

# Columbia SPS Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Guide

developed by Columbia SPS Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Committee

# Table of Contents



WHY IS A GUIDE NECESSARY [PAGE 1](#) | OVERALL  
RECOMMENDATIONS [PAGE 2-3](#) | ABLEISM  
[PAGE 4-5](#) | AGEISM [PAGE 6](#) | GENDER AND  
SEXUAL ORIENTATION [PAGE 7-8](#) | RACIAL AND  
ETHNIC IDENTITY [PAGE 9-10](#) | VISUAL IMAGERY  
[PAGE 11](#) | REFLECTION [PAGE 12](#) | PROMOTING  
ALLYSHIP [PAGE 13](#) | GLOSSARY OF TERMS  
[PAGE 14-21](#) | REFERENCES [PAGE 22](#)

---

# WHY IS A GUIDE NECESSARY?

ONE OF THE WAYS FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENTS AT THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES (CUSPS) CAN DEMONSTRATE OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY (DEIA) IS THROUGH THE LANGUAGE WE USE WHEN COMMUNICATING. BEING RESPECTFUL AND THOUGHTFUL IN OUR EXCHANGES WITH EACH OTHER, WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS, WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC, IS INTEGRAL TO FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY.

The **Columbia SPS DEIA Guide** was developed by a cross-capacity team from the *Columbia SPS Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Committee*. Our goal is to support the ongoing development of a DEIA mindset and culture within our community. We recognize that we are all on a personal DEIA learning journey and hope this guide will serve as a useful resource for you.

The guide is an advisory document. We ask that you review it carefully, reflect on the various topics, and refer to it when facing challenges in your work. It may not be possible to implement every recommendation in this guide consistently.

The most important recommendations are **highlighted in magenta** with arrows to indicate that they constitute baseline expectations that everyone communicating on behalf of CUSPS must meet to avoid causing harm to others and our community as a whole.

Language is a tool. It can make our worlds bigger or make them smaller. It can be used to create connections or to cause harm. It can affirm, or it can disparage. The recommendations in this guide concern the written, oral, and visual use of language in the office, in the classroom, at events, and in external communications on behalf of CUSPS. We encourage you to take the space and time you need to apply these recommendations in your work thoughtfully and to discuss them within your teams to build consensus around their consistent implementation.

This guide was inspired by DEI leaders who have paved the way for organizations to more easily embed DEI practices in the workplace. In particular, we would like to thank [The Sierra Club](#), [Race Forward](#), and those cited in the References.

Thank you.



# OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

## USE PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

When people living with disabilities offer advice on discussing issues related to ability, there is nearly one universal point they make: use people-first language (PFL). Practicing PFL means recognizing that everyone inhabits numerous identities, each influencing the others. As we shift our language to place the person first, we begin to embrace a more holistic and ability-focused perspective. Here are some examples of people-first language vs. identity-first language (IFL):

- Has autism vs. is autistic
- Has epilepsy vs. is epileptic
- Lives with HIV vs. is an HIV patient
- Has a mental illness vs. is mentally ill

PLEASE NOTE: Although PFL is the framework selected for this guide when discussing identity, there is an ongoing debate within the DEIA community around whether PFL or IFL is preferred. We invite you to visit this link for more information. <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

## BECOME CULTURALLY COMPETENT

If there is a particular group of people that you work with closely, it's important to develop an awareness of their culture and background, and if you do not share or are not familiar with the identity, build in direct collaboration and communication with that community. Likewise, when you communicate with someone or with a group whose identity (e.g., racial or ethnic) you do not share or are not familiar with, we encourage you to seek direct collaboration and communication with people in that community. Avoid potential "tokenism" when asking for input from community sources.

## ASK BEFORE CALLING OUT IDENTITY

It is recommended that we ask individuals how they would like their identities to be described. That includes asking what pronoun they prefer, how they would like their racial or ethnic identity to be described, if at all; and clarifying any other identity categories you might want to use to describe them in communications with and/or about them—for example, their age or sexuality. There are many ways to talk about identity, so it's best to ask.



# OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS



## SELF-IDENTIFIED

The descriptor “self-identified” can be a useful tool for communicating complex identities. If someone identifies as “queer”—an identity that LGBTQ+ communities have reclaimed to elevate it from its previous status as a slur—referring to them as a “self-identified queer activist” would clarify that this person chooses to be identified this way.

## COLLABORATION WITHOUT TOKENIZATION

Throughout this guide, we encourage everyone to collaborate with their teams to put these recommendations into practice. As you learn how to communicate more thoughtfully, peer review of content can be an important tool to help you see your communications from a different perspective. For example, if you’re unsure how to express or phrase something tricky, try running it by a colleague.

No one likes to be asked to speak on behalf of all people who share their identities. At the same time, it is appropriate to ask a colleague to recommend based on their knowledge of a particular community. We ask that you be thoughtful and intentional about your requests for support; reflect on whether the person you are asking for support may feel tokenized by the request.

You can also demonstrate respect for a colleague’s time and expertise by doing your research first, requesting your colleague’s input on specific questions after you’ve put genuine effort into your learning, thanking them, and crediting them where appropriate.

# ABLEISM

ABLEISM IS A WAY OF THINKING THAT VALUES THE LIVES, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND PERSPECTIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES LESS THAN THOSE OF PEOPLE WITHOUT DISABILITIES. ABLEISM CAN SHOW UP IN A NUMBER OF WAYS—FROM OUTRIGHT EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION TO INSENSITIVE LANGUAGE USE. ABLEISM INCLUDES MENTAL, PHYSICAL, AND EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES, WHETHER PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY.

## TIPS ON HOW TO REFER TO PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Undeniably, the language that we use to refer to persons with disabilities has an impact, as it shapes our perception of the world. This language has evolved over time, and terms that were commonly used some years ago are no longer acceptable. Ableism is a misguided and biased understanding of disability, and can take many forms, including harmful language.

