used as an indicator of ethnicity. Capitalize this term when discussing race.[1]

Caucasian

An outdated and discouraged term that originated as a way of classifying White people as a race to be favorably compared with other races. More recently this term is often used in an effort to distance oneself from race discussions or racial identification due to discomfort with the topic.[3]

White Supremacy

White supremacy is the "historically based, institutionally and culturally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent for the purpose of establishing, maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege."[6] There is a misconception that white supremacy has to do with individual hate, but it is actually -and should be better communicated as- systemic practices based in racism.

Environmental DEIJ Definitions

The terminology below has been included only to highlight the direct effects environmental issues and/or climate change can have on certain communities, communicating both the scientific and social impacts.

Community Science (previously Citizen Science)

The engagement of all people in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in the scientific process – from volunteer, community-driven water quality monitoring projects to collaborations with local, state, and federal stakeholders.

> At its core, working with volunteers to collect data is meant to be an inclusive alternative to the restraints of collecting scientific data as an industry, government, or academic professional. Everyone is part of a community but not everyone who lives in our community is a citizen. Citizen status shall not define who can or cannot participate in volunteer data collection.

Environmental Racism

The set of structures, institutions, practices and ideas that produce unhealthy, poisoned environments, concentrated in low-income communities and communities of color worldwide.[6]

Intersectional Environmentalism

An inclusive version of environmentalism that advocates for both the protection of people and the planet. It identifies the ways in which injustices happening to marginalized communities and the earth are interconnected. It brings injustices done to the most vulnerable communities, and the earth, to the forefront and does not minimize or silence social inequality.[5]

Environmental Justice

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies, and refers to "decisions [that] support sustainable communities where people can interact with confidence that their environment is safe, nurturing, and productive."[15]

Climate Justice, Climate Inequity, Climate Chaos

Terms and concepts that "acknowledge climate change can have differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on underprivileged populations."[13] Climate justice begins with recognizing key groups are differently affected by climate change. Climate impacts can exacerbate inequitable social conditions.

Sources:

The sources included in this document were chosen to both provide academic understanding and personal perspectives. We recognize that there is great credibility in personal experiences and general statements often found in academia do not always reflect diverse personal experiences.

1. The Language of Inclusion
2. Why the term BIPOC is so complicated, explained by linguistics
3. APA Style Guide: Racial and Ethnic Identity
4. What makes you "Multicultural"
5. Intersectional Environmentalism
6. Allyship & Accountability Glossary
7. Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and White Supremacy
8. Who Can Call Themselves Brown?
9. LGBTQ Experiment
10. GLAAD Media Reference Guide 10th Edition
11. Communicating with and about people with disabilities
12. Asian Pacific Institute Census Data and API Identities
13. What is 'Climate Justice'
14. Climate Adaptations: Marginal Populations in the Vulnerable Regions
15. Learn About Environmental Justice
16. How to Fix A Broken Tongue
17. What is an Ethnic Group in Ordinary People's Eyes
18. Building Equity & Inclusion Through the Power of Language

Additional Communications Resources

Sum of Us: A Progressive's Style Guide

Resources for building an anti-racism communications strategy

D5 Coalition

The Communications Network

White Allyship 101: Resources to Get to Work

Framing & Messaging, Racial Equity tools

Reminder: When writing about, or interviewing someone, use the terms they use to describe themselves. Do not make assumptions on terminology, when in doubt, ask the person or audience in question. Any questions or suggestions for this document can be sent to dei@allianceforthebay.org or by anonymous comment form.