



# **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

## **2025 CHAPTER TOOLKIT**



# Table of Contents

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Introduction - Toolkit Purpose. . . . . 3

Our Position on DEI for PRSA and PRSSA Members: Open Letter From PRSA Chair Ray Day . . . . . 4

The DEI Liaison Role . . . . . 6

The PRSA Foundation . . . . . 8

Do’s and Don’ts for DEI Liaisons . . . . . 9

Engaging With Students at HBCUs and HSIs. . . . . 10

About the Chapter DEI Award Programs . . . . . 12

DEI Monthly Calendar of Observances . . . . . 13

Resources for DEI Liaison. . . . . 14

Your Guide To Creating a DEI Statement. . . . . 16

Media Style Guides for Race, Ethnicity and Religion . . . . . 17

Race, Ethnicity and National Origin Definitions. . . . . 18

About Gender and Sexuality. . . . . 19

About Disabilities . . . . . 21

2025 DEI Executive Committee . . . . . 22



# Introduction

In recent years, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have faced challenges across various sectors, from corporate boardrooms and state legislatures to educational institutions and government agencies. Amid debates over affirmative action and diversity metrics, the need for robust DEI policies remains critical. These discussions underscore the complexities of integrating diverse perspectives and the ongoing necessity for constructive dialogue.

At the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), we recognize that embracing DEI isn't just about compliance; it's about shaping our identity and ensuring our future success. Diversity is more than a demographic checklist; it's the collective sum of our unique identities — our backgrounds, languages, cultures, abilities and beliefs. Embracing diversity isn't just a commitment to fairness; it's a strategic imperative for thriving in a global marketplace.

Our Fellows, Chapter, Section and District leaders, along with DEI liaisons, play pivotal roles in advancing our organization's DEI efforts. This Toolkit is designed to support you in fostering inclusive relationships within PRSA and fulfilling your responsibilities effectively. The resources provided here offer guidance on implementing inclusive practices and developing collaborative programming that reflects our commitment to diversity and equity.

We encourage you to utilize this Toolkit as a valuable resource, enabling you to navigate DEI challenges with confidence and purpose. Your feedback and insights are essential as we continue to evolve our DEI initiatives. Please reach out to us at [diversity@prsa.org](mailto:diversity@prsa.org) with your thoughts and needs.

## Toolkit Purpose

This Toolkit is designed to empower DEI liaisons and PRSA Chapters with actionable tools, current resources and community-centered guidance.

# Our Position on DEI for PRSA and PRSSA Members

Dear PRSA and PRSSA Members,

At the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is unwavering. In recent years, DEI initiatives have become vastly criticized and often weaponized, leading to confusion among the general public. This has resulted in companies and organizations reconsidering or even retreating from their commitments due to shifting political and social pressures. Despite these challenges, PRSA remains steadfast in our belief that DEI is not a passing trend — it is fundamental to the future of public relations, business and society.

Today, we want to address a question we've heard from many PRSA members: "What does diversity, equity and inclusion mean to PRSA in the current landscape?" The answer is simple — DEI is who we are, and it is core to the values of PRSA.

## Our Name Reflects Our Mission and Values

Since its inception, PRSA has played a pivotal role in advancing a more representative, equitable and inclusive public relations profession. Our organization is a reflection of the industry we strive to shape. Rather than bowing to ongoing external pressure to dismantle DEI efforts, we will focus on ensuring our members, partners and the next generation of PR professionals who rely on PRSA's leadership have the necessary resources to thrive in our profession.

Research consistently shows that diverse teams drive better business outcomes. A study by McKinsey & Company found that companies in the top quartile for ethnic and gender diversity are significantly more likely to outperform their peers financially. Similarly, research from Harvard Business Review highlights that inclusive organizations are more innovative, resilient and successful. Another more recent study from The Harris Poll shows that, despite the political backlash, 61% of Americans today recognize the positive impact of diverse teams on organizations, and 75% want to see more work on diversity to ensure everyone is advancing.

Yet, the reality remains that PR and communications professionals from underrepresented communities continue to face barriers to advancement. The 2023 Diversity Action Alliance Report revealed that while 25% of entry-level PR professionals are people of color, only 14% reach the senior executive level. These statistics underscore why our work matters now more than ever.

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of Americans today recognize the positive impact of diverse teams in organizations.