## COMMON PHRASES TO AVOID

Most persons with disabilities are comfortable with the words used in daily life. For example, you can say “let’s go for a walk” to a person who uses a wheelchair or write “have you heard the news?” to a person who is deaf. However, phrases such as “blind as a bat” or “deaf as a post” are unacceptable and should never be used, even in informal contexts. You should also be careful with metaphors like “blind to criticism” and “to fall on deaf ears.”

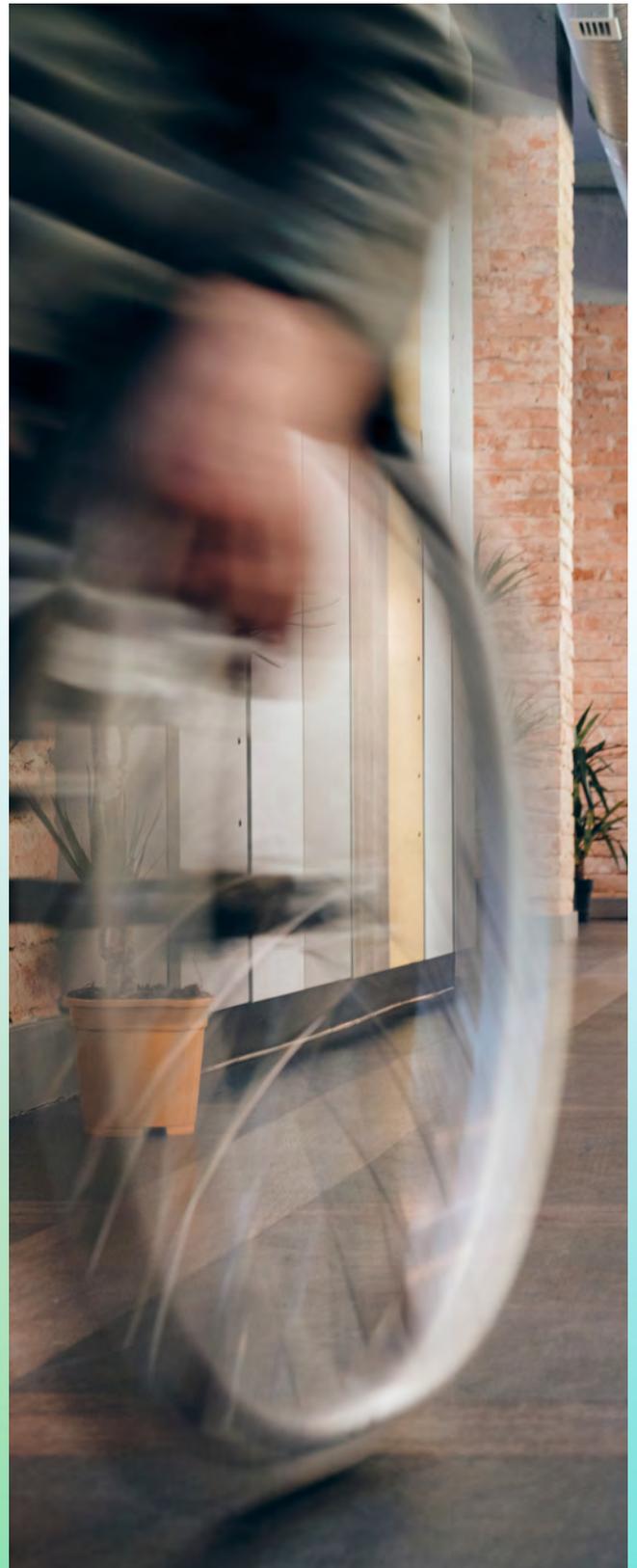
### ↪ **Schedulers became “blind” (and/or “deaf”) to the impact of supply chain disruptions.**

Instead of saying someone is “blind” to reality or “deaf” to certain challenges, say what’s happening: they’re seemingly insensitive or unable to see or listen.

### ↪ **“Stand” in solidarity.**

Not everyone can stand, speak out, or make themselves heard. Many people with disabilities casually use terms tied to ability—a blind person might say “see you later!” for example— but if you can massage a sentence to avoid this issue, it’s best to do so.

“Stand” is the most common example of this challenge. Many organizations have begun to say “be in solidarity” or “protect our rights” rather than “stand up for our rights.” Another alternative is “rise,” because no matter what your physical abilities, you can rise to an occasion or rise to overcome.





## COMMON PHRASES TO AVOID

→ **The "lame" effort to defend this initiative fell apart before it started.**

It's never acceptable to use the word "lame," which is considered a slur. Instead, use the words "incompetent" or "half-hearted" to describe an apparent lack of effort. When in doubt, get more specific.

→ **Industry representatives are "crippled" (or "handicapped") by corporate agendas.**

"Cripple" is another word that historically refers to a disability and is now considered a slur. Instead of saying someone or something is "crippled," try "hamstrung" or "held back."

→ **The amount of carbon produced is "dwarfed" by the amount saved.**

It's important to think about where the words we use are derived. For example, the word "dwarfed" (in this case, meaning made to seem small by comparison) comes from the word "dwarf," which is not how most people with the medical condition dwarfism prefer to be described. So instead, choose a different way to express scale that isn't tied to identity. Exceptions are proper names and scientific terms that include "dwarf," as in "dwarf reindeer."

→ **The number of support requests lately is "crazy" even "insane." We're "going nuts" just trying to keep up.**

The term "crazy" or other terms relating to or suggesting mental illness to pejoratively refer to an overwhelming situation or a specific person should be avoided.

We encourage students to visit [Columbia's University Life webpage](#) for more information on services and support. For information on disability services at Columbia University, please visit <https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>. Faculty, students, and staff are encouraged to learn more about accessibility through [Columbia's Center for Teaching and Learning](#).

# AGEISM

AGEISM SHOWS UP IN OUR LIVES WHEN WE MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE BASED ON THEIR PERCEIVED OR ACTUAL AGE. THESE GENERALIZATIONS POINT BOTH WAYS—OLDER PEOPLE OFTEN EXPERIENCE WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION, THE MOST COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD FORM OF AGEISM.

Young people also experience ageism when treated as less than full community members because of their youth and perceived inexperience. In both cases, generational differences can keep people from feeling included, making it essential that we speak respectfully about age in all of our communications.

## TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING ABOUT AGE

For more on the complexities of ageism, see the [APA Style Guide](#), which addresses both ends of the ageism spectrum in greater detail. But, first, consider whether there is a need to mention someone's age. There are often good reasons to mention someone's age—if they identify as a youth activist or an elder in a particular community.

Always ask those you are communicating with about how they would like to be described. For example, some people prefer “senior” to “elder” or “student” to “youth.” With something so personal, it's best to ask.

Avoid age-based comparisons that rely on negative or stereotypical depictions of people in certain age categories.

Don't assume that every member of a generation (e.g. Millennials or Boomers) have similar characteristics.

When talking about the future of Columbia SPS, let us consider how we are both striving to be a welcoming community for students of all ages and to celebrate the contributions of our multi-generational students.

Ageism also impacts people differently based on their gender. For example, women face harsher social penalties for aging visibly; when speaking about an older woman's identity, ask yourself if you would mention her age if she were male.



# GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN DEFINES GENDER IDENTITY AS THE “INNERMOST CONCEPT OF SELF AS MALE, FEMALE, A BLEND OF BOTH OR NEITHER – HOW INDIVIDUALS PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AND WHAT THEY CALL THEMSELVES.” IT CAN MIRROR WHAT A PERSON WAS ASSIGNED AT BIRTH OR BE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT. THERE ARE DOZENS OF GENDERS, OUTSIDE OF JUST MAN OR WOMAN, THAT PEOPLE CAN IDENTIFY.

**Sexual orientation** is the inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Essentially, it's who you are interested in dating and being intimate with. Someone can be transgender but also be gay, straight, bisexual, asexual, or a whole host of other sexual identities that exist.

**Gender identity** is your internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman or someone outside of that gender binary. Also, note that "they/theirs" is not used by all nonbinary people and ask before making an assumption.

## **Gender expression**

The external appearance of one's gender identity is usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine. Gender expression is not the same as a person's gender identity.

## **Gender transition**

The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns, and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions.

## **Transgender**

A term for people whose gender is different from the sex they were at the time of their birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

**Please note the following when referring to a person who is transgender:**

- "He is a transgender person."
  - Instead, say, "He is transgender."
- "Before he changed genders" or "When he was a boy."
  - Refer to as "before he transitioned" and "When he presented as a woman."



# GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WRITING ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Whether in conversation, publicly or privately, and in written communications, we recommend that you check with the person you are referring or speaking to what their gender and pronouns are. For example, she, her, hers; he, him, his; they, them, their; or different pronouns of their choice.

When you do not know someone's gender and have no way of asking them, follow the APA style guide by defaulting to a gender-neutral "they" pronoun. If you cannot, here is an example of how you may refer to them: "Morgan Gomez, a professor at Columbia SPS, presented at the panel and shared their perspectives on being a lesbian in academia."

We encourage you to familiarize yourself with the extensive and informative resources contained in the [Columbia University LGBTQ+ Guide](#).

**If you refer to gender and sexual orientation jointly, we recommend defaulting to LGBTQ+.**

- Use the term "cisgender" (versus. "non-trans" or "non-transgender") to refer to a person who is not transgender if there is a need to refer to their gender. Cisgender means you identify with the gender you were assigned at birth.
- Use gender-neutral terms whenever possible. For example, use "firefighter" not "fireman," "police officer" not "policeman," "mail carrier" not "mailman," "server" not "waitress," "representative" or "member of Congress," not "congressman or congresswoman."

### Using the word or concept "Empower"

The word "empower" carries the condescending implication that we are giving women, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people their basic right to equality as a gift or magnanimous gesture, rather than those communities are taking and owning what is rightfully theirs. This applies to all sections of this guide.

- Instead of saying Columbia SPS wants to "empower" certain people or communities, be more specific about what you mean. Are we trying to elevate voices? Offer financial resources so folks can do their organizing?

### Using the word or concept of "Tolerance"

Avoid the frame of "tolerance" of differences. This applies to every section of this guide—we should not be aiming to "tolerate" one another but rather to celebrate and uplift our differences.



### Sexualization

Avoid language that sexualizes people's bodies, particularly women's bodies. We should particularly avoid sexualized descriptions of interview subjects.

- For example: "The curve of the river echoed the shape of a woman's body, drawing us all in."

### Sexist Language

Avoid language that is sexist and offensive, such as: "He/she performed like a blonde on that project," referring to someone's work as inadequate.

## COMMON PHRASES TO AVOID

↪ He/she is "not the right man for the job," "man up," or "man-made."

- Avoid patriarchal language
- Try substituting gender-neutral language like "right person for the job" or "handmade."

↪ "This work is important because the health and safety of our wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters are at stake."

- Avoid emphasizing the importance of work through women's relationships with men.
- Instead, talk about the other reasons it is important to promote gender equity: "This work is important because women's rights are human rights."

# RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

AT CUSPS WE ARE COMMITTED TO STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY TO BE RESPECTFUL AND ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHNIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN OUR COMMUNICATIONS.

Our goal is always to ask, “Are we appropriately identifying an individual as they would wish? Are we considering the community at large? Does this message tokenize their racial and ethnic background? How does this message align with our commitment to DEIA?”