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of entry-level PR professionals are people of color.

**14%**

of people of color will reach the senior executive level.

## The Role of PRSA in Leading the Industry Forward

PR professionals are the storytellers of our time. We shape narratives, build reputations and foster meaningful engagement between organizations and the public. As communicators, it is our responsibility to not only reflect the world as it is, but also to drive the change needed to create a more equitable future.

PRSA will continue to:

- Provide actionable resources to help PR and communication professionals integrate DEI principles into their work.
- Host meaningful conversations on the evolving DEI landscape and how we can drive impact.
- Celebrate diverse voices and ensure that underrepresented professionals have a seat at the table.
- Support PRSA and PRSSA members including those in states where DEI efforts face legal and political challenges.

We recognize that some of our PRSA and PRSSA Chapters operate in states where DEI policies are under attack. To our colleagues and students in these regions, we see you, we support you and we will provide the tools and guidance necessary to navigate these challenges — while staying true to the principles of fairness, representation and inclusion.

## Standing Firm for Today, Tomorrow and Always

PRSA is not here to follow trends — we are here to lead. Our organization, our mission and our values remain unchanged because the work we do is far from over.

**To our members:** Whether you are looking for DEI best practices, educational programming or simply a community that values equity and inclusion, PRSA is your home. In the coming weeks, we will be rolling out additional DEI resources to help you integrate these principles into your work and professional development.

One example is [PRSA's Member Mondays](#) sessions — open to all members and all nonmembers — some that will focus on DEI, and what communicators should do to navigate today and tomorrow. (A replay also will be available.)

We encourage you to join in our mission, engage in conversations and advocate for a profession that welcomes and uplifts all voices. The power of PR lies in our ability to inform, inspire and ignite change. Together, we can ensure that diversity, equity and inclusion are not just ideals we aspire to but principles we live by.



Thank you for your commitment to PRSA, to DEI and to the future of our industry.

Sincerely,

**Ray Day, APR**

2025 PRSA Chair, and the PRSA DEI Executive Committee



## The DEI Liaison Role

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The DEI liaison holds a pivotal role within PRSA, crucial for fostering diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) across all levels. Working closely with Chapter leadership, the DEI liaison is tasked with developing and executing strategies to embed DEI principles within each Chapter. This includes advocating for diversity as a core value and actively engaging volunteers from diverse backgrounds. It also involves advocating for the profession and serving as a communicator and distributor of all DEI-related efforts.

Districts and Sections are encouraged to integrate DEI leadership into their operational frameworks to best serve their membership. It is strongly recommended that each Section and District appoint a DEI liaison to the executive committee or establish a dedicated subcommittee. This initiative aims to cultivate a culture of DEI throughout all Section and District activities.

A significant aspect of the DEI liaison's role involves creating and promoting programs that enhance understanding of DEI issues. This includes fostering partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) within Chapter regions. Collaborating with Faculty Advisers at these institutions is essential to fostering meaningful engagement.

Lastly, the DEI liaison collaborates with Chapter, Section, or District leadership and the membership chair to develop an annual DEI Calendar of activities. This Toolkit outlines strategic initiatives to advance DEI goals throughout the organization.

Below are additional considerations for the DEI liaison.

- **Develop the DEI short-term and long-term goals** and organize a group of volunteers to help with DEI initiatives.
- **Design programs** that reinforce diversity, equity and inclusion within the Chapter, Section, or District.
- **Work with Chapter, Section, or District leadership** to ensure that communications (website, social media channels, etc.) are consistent with PRSA's practices and culture. Maintain diversity metrics.



- **Act as a liaison** to underrepresented groups within the Chapter, Section, or District and work to ensure that all voices are heard.
- **Participate in quarterly conference calls** to discuss and review initiatives led by the DEI Committee.
- **Utilize the annually updated Toolkit** and Do's and Don'ts lists as a resource for efforts.
- **Work to align and implement DEI activities** into annual programming.
- **Plan Chapter-, Section- or District-based activities** during Diversity Equity Inclusion Month (October).
- **Support the Strategic Plan** goals and objectives of the DEI Committee by sharing announcements, posts and events with the members.
- **Evaluate** if the Chapter, Section, or District can apply for DEI awards.