## PREFERRED TERMS FOR RACIAL IDENTITY

When engaging with new members, we recommend that you begin by asking the person how they prefer to be identified in your communities. If you cannot ask about their racial and ethnic identity, we offer in this guide terms you should become familiar with so you may leverage them in your communications. We also recommend that terms referring to racial and ethnic identities out of respect be capitalized in written communications.

**Native American** (Tribal when referring to governments, Tribal or Native when referring to communities within U.S. borders, Indigenous in international contexts)

Whenever possible, capitalize “Tribe” or “Tribal” as well as “Native” and “Indigenous.” Common use and preference on this varies wildly, and we should prioritize the preferences of the people we are referring to.

But unless there is a reason not to, we will capitalize these terms to default to a position that expresses respect.

## **Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI)**

AAPI are an integral part of the American cultural mosaic, encompassing a wide range of diversity. AAPI communities consist of approximately 50 ethnic groups speaking over 100 languages, with connections to Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Hawaiian, and other Asian and Pacific Islander ancestries.

## **Middle Eastern & North African (MENA)**

Refers to native-born descendants who trace their ancestry to the Middle East and North Africa, including 22 countries that form the Arab League and the non-Arab countries: Iran, Israel, and Turkey. Additionally, there are minority populations (both ethnic and religious) from these nation-states who are also Middle Eastern Americans.

## **Black and/or African American**

Be sure to ask how they prefer to be referred to. Black and/or African Americans are not interchangeable, particularly for recent African immigrants living in the U.S. When using the term “Black,” make sure it is capitalized.

## **Hispanic/Latino/Latinx**

Again, please be sure to ask and defer to the person's preferences—some people prefer “Hispanic,” at SPS, we default to “Hispanic-Latinx.” Use of “Latinx” is also appropriate if you deem it culturally correct for your audience. Latinx is a gender-neutral term for Latino/a identity.

# RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

## TIPS FOR WRITING ABOUT RACE FROM RACE FORWARD

[Race Forward](#) is an organization that advances racial justice through research, media, and practice, and they have published a helpful guide called the [Race Forward Reporting Guide](#). We highly recommend that you read the guide.

Ask people about their heritage and strive for respectful accuracy that observes how people self-identify racially and ethnically, allowing for multiple categories.

Familiarize yourself with the key terms and concepts of race and ethnicity and how categories that describe these can intersect (“Afro-Colombian,” “a person of mixed Navajo and Asian American descent,” or Hispanic – Latinos who identify as “some other race”).

### COMMON PHRASES TO AVOID

#### ↪ "Minority"

According to [Race Forward](#), “Defining people of color as ‘minorities’ is not recommended because of changing demographics and how it reinforces ideas of inferiority and marginalization of a group of people.”

It is also becoming inaccurate in some areas as population demographics shift. When considering a term other than “minority,” consider which specific communities you mean. Communities of color? Poor and working-class communities?

Be more specific and you can easily avoid these terms and consider if what you are saying or writing are embedded stereotypes that should be removed.



Do not use geographic descriptors interchangeably with religious or other terms to describe specific groups of people. For example, “Muslim” is not synonymous with Arab; African American Muslims are the largest Muslim population in the United States.

#### ↪ "Brown bag"

The term “brown bag,” often used to refer to a bagged lunch, has a charged racist association that makes it a term to avoid. Instead, consider “working lunch” or “BYO lunch session.”

#### ↪ It was a "dark day in history."

Words like black and dark, and are often used symbolically to express negative concepts. These terms can be offensive to various groups and should be avoided when possible. There are many alternative ways to express this type of symbolism.

**Please refer to the glossary for terms and definitions.**

# VISUAL IMAGERY

AS WE LEARN TO BECOME MORE THOUGHTFUL AND INTENTIONAL WITH OUR WORDS, WE SHOULD PUT INTENTION AND CARE INTO THE IMAGES WE'RE USING IN OUR PRESENTATIONS, REPORTS, AND WEBSITES. IT CAN BE CHALLENGING TO AVOID TOKENIZING PEOPLE WITH IMAGERY WHILE AT THE SAME TIME REPRESENTING THE FULL DIVERSITY OF OUR COMMUNITY.

## REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Visuals have the pressure of the first impression and carry the value of lasting impressions. As you choose photos, illustrations, and graphics, consider including different ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, genders, ages, and disabilities. The goal is to connect broadly with people in our community, external and internal, with integrity and authenticity.

Be attentive to how you select photos and videos and the subjects within them. As you select visual content, think through:

- The principle behind the photo: Is it possible to name and give voice to the individuals in the photos (see ethical storytelling below)? Is power/agency being given to one person in the photo over another?
- The visual storytelling: Does everyone in every photo in a single email look the same when there is an opportunity to feature more diversity in race, body type, physical ability, age? If there is diversity within the photo, what is the subliminal messaging around the power dynamic being displayed? Is this what you want to convey?

### Please consider the following in your visual communication efforts:

- Images, visual narratives, and multimedia in communications and presentations must reflect the DEIA principles adopted across the organization. Ensure that they are consistent across your team. When in doubt, request that a member of the SPS Communications team or DEIA Committee review your content.
- Authenticity is imperative. Insensitive or inappropriate visual communications can be damaging to our efforts to foster a positive DEIA culture within our community.





# PROMOTING ALLYSHIP

A LIST OF BEHAVIORS TO PRACTICE AND AVOID ARE USEFUL, BUT IT IS INTENTIONALITY THAT CAN MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE. ADAPTED FROM STANFORD GSB (NEALE, ET.AL., 2020) BELOW ARE WAYS YOU CAN BE A BETTER ALLY IN DEIA ACTIVITIES.

Part 1	
	I demonstrate knowledge and awareness of the issues of racism.
	I continually educate myself about racism and multicultural issues.
	I recognize my own limitations in doing anti-racist work.
	I raise issues about racism over and over, both in public and in private.
	I realize "it's not about me." I avoid personalizing racial issues as they are raised in conversation
	I can identify racism as it is happening.
	At meetings, I make sure anti-racism is part of the discussion.
	I can strategize and work in coalition with diverse others to advance anti-racist work.
	I attend to group dynamics to ensure the participation of people of color.
	I support and validate the comments and actions of people of color and other allies (but not paternalistically).
	I strive to share power, especially with people from marginalized groups.
	I take a personal interest in the lives and welfare of individuals of different races.
	I use my position as a white "insider" to share information with people of color that they may not have access to.
	I hold high expectations for people of color and for white people.
	I reach out to initiate personal contact with people of different races.
	I listen carefully so that I am more likely to understand the needs of people from marginalized groups.
	I understand enough about people of color's perspectives that when relevant, I can share these perspectives when people of color are not present.
	I can accept leadership from people of color as well as from white people.
	I work side by side with people of different races on tasks, projects, and actions.
	I debrief with people of color to give and get "reality checks" and affirmations after meetings and interactions.
	I readily accept—with no explanations or "proof" necessary—a person of color's position or perception.
	I can be present emotionally when individuals need to express feelings about racism.
	I discuss race and racism with both whites and people of color, and in these discussions I take people of color's perspectives seriously.
	I take risks in relating to people across lines of difference.
	I demonstrate shared values with people from various communities, for example, impatience with the pace of change, anger at injustice, etc.
	I know the private lives of families and friends who are people from different backgrounds. I can relax, socialize, and feel at ease with people of color and with whites.
Part 2	
	I am not clear on the labels people of color prefer to use to identify themselves.
	When people of color point out racism as it is happening, I feel personally attacked.
	I rely on people of color for education about my own (and institutional) racism.
	I use meeting time to establish my antiracist credentials (e.g., recounting stories about how I "marched in the Sixties" or about how many friends of color I have).
	It is important to me to point out examples of "reverse racism" when I see them.
	I have been told I act in a racist manner without knowing it.
	I speak for people of color and attempt to explain their positions.

# Glossary of Terms

---

BELOW ARE TERMS RELATED TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY THAT WILL HELP INFORM AND ALLOW YOU TO BETTER ENTER ANY SPACE RESPECTING OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITY AND BEYOND.

**DIVERSITY:** Diversity describes the myriad ways in which people differ, including the psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among all individuals, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, religion, economic class, education, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, mental and physical ability, and learning styles. Diversity is all-inclusive and supportive of the proposition that everyone and every group should be valued. It is about understanding these differences and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of our differences.

**EQUITY:** Equity ensures that individuals are provided the resources they need to have access to the same opportunities, as the general population. While equity represents impartiality, i.e. the distribution is made in such a way to even opportunities for all the people. Conversely, equality indicates uniformity, where everything is evenly distributed among people.

**INCLUSION/INCLUSIVENESS:** Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policymaking in a way that shares power.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Accessibility is about giving equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader meanings of compliance and refers to how organizations make space for the characteristics that each person brings. Accessibility compliance guidelines and best practices apply to both physical and digital environments.

---

**ANTI-RACISM:** Refers to a form of action against racial hatred, bias, systemic racism, and the oppression of marginalized groups. Anti-racism is usually structured around conscious efforts and deliberate actions to provide equitable opportunities for all people on an individual and systemic level. As a philosophy, it can be engaged with by acknowledging personal privileges, confronting acts and systems of racial discrimination, and/or working to change personal racial biases.

**ABLEISM** – Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in physical, mental and/or emotional ability that contribute to a system of oppression; usually of able-bodied/minded persons against people with illness, disabilities, or less developed skills.

**AGEISM** – Prejudice against or in favor of any age group.

**ANTI-SEMITISM** – Hatred, discrimination, hostility, or oppression of or against Jewish people as a group or individuals.

**ARBITRARY STATUS HIERARCHIES** – Status differences that are not based on actual differences in competence or ability, but are based on what somebody happens to be born as (their gender, their race/ethnicity, their disability status, and so on).

**BELONGING** – The feeling that a person is a valued member of a group or community.

# Glossary of Terms

---

**BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE-OF-COLOR (BIPOC)** – A term used to describe non-White people. Black & Indigenous (BI) are distinguished to address the unique anti-Black & settler colonial face target groups.

**"BLACK LIVES MATTER (BLM) MOVEMENT** – A movement to address systemic violence against Black people. Started in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin. In June 2020, there was a resurgence of the BLM movement due to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery.

**BYSTANDER INTERVENTION** – The act of stepping in and correcting at the moment when a person of lower status is interrupted, talked over, disregarded, or ignored; it can be an act of speaking up on behalf of another person or insisting that someone be allowed to finish their thought, make their point, to be heard within a meeting, and so on.

**CAUCUS AND AFFINITY GROUPS**– spaces for people to work within their communities and reduce the onus of racial equity work on BIPOC people.

**CISGENDER** – An abbreviation for individuals in whom there is a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity. Often referred to as a cis-male or cis-female, these terms describe the antonym of transgender. It is still sometimes used as a derogatory term and is disliked by some within the LGBTQ+ community.

**CLIMATE** – Employees' shared perceptions about the behaviors that are expected and rewarded within the organizational or workgroup context. It is a powerful tool that drives employee behaviors.

**COLONIZATION** – A system of oppression based on invasion and control results in institutionalized inequality between the colonizer and the colonized.

**CONSCIOUS OR EXPLICIT BIAS** – Bias and stereotyped perceptions that occur within an individual's awareness.

**CULTURAL COMPETENCE**– The awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to effectively communicate, collaborate, and engage with others who are different from oneself in meaningful ways through interactions characterized by reciprocity, mutual understanding, and respect (Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller, 2004).