# Empower. Engage. Elevate.

## The PRSA Foundation's Bold Vision For Inclusivity



The PRSA Foundation is on a mission to transform public relations through diversity and inclusion, and is working to cultivate a workforce that reflects the vibrant communities we serve, equipping up-and-coming PR professionals to engage effectively with all audiences.

As the charitable arm of PRSA, the Foundation empowers the next generation of PR leaders through scholarships and grants. Since 2003, it has awarded over \$900,000 and expects to surpass the \$1,000,000 mark in 2025. Opportunities are available to aspiring public relations professionals at colleges and universities nationwide, including those involved in PRSSA Chapters.

The Foundation's flagship event, the Paladin Awards, honors pioneers who have significantly advanced diversity and inclusion in the industry. It also serves as the organization's primary fundraiser, with event proceeds going directly toward supporting scholarships, industry education and other key initiatives.

Within the last five years, the PRSA Foundation has continued to accelerate its impact. In 2020, the Foundation Board established a permanent endowment for the PRSA Diversity Multicultural Scholarship, and in 2023 it launched the Foster the Future fellowship — both initiatives provide scholarships, stipends and paid internships aimed at building pathways for future public relations and communications leaders.

At the PRSA Foundation, we believe that empowering inclusivity helps elevate and enhance the future of our industry. Please visit [prsafoundation.org](https://prsafoundation.org) to learn more and join us in our mission.







## Do's and Don'ts for DEI Liaisons

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### Do's for DEI Liaisons:

- **Develop** a DEI plan for your Chapter, Section, or District that aligns with PRSA's Strategic Plan.
- **Brainstorm and seek ideas** to promote DEI initiatives.
- **Create and share a year-long DEI Calendar** highlighting religious observances and cultural events.
- **Proactively outline ways for others to contribute** to the success of your DEI plan.
- **Provide guidance** on leveraging personal and PRSA social media to advance DEI efforts.
- **Establish clear guidelines** for acceptable and unacceptable content.
- **Partner with other affinity groups and civic organizations** to expand DEI efforts.
- **Network** among your peers within and outside of PRSA to bring forward DEI strategies and tactics to help the community at large.
- **Represent** your Chapter, Section, or District by serving on or moderating panels.
- **Use the DEI Toolkit** and compile a list of resources to share with others.
- **Stay informed** on prosocial programs and highlight trailblazers in your community through social media, Op-Eds, etc.
- **Tag PRSA DEI Committee and PRSA Foundation** in relevant posts (#prdiversity and @prsafoundation).
- **Participate** in the DEI Committee's monthly/quarterly meetings.
- **Consider a succession plan** and appoint a vice chair for support.

### Don'ts for DEI Liaisons:

- **Don't try to do it all by yourself.** Collaborate and delegate.
- **Don't get overwhelmed** by the scope of your responsibilities.
- **Don't be intimidated by challenges;** take a breath and move forward.
- **Don't assume** you have all the answers for solving inequities.
- **Don't hesitate** to add your voice to the conversation — your perspective matters.



## Engaging with Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

Through conversations with PRSSA Faculty Advisers at HBCUs and HSIs, it has become clear that there is a strong need for support in professional development and financial resources for local PRSSA Chapters. Many opportunities are not as accessible to students and Faculty Advisers at these institutions. It's crucial that these resource gaps do not prevent students or their Faculty Advisers from benefiting from the exceptional offerings of PRSA.

Based on insights from HBCU and HSI Faculty Advisers, here are key recommendations to enhance our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and to support future PR professionals:

### Best Ways To Engage:

- **Support underrepresented students:** Help diversify the industry by offering students from diverse backgrounds industry knowledge, relevant skills and a strong professional network.
- **Offer internship and mentorship opportunities:** Even if your organization lacks formal paid internship programs, explore creative ways to provide students with professional exposure and guidance.
- **Build relationships through joint meetings:** PRSA Chapters can collaborate with PRSSA Chapters by inviting them to your meetings and attending theirs.
- **Host training sessions:** Organize regular training with PRSSA Chapters on topics such as LinkedIn profiles, professional social media presence, resume writing and interview skills.
- **Provide campus engagement:** Invite agency, corporate and other industry professionals to campuses to assist students with professional development.



- **Collaborate with local diversity offices:** Work closely with PRSSA Chapters and diversity departments at local colleges, including HBCUs and HSIs.
- **Leverage sponsor relationships:** If your PRSA Chapter has strong sponsor relationships, partner with them to support diverse students, benefiting both the students and your Chapter.
- **Fundraise for student events:** Set aside funds to send students to District events or ICON to further their professional growth.
- **Drive DEI initiatives locally:** Partner with students or student groups to implement DEI-focused programs or projects that benefit the local community.

These are just a few ways PRSA Chapters, Sections and Districts can strengthen their relationships with PRSSA students and Faculty Advisers at HBCUs and HSIs. We encourage PRSA members to adapt these suggestions to fit the unique needs of their Chapter and the diverse students in their communities.

The DEI Committee remains committed to continuing dialogue with Faculty Advisers, particularly those at HBCUs and HSIs, and to developing new strategies to meet their evolving needs.





## About the DEI Chapter Award Programs

Each year, PRSA awards the top three Chapters for their DEI initiatives and programs. The DEI Chapter Award is given to Chapters that embody and demonstrate key values in diversity, equity and inclusion, and that contribute to advancing diversity as shown by submissions of their best practices and/or case studies. These awards recognize local efforts as well as provide further support for continued achievements at the Chapter level. The awards also help local Chapters learn and adapt new strategies of engagement to advance a Chapter's DEI mission.

Please [visit the DEI Awards website](#) for the updated Awards deadline and more information.

# DEI Monthly Calendar of Observances

Recognizing that programming efforts by the DEI liaison can be helped through knowledge of national celebrations of diversity, equity and inclusion, this calendar of activities is intended to provide insights and information for the execution of Chapter, Section or District-specific and coordinated activities.

| MONTH     | AREA   |
|-----------|--|
| January   | New Year   |
| February  | Black History Month (USA and Canada)<br>Lunar New Year   |
| March     | Women's History Month<br>National Development Disabilities Awareness Month<br>National Irish American Heritage Month   |
| April     | Deaf History Month<br>Autism Acceptance Month<br>Celebrate Diversity Month<br>National Arab American Heritage Month  |
| May       | Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month<br>Jewish American Heritage Month<br>Mental Health Awareness Month<br>Older Americans Month   |
| June      | LGBTQIA+ Pride Month   |
| July      | DEI Chapter Award Deadline Announced<br>Disability Pride Month   |
| August    | OPEN   |
| September | Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15–Oct. 15)   |
| October   | PRSA DEI Month<br>Global Diversity Awareness Month<br>LGBTQIA+ History Month<br>Filipino American History Month<br>National Disability Employment Awareness Month<br>PRSA ICON DEI Celebration |
| November  | Indigenous Peoples Month   |
| December  | OPEN   |

*\*Guidance from the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA): “There was an overwhelming preference for ‘Indigenous Peoples’ Month over ‘Native American Heritage’ Month.” The NAJA board’s position is that the proper recognition should include Indigenous Peoples across the continent, not just those in the U.S., and also recognize that we are more than our history and heritage.*

# Resources for DEI Liaison

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The following resources are organized to help Chapters, Sections and Districts better utilize the PRSA DEI Calendar and empower DEI liaisons to customize programming for their members.

PRSA also has a page [Reality Check](#) with articles and other resources. Check it out!

The DEI Committee also continues to host webinars, [Diverse Dialogues](#), on relevant topics.

## January – General DEI Education

- [Why DE&I Needs to Be More than an HR Initiative](#) (PRsay).
- [How to get serious about diversity and inclusion in the workplace](#) (TED Talk).

## February – Black History Month

- [Code Switch](#) (podcast).
- [How microaggressions are like mosquito bites](#) (video clip).
- [13TH](#) (Netflix film).

## March – Women’s History Month

- [Men and Women Seeking #MeToo Congruence](#) (The Winters Group, 2017).
- [National Developmental Disabilities Month](#).
- [Widening the Aperture of Diversity to Include People with Disabilities](#) (PRsay).
- [I got 99 problems... palsy is just one](#) (TED Talk).
- [Taking the ‘invisible’ out of invisible illnesses](#) (TED Talk).
- [International Day of Transgender Visibility](#) (March 31).