**CULTURAL RACISM** – Prejudiced representation in narratives, based on the belief that the traits of Whiteness are "better" or more "normal" than that of POC.

**DISABILITY** – Disabilities refer to having a physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder a person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. A disability may be temporary in its nature, or long-term.

**DISCRIMINATION** – The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, national origin, age, physical/mental abilities, and other categories that may result in differences in the provision of goods, services or opportunities.

**DISENGAGEMENT** – An individual's sense of apathy for and detachment from work; it's characterized by being withdrawn, burned out, showing no effort, or going through the motions of work without giving of oneself.

**DIVERSITY VALUE PROPOSITION** – The idea that when you've got diverse members in a group, diversity brings a collection of perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and values.

**ENGAGEMENT** – an individual's sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in displaying personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward organizational goals.

# Glossary of Terms

---

**EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGs)** – voluntary, employee-led groups whose aim is to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with the organizations they serve. ERGs are usually led and participated in by employees who share a characteristic of gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, lifestyle, or interest. The groups exist to provide support and help in personal or career development and create a safe space where employees can bring their whole selves to the table. Allies may also be invited to join the ERG to support their colleagues.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS** – An important source of influence on the inclusiveness of the climate; they may include institutional policies, rules, regulations, the economic conditions or industry within which you're embedded that might be relevant, and even interpersonal dynamics that you inherited when you took on your role.

**EQUALITY** – Equality is the condition under which every individual is treated in the same way and is granted the same rights and responsibilities, regardless of individual differences.

**ETHNICITY** – is a social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on a shared sense of group membership, cultural heritage, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.

- **African-American** – refers to people in the United States who have ethnic origins in the African continent. While the terms "African American" and "Black" are often used interchangeably in the United States, it is best to ask individuals how they identify. For example, some individuals in immigrant communities may identify as Black but do not identify as African American.
- **Alaska-Native** – Umbrella term for the indigenous peoples of Alaska, a diverse group consisting of over 200 federally recognized tribes and speaking 20 indigenous languages. This is a general term; Alaska Native people may prefer to define or identify themselves by their specific tribal affiliation(s). For example, the term "Eskimo" is considered derogatory by some Alaska Native people and should be avoided.
- **Anglo or Anglo-Saxon** – Of or related to the descendants of Germanic peoples (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) who reigned in Britain until the Norman conquest in 1066. Often, White English-speaking persons of European descent in England or North America, not of Hispanic or French origin.
- **Arab** – Of or relating to the cultures or people that have ethnic roots in the following Arabic-speaking lands: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. "Arab" is not synonymous with "Muslim." Arabs practice many religions, including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and others.
- **Asian-American** – Of or related to Asian Americans. The U.S. Census Bureau defines "Asian" as "people having origins in any of the original peoples of Asia or the Indian subcontinent." It includes people who indicated their race or races as 'Asian,' 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Filipino,' 'Korean,' 'Japanese,' 'Vietnamese,' or 'Other Asian.' Asian Americans are approximately 3.6 percent of the total U.S. population, and 4.2% include persons of mixed race.
- **Black** – Of or related to persons having ethnic origins in the African continent; persons belonging to the African Diaspora. Some individuals have adopted the term to represent all people worldwide who are not of white European descent, although this usage is not common. "Black" is often used interchangeably with "African American" in the United States.
- **First Nations** – Indigenous peoples of Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. The term "Aboriginal Peoples" can refer to the first inhabitants of Canada as a group (including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in aggregate.) However, these are general terms; many First Nations people prefer to define or identify themselves by their specific tribal affiliation(s).
- **Hispanic/Latino/Latinx** – The U.S. Census Bureau defines Hispanics as "those people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire (Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban.)"

# Glossary of Terms

---

- **"Hispanic"** - is a term instituted by federal agencies, and some find the term offensive as it honors the colonizers and not the indigenous groups the term represents. The term Hispanic is typically used on the East Coast and in the South to describe persons from Latin America. In contrast, other parts of the country typically use the term Latino. Chicano is a term that describes someone of Mexican-American descent, in other words, those who are beyond the first generation. In addition, Latinx is a gender-appropriate term, which omits any masculine or feminine roots and is typically used by younger generation Latinos.
- **Middle Eastern and North African** - refers to immigrants and their native-born descendants who trace their ancestry to the Middle East and North Africa. In other words, they come from the 22 countries that form the Arab League, and the non-Arab countries: Iran, Israel, and Turkey. Additionally, there are minority populations (both ethnic and religious) from these nation-states who are also Middle Eastern Americans. These include Armenians, Assyrians, Baha'is, Chaldeans, Copts, Druze, and Kurds. While the U.S. government does not recognize Middle Eastern Americans as an official minority group, we still need to acknowledge their presence because of their contributions to American society and economy - and, ironically, the relatively high level of discrimination they have endured in this country.
- **Multiethnic** - An individual that comes from more than one ethnicity.
- **Native American** - This can refer broadly to the indigenous peoples of North and South America but is more commonly used as a general term for the indigenous peoples of the contiguous United States. This term has been used interchangeably with the term "American Indian," although some Native Americans find this latter term offensive since "Indian" is a misnomer. These are general terms that refer to groups of people with different tribal affiliations; many Native American individuals prefer to identify themselves by their specific tribal affiliation(s).
- **Pacific Islander** - Pacific Islander, or Pasifika, refers to the indigenous inhabitants of the Pacific Islands, specifically persons whose origins are of the following sub-regions of Oceania: Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia.

**GASLIGHTING**- A form of psychological abuse by shaming, casting self-doubt, and/or altering the perception of truth.

**GENDER** - Gender is the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that society considers "appropriate" for men and women. It is separate from 'sex,' which is the biological classification of male or female based on physiological and biological features. Therefore, a person's gender may not necessarily correspond to their birth-assigned sex or be limited to the gender binary (woman/man).