## April – Deaf History Month

- [National Association of the Deaf](#) (webinars).
- [National Deaf History Month: Exploring Deaf Culture](#) (Library of Congress).
- [Deaf History Month – Global Views](#) (podcast).
- [Celebrating Deaf History Month](#) (YouTube playlist).
- [World Autism Awareness Month](#) (CDC).

## May – Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

- [We Are Not Invisible](#) (PRsay).
- [AANHPI Resource Center](#).
- [AANHPI Heritage Website](#) (Library of Congress).
- [The Problem with Apu](#) (Apple TV).
- [Speaking Up Against Anti-Asian Racism](#) (PRsay).



## June – LGBTQIA+ Pride Month

- [Celebrating the PR Profession’s LGBTQ Community](#) (PRsay).
- [Making the Business Case for LGBTQ Inclusion](#) (*Strategies & Tactics*).
- [LGBTQ Workplace Discrimination](#) (PRSA webinar).
- [Transgender Justice Initiative](#) (Human Rights Campaign).
- [Pride, Politics and PR: Why Rainbow Silence is a Reputational Risk](#) (PRSA-LA).

## August – Religious Groups

- [Religion Communicators Council](#).
- [The Story of God Trailer - National Geographic](#) (movie).
- [Books on Religion](#) (Good Reads).
- [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#).

## September – Hispanic Heritage Month

- [Hispanic Market Overview](#) (Hispanic Ad).
- [The Growing Power of the Hispanic Market](#) (PRsay).
- [Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month](#) (PRsay).
- [Exploring the Growing Influence of the Hispanic Market](#) (Hispanic Ad).
- [Latino USA](#) (podcast).

## October – DEI and Addressing Disinformation

- [The Consequences of Misinformation](#) (PRsay).
- [Trust and Transparency in Times of Crisis](#) (*Strategies & Tactics*).
- [Why Educating Employees on Inclusive Language Matters](#) (PRsay).
- [4 Tips to Create an Inclusive Crisis Comms Plan](#) (*Strategies & Tactics*).
- [Advancing Your Communication Strategy in DE&I](#) (PRSA Certificate Program).

## November – Indigenous Peoples Month (NAJA)

- [Native American Calling](#) (podcast).
- [Museum of Northern Arizona](#) (website).
- [National Museum of the Native American](#) (Why We Serve).

## December – International Day of People With Disabilities (Dec. 3)

- [Being Blind Has Not Stopped Rachel Carver, APR, from a Successful PR Career](#) (PRsay).
- [Widening the Aperture of Diversity to Include People with Disabilities](#) (PRsay).
- [Team Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution](#) (Netflix film).
- [The Accessible Stall](#) (podcast).

# Your Guide To Creating a DEI Statement

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## Drafting Your Statement\*

**Start with the PRSA DEI Committee's statement:** Use it as a foundation, then define what diversity, equity and inclusion mean to your Chapter, Section, or District. Highlight the value you place on each of these principles.

**Engage your members:** Solicit feedback and input from your members to ensure their buy-in and reflect their perspectives in the mission statement.

**Review and update annually:** Revisit your DEI mission statement and strategy each year to reinforce your Chapter's commitment and ensure alignment with all members.

**Track progress:** Set clear, measurable goals (key performance indicators) to assess the effectiveness and impact of your DEI mission and strategy.

**Alignment:** A good DEI statement aligns with values, action and accountability.

*\* Steps adapted from guidelines provided by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce*

**Here's an example of a DEI statement from a national PR agency:**

Fenton is an anti-racist and intersectional organization that prioritizes the needs of those who have been historically oppressed. We do the work of creating positive social change as an act of repairing the harm done to those who have been and are currently disenfranchised and to build a workforce that more accurately reflects the vast diversity of our world.

We believe to truly create change that dismantles white supremacy, racism, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, heteronormativity, ableism, classism, religious discrimination and other forms of oppression, we must learn from the wisdom of those whose identities and experiences closely align with the problems we see today. And we honor the value of their lived experiences — domestically and globally — by continually building and sustaining a workplace that is inclusive and rooted in justice and equity.

We make this statement not as a concluding point of our collective journey. Rather, we have much to learn and are committed to the learning — and more importantly, the doing. This statement enshrines Fenton's accountability to these words and this work.

## Helpful References

- [How Communicators Can Lead the Way on Diversity and Inclusion.](#)
- [Writing a Diversity and Inclusion Statement: How to Get it Right.](#)

# Media Style Guides for Race, Ethnicity and Religion

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- [Asian American Journalists Association Handbook.](#)
- [Conscious Style Guide.](#)
- [GLAAD Media Reference.](#)
- [Guia de Lenguaje Inclusivo de Genero \(Spanish\).](#)
- [Inclusive Language Guides.](#)
- [Native American and Indigenous Terminology Guide.](#)
- [National Association of Black Journalists Style Guide.](#)
- [Religion Stylebook.](#)



# Race, Ethnicity and National Origin Definitions

| IDENTITY  | EXPLANATION  | EXAMPLE(S)  |
|---|--|---|
| African American/Black                                    | <p>Black and African American are not always interchangeable. Some individuals prefer the term black because they do not identify as African and/or American.</p> <p>Individuals may identify as African, Afro-Caribbean, AfroLatino or other.</p>   | <p>Refer to groups as Black students, Black faculty members, etc., not “blacks.”</p> <p>Consider the necessity of using race within your text. Ask yourself: “Would I mention ‘white student’ or ‘white faculty member’ when discussing others?”</p>                                  |
| Asian, Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI)             | <p>Asian refers to people who are citizens of countries in the Far East, Southeast Asia or the Indian subcontinent, or to describe people of Asian descent.</p> <p>Asian Americans trace their origins to these regions.</p> <p>Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, Fijian and other peoples of the Pacific Island nations.</p> <p>Use Asian/Pacific Islander when referring to the relevant population in its entirety. Otherwise, use the preferred term of the individual or group.</p> | <p>Refer to groups as Asian students, Asian faculty members, etc., not Asians.</p> <p>Consider the necessity of using race within your text. Ask yourself: “Would I mention ‘white student’ or ‘white faculty member’ when discussing others?”</p>                                    |
| Hispanic, Latin(a/o), Latinx, Latine, Chicano             | <p>Hispanic refers to people from Spanish-speaking countries.</p> <p>Latino, Latina or Latinx is a person of Latin American descent who can be of any background or language. If the individual or group does not identify as either Latino or Latina, the gender-neutral term Latinx can be used. When referring to a group, generally use Latinx as it is gender inclusive. The LGBTQIA+ community has also begun using the term Latine with an “e” as it is gender neutral in Spanish.</p>                        | <p>People from Mexico, Cuba and Guatemala who speak Spanish are both Hispanic and Latin(o/a/x/e).</p> <p>Brazilians who speak Portuguese are Latino/a/x but NOT Hispanic.</p> <p>Spanish-speaking people in Spain and outside Latin America are Hispanic but not Latin (o/a/x/e).</p> |
| Native American, American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAN) | <p>Native Americans, also known as American Indians or Indigenous Peoples, are the original inhabitants of the Americas including those groups who lived in what is now the United States and Canada. The term encompasses a vast array of distinct cultures, languages and tribal groups, each with their own unique history, traditions and governance.</p>  | <p>Native American cultures are diverse, with each tribe having unique traditions, languages and ways of life.</p>  |
| People of Color (POC/BIPOC)                               | <p>BIPOC is an acronym that stands for “Black, Indigenous and People of Color.”</p>  | <p>It’s a more specific alternative to terms like “marginalized” or “minority.”</p>   |
| Underserved/Historically Underrepresented Groups (HUGs)   | <p>Do not use the term minority to describe students from diverse backgrounds. When referring to multiple groups of students from diverse backgrounds, use “underserved/underrepresented students”; however, use the specific group title when possible.</p>   | <p>For example: LGBTQIA+ students, Black students, undocumented students, etc.</p> <p>You may use descriptors like marginalized, minoritized or historically underrepresented.</p>  |
| Immigration Status  | <p>Do not use the word “illegal immigrant” or “illegal alien” to refer to individuals who are not U.S. citizens/permanent residents, who do not hold visas to reside in the U.S. or who have not applied for official residency.</p> <p>These words dehumanize the individual by stripping their identity down to a legal status. Instead of saying “illegal immigrant” or “illegal alien,” use “undocumented.”</p>  | <p>Example: undocumented students; undocumented individuals.</p>  |



## About Gender and Sexuality

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Our definitions and understanding of relationships have expanded far beyond historic constraints of heterosexual partnerships and nuclear families. People need not have had specific sexual experiences to know their own sexual orientation; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all. Using sexual orientation rather than sexual preference indicates an understanding of human attraction to others.