**GENDER IDENTITY** - refers to all people's internal, deeply felt sense of being a man, woman, both, in between, or outside of the gender binary, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth. Because Gender identity is internal and personally defined, it is not visible to others, differentiating it from gender expression.

**GENERATIONAL STATUS** - refers to a group or cohort of individuals born during a certain time who share common historical, social, and influences, and formative experiences.

**IMPLICIT BIAS**- Negative associations expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold, also known as unconscious or hidden bias. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist. Notably, implicit biases are favored above individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that people may profess.

**INCLUSION** - A relational construct; ultimately, the act of creating an environment and community in which any individual or group will be welcomed, respected, supported and valued as a fully participating member. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces and respects differences.

**INCLUSIVE CLIMATE**- A climate is inclusive when its norms are carefully constructed to promote experiences of both belonging and uniqueness for its members. Inclusive climates enable learning and performance.

# Glossary of Terms

---

**INCLUSIVE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**– Team rules and norms explicitly designed to facilitate all team members' participation and promote the collaborative exchange of ideas among them. In the absence of these rules, team discussion and decision-making are often dominated by a subset of team members. This could be a function of status differences and/or personality. So, for example, those with greater Status or more outgoing personalities can easily dominate the discussion.

**INTERSECTIONALITY** – is a term for how social categorizations such as race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and more play into people's experiences. We often think about these social categories as an additive, each layer adds on to more oppression. In reality, intersectionality is about how these categories are so entangled that we can't separate the experience. Someone's experience as a black woman will be different from the experience of a white woman, but also from a black man. But the experience they face is not an addition to the experience of being Black and a woman. Being a black woman creates a unique experience of racism and misogyny that you can't disentangle.

**MARGINALIZED/MARGINALIZATION** – The process by which minoritized groups/cultures are excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community. A tactic used to devalue those that vary from the mainstream norm, sometimes to the point of denigrating them as deviant and regressive.

**MICRO-AFFIRMATIONS** – Subtle behaviors that serve to help others feel valued, included, and an important part of the group; they may include nodding at someone, smiling at them when they're speaking, acknowledging the points they've made, acknowledging their contributions, amplifying their voice, giving them the floor, calling on them by name, and giving them praise publicly.

**MICRO-AGGRESSIONS** – An inhibitor to inclusion; subtle behaviors that lead someone to feel devalued, such as being repeatedly interrupted or spoken over, having others take credit for your ideas, not feeling welcome in a discussion even when others are aware of your presence, and being the last to receive information about something.

**MICRO-AGGRESSIONS, MICRO-ASSAULTS, MICRO-INEQUITIES** – Every day, recurring insults, indignities, and demeaning and derogatory behaviors, actions, and messages are sent to members of minoritized groups.

**NATIONAL ORIGIN** – The state, country, or nation where a person or their ancestors were born.

**OPPRESSION** – The systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions and embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society. Oppression also signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups.

**ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE** – refers to the shared meaning that employees attach to the events, policies, practices, and procedures they experience and what communicates to them about the behaviors they see as being rewarded, valued, supported, and expected.

**ORGANIZATIONAL INCLUSION** – Inclusion is a call to action within the workforce that means actively involving every employee's ideas, knowledge, perspectives, approaches, and styles to maximize organizational success.

**PEER INFLUENCE** – An important source of influence on the inclusiveness of the climate; employees tend to see themselves as passive recipients of a climate that is handed down from management, but they are co-creators of the climate.

**PERSON/PEOPLE OF COLOR (POC)** – Used primarily in the United States to describe any person who is not white; the term is meant to be inclusive among non-white groups, emphasizing common experiences of racism. (This definition parallels the Communities of Color definition.)

**PREJUDICE**– A pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or group toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics. ∞

# Glossary of Terms

---

**PRIVILEGE** – An invisible package of unearned assets that one can count on cashing in each day, but about which one is largely oblivious. Def. 2 – A set of advantages, entitlements, and benefits accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to the members of a dominant group (e.g., white/Caucasian people with respect to people of color, men with respect to women, heterosexuals with respect to homosexuals, adults with respect to children, and rich people with respect to poor people). Privilege tends to be invisible to those who possess it because its absence (lack of privilege) is what calls attention to it. In other words, men are less likely to notice/acknowledge a difference in advantage because they do not live the life of a woman; white people are less likely to notice/acknowledge racism because they do not live the life of a person of color; straight people are less likely to notice/acknowledge heterosexism because they do not live the life of a gay/lesbian/bisexual person.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL AVAILABILITY** – A dimension that involves having the capacity to engage; it relates to an employee's circumstances. It involves protecting employees' efforts to renew personal energy through work-life balance and providing them with learning opportunities and feedback that allow them to feel confident about investing themselves in their work.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANINGFULNESS** – This dimension is described as "having a reason to engage." It relates to work elements; employees believe their work is meaningful. It involves jobs with high "motivating potential" –challenging, meaningful, and provides opportunities for autonomy, and involves specific and difficult goals. Employees' natural tendency to reciprocate (i.e., principles of social exchange) is reinforced.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY** – This dimension involves people experiencing the freedom and safety to engage (rather than being focused on protecting themselves). It relates to social elements and involves developing high-trust relationships.

**RACE/RACISM** – A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on physical appearance (particularly skin color), cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time. There are no distinctive genetic characteristics that truly distinguish between groups of people. Created by Europeans (Whites), race presumes human worth and social status to establish and maintain privilege and power. The race is independent of ethnicity. 2nd def. These biases occur when individuals interact with others, and their personal, racial beliefs affect their public interactions.

- **Color Blindness** – The racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity. The term "colorblind" de-emphasizes or ignores race and ethnicity, a large part of one's identity.
- **Communities of Color** –A term used primarily in the United States to describe communities of people who are not identified as White, emphasizing common experiences of racism.
- **Covert Racism** – Expresses racist ideas, attitudes, or beliefs in subtle, hidden, or secret forms. Often unchallenged, this type of racism doesn't appear to be racist because it is indirect behavior.
- **Institutional Racism** – Institutional racism refers to how institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group. Still, their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

**INTERNALIZED RACISM** – Internalized racism is a phenomenon that occurs when a group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of a racist system by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that reinforce that system. In the U.S., this generally involves reinforcement of white supremacy.

# Glossary of Terms

---

**INTERPERSONAL RACISM** – Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. When private beliefs interact with others, racism resides in the interpersonal realm—examples: public expressions of racial prejudice, hate, bias, and bigotry between individuals.

**MULTIRACIAL** – An individual that comes from more than one race.

**REVERSE RACISM** – Perceived discrimination against a dominant group or political majority. They are commonly used by opponents of affirmative action who believe these policies are causing members of traditionally dominant groups to be discriminated against.

**STRUCTURAL RACISM** – The normalization and legitimization of an array of historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal dynamics that routinely advantage Whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of White domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society, including its history, culture, politics, economics, and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution because it involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.

**RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY** – An individual's awareness and experience being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe themselves based on biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience.

**RACIAL JUSTICE** – the proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes.

**RELIGION** – A system of beliefs, usually spiritual in nature and often in terms of a formal, organized institution.

**SAFE SPACE** – A place where anyone can relax and be able to express fully, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, religious affiliation, age, or physical or mental ability.

**SEX**– the biological classification of male or female based on physiological and biological features. A person's sex may differ from their gender identity.

- **Birth Assigned Sex**– The designation refers to a person's biological, morphological, hormonal, and genetic composition. One's sex is typically assigned at birth and classified as either male or female.
- **Intersex** – The term "intersex" refers to atypical internal and/or external anatomical sexual characteristics, where features usually regarded as male or female may be mixed. This is a naturally occurring variation in humans, not a medical condition, and is distinct from transsexuality.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** – Refers to the sex(es) or gender(s) to whom a person is emotionally, physically, sexually, and/or romantically attracted. Examples of sexual orientation include gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, asexual, pansexual, queer, etc.

- **Asexual** – Someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Asexual people have emotional needs and can experience emotional or romantic attraction. Asexuality is considered identity and is not the same as celibacy, which is a choice.

# Glossary of Terms

---

**SUPPORTIVE CONTEXT**- One in which people feel safe to express themselves without having to worry about suffering negative consequences because they know that others will assume that they have positive intentions. The default assumption is that people are competent.

**TRANSGENDER**- An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their assigned sex at birth (i.e., the sex listed on their birth certificates). Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies through hormones and/or gender affirmation surgery. Transgender people may identify with any sexual orientation, and their sexual orientation may or may not change before, during, or after transition (linked definition). Use "transgender," not "transgender."

**TRANSITION** - The process that people go through as they change their gender expression and/or physical appearance (e.g., through hormones and/or surgery) to align with their gender identity. A transition may occur over a period of time and may involve coming out to family, friends, coworkers, and others; changing one's name and/or sex designation on legal documents; and/or medical intervention. Some people find "transition" offensive and prefer terms such as "gender affirmation." It is best to ask individuals which terms they prefer.

**UNCONSCIOUS BIAS** - Snap judgments that result from the shortcuts, or pre-existing knowledge structures in our brains that make us very efficient at interpreting incoming information quickly, below our level of conscious awareness, about what or who we see; these judgments tell us who or what is likable, safe, valuable, right, or competent; they impact how we see people; they are influenced by society; they affect our objective observations.

**VETERAN STATUS** - The status of having served in the active military, naval, or air service and being discharged or released from service under conditions other than dishonorable.

**WHITE PRIVILEGE**- refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits, and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally, white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.

**WHITE SUPREMACY** - White supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent; to maintain and defend a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

# References

## General Resources

- [Bias-Free Language \(APA Style Guide\)](#)
- [Diversity Education and Training Sessions](#)
- [The Sierra Club Equity Language Guide](#)
- [The Race Forward Guide](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#)  
[Implicit Bias Workbook](#)
- [Learning for Justice](#)
- [University of Washington-Tacoma Diversity & Social Justice Glossary](#)
- [Visuals Matter: Using Imagery to Promote and Support Diversity and Inclusion Efforts](#)

## People-First versus Identify-First Perspectives

- [Language Matters: Identity-First vs. Person-First Language](#)
- [Why Person-First Language Doesn't Always Put the Person First](#)

## Identity: Racial and Ethnic, Gender and Sexual Orientation

- [Racial Equity Tools](#)
- [Identity and Cultural Dimensions | Asian American and Pacific Islander](#)
- [Identity and Cultural Dimensions | Black/African American](#)
- [Identity and Cultural Dimensions | Hispanic/Latinx](#)
- [Identity and Cultural Dimensions | LGBTQI](#)
- [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Arab / Middle Eastern American](#)
- [Multicultural competence in student affairs](#)

## Disabilities and the Disability Rights Movement

- [Just Like Everyone Else](#)
- [Disability Language Style Guide](#)
- [Identity and Cultural Dimensions | People with Disabilities](#)

Special thanks to the [Columbia University School of Social Work](#), [the Office of Multicultural Affairs](#), [University Life](#), [Columbia Business School](#), and [the Office of the Provost](#) for leading the way for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

In remembrance of [Professor Katherine W. Phillips](#).

The Columbia SPS Equity Language Guide is a living document and as our work in DEIA evolves we will adjust, modify, and expand the content.

Please contact [spsdiversity@columbia.edu](mailto:spsdiversity@columbia.edu) with any questions, suggestions, and observations.