Use of “sexual orientation” rather than “sexual preference” indicates an understanding of human attraction to others. “Preference” suggests that sexuality is a choice, a concept used often to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ people and cast their sexuality in relation to historic heterosexuality.

### Key Terms

**Ally:** A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQIA+ people.

**Bisexual, Bi, Bi+:** An adjective used to describe a person who has the potential to be physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way or to the same degree.

**Gay:** An adjective used to describe a person whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). Sometimes lesbian (n. or adj.) is the preferred term for women. Avoid identifying gay people as “Homosexuals,” an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbians and gay people.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.



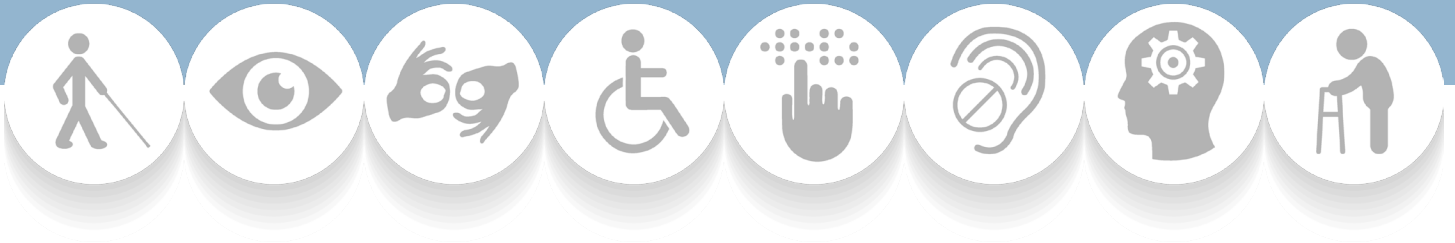
**LGBTQIA+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual. The plus sign includes other members of the community such as genderfluid, nonbinary or two-spirit, among others.

**Pansexual:** Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people regardless of gender. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual.

**Queer:** A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQIA+ movement.

**Same-Gender Loving:** Also known as SGL, this is a term used by some Black people as an Afrocentric alternative to what are considered Eurocentric, or white, identities like gay and lesbian. Coined by activist Cleo Manago in the 1990s, the term and its usage explicitly recognize the histories and cultures of people of African descent.

**Two-Spirit:** An adjective used by some Indigenous and First Nations people as an umbrella term to describe people who are not straight and/or cisgender. Many Indigenous communities have specific words in their language to describe these experiences, but some do not. This term should not be used to describe people who are not Indigenous. Only use it for an Indigenous person if they use it to describe themselves.



## About Disabilities

When discussing language surrounding disability status, the preferred language of the majority of the disabled population is to go with identity-first language. The goal is to be factual and descriptive.

The term “disabled” is no longer seen as a bad or negative word. Instead, referring to an individual as a disabled person is the norm and is considered most respectful. The disability pride movement has grown in recent years and the disabled community has embraced the term for themselves. It is also okay to use their specific disability as an identifier. The people-first language should largely be avoided except for discussing mental illness. Those cases should be done on a case-by-case basis, but at this time it’s acceptable to use phrases such as “with mental illness.”

When referring to facilities, use the term accessible instead of disabled or handicapped-friendly. Avoid outdated, offensive words such as handicapped, retarded, crippled, crazy, etc. Avoid using self-diagnosing language such as, “I’m so OCD,” and “I’m insane,” unless these mental illnesses have been diagnosed. It is essential you do not use terms such as special abilities, special needs, differently abled or (dis)ability.

It is also important to avoid using terms such as “person with autism” or “person on the spectrum.” Instead, you should say autistic person or autistic. Again, identity-first language is preferred largely by the community. The terms neurodivergent and neurodiverse are also appropriate descriptors in cases describing conditions including ADHD, autism and dyslexia.

When discussing the Deaf and hard of hearing community, capitalize the D in deaf, and you may use the abbreviation, HoH. For example, when discussing the wider community, say d/Deaf/HoH.

There are a variety of nuances across the disabled community, and disability is not a monolith. When in doubt, defer to the community you are communicating with and use the language they most prefer.

Sources:  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
United Nations



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