



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Justice (DEIJ) Terminology Guide

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Purpose: The purpose of this document is to create a guide for Alliance staff on how to appropriately communicate with our audiences in a way that is sensitive to DEIJ considerations.

This document is meant to serve as a general guide for terminology best practices, but always make sure you are listening to the community members you are speaking with about how they refer to themselves and their community members. Always follow their lead when referencing them. When in doubt, ask the individual you are interacting with.

Please Note: This guide is not meant to be exhaustive, since language is continuously evolving. Terms and definitions are based on extensive research from reputable sources as of the date of this document.

General Terminology

Diverse/Diversity – The demographic mix of a specific collection of people, taking into account elements of human difference. (e.g., racial and ethnic groups, income, spectrum of built environment settings (rural to urban), faith communities, LGBTQ+ populations, people with disabilities, gender, relationship to the natural environment)

Equity – Improving equity is to promote justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the underlying or root causes of disparities within our society.

Inclusion – Refers to the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes within an organization or group. While a truly “inclusive” group is necessarily diverse, a “diverse” group may or may not be “inclusive.”

Underserved vs. under-resourced: Use underserved only when talking about services, not as a blanket term for impoverished communities. Use the phrase “under-resourced” as a more accurate way to frame larger issues. For this purpose, resources include leadership, physical assets, money, power, political will, institutions, community cohesion, and services.

Underserved – Populations who receive inadequate or inequitable services, who experience quality-of-life disparities, and who may in some circumstances have little power or influence over outside decisions that impact their daily quality-of-life.

Underrepresented – inadequately represented or disproportionately low representation.

Ally / Allyship– Allyship is a process, not an identity. It is an ongoing and lifelong process of listening and learning. Appropriate use: “doing ally work” to reference the fact that “ally” is an action, not an identity.

Allyship can be in reference to justice for racial, LGBTQIA+, immigrant, differently abled, etc. peoples and movements.

Environmental Terminology

Environmental racism – The set of structures, institutions, practices and ideas that produce unhealthy, poisoned environments, concentrated in low-income communities and communities of color worldwide.

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

Environmental justice – The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies³, and refers to “decisions [that] support sustainable communities where people can interact with confidence that their environment is safe, nurturing, and productive.”

Race Terminology

All terminology has a history and specific use for certain circumstances. Very few words can be adequately used as a blanket description for a group of people. Each of these terms has a purpose and correct use (similarly to how we want to use correct pronouns). None of them should be used indiscriminately but specifically to the topic you are discussing. “Naming and self-naming is powerful, there is no one size fits all.”

African American – Acceptable for an American Black person of African descent. The terms are not necessarily interchangeable. Americans of Caribbean heritage, for example, generally refer to themselves as *Caribbean American*. Follow a person’s preference.

American Indians, Native Americans – Both are acceptable terms in general references for those in the U.S. when referring to two or more people of different tribal affiliations. For individuals, use the name of the tribe; if that information is not immediately available, try to obtain it. *He is a Navajo commissioner. She is a member of the Nisqually Indian Tribe. He is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.* Some tribes and tribal nations use *member*; others use *citizen*. If in doubt, use *citizen*. Avoid words such as wampum, warpath, powwow, teepee, brave, squaw, etc., which can be disparaging and offensive. In Alaska, the Indigenous groups are collectively known as Alaska Natives.

Black – Use the capitalized term as an adjective in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense. Ex: *Black people, Black culture, Black literature, Black studies, Black colleges*

Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) – The term is acceptable when necessary in broad references to multiple races other than white. Be aware, however, that many people of various races object to the term for various reasons, including that it lumps together into one monolithic group anyone who isn’t white. Be specific whenever possible. This term is also meant to unite all people of color in the

work for liberation while intentionally acknowledging that not all people of color face the same levels of injustice. By specifically naming Black and Indigenous people we are recognizing that Black and Indigenous people face the worst consequences of systemic white supremacy, classism and settler colonialism.

Brown – This is a personal descriptor that should only be used if a person self-identifies as such. Avoid this broad term in describing others unless coming from a direct quote from someone who identifies as brown.

Indian – Avoid unless describing the peoples and cultures of the South Asian nation of India. Do not use the term as a shorthand for *American Indians*.

Indigenous – Capitalize this term used to refer to original inhabitants of a place. Ex: *Aboriginal leaders welcomed a new era of Indigenous relations in Australia; Bolivia's Indigenous peoples represent some 62% of the population.*

Latino, Latina – Latino is often the preferred noun or adjective for a person from, or whose ancestors were from, Latin America. Latina is the feminine form. Some prefer the recently coined gender-neutral term **Latinx**, which should be confined to quotations, names of organizations or descriptions of individuals who request it and should be accompanied by a short explanation.

For groups of females, use the plural Latinas; for groups of males or of mixed gender, use the plural Latinos. **Hispanic** is also generally acceptable for those in the U.S. Please remember that Hispanic references people of Spanish ancestry. Be considerate in your use of this term as not all people from Latin America are Hispanic (ex: Brazil), just as not all Hispanic people are from Latin America (Ex: Spain). Use a more specific identification when possible, such as Cuban, Puerto Rican, Brazilian or Mexican American.

Minority – The term is only acceptable as an adjective in reference to demographics or describing collected data. However, it should never be used as a noun in the singular.

Multiracial – People who identify with 2 or more races. Individuals often (but not always) self identify with one race over the other depending on multiple factors. Not all adults with a mixed-race background consider themselves multi-racial.

“While multiracial adults share some things in common, they cannot be easily categorized. An added layer of complexity is that racial identity can be fluid and may change over the course of one’s life, or even from one situation to another.”

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

People of color – The term *people of color* is a generally acceptable term to describe a group of people of races other than *white* in the United States. Avoid using *POC*. When talking about just one group, be specific: *Chinese Americans* or *members of the Seminole Indian Tribe of Florida*, for example. Be mindful that some Native Americans say the term *people of color* falls short by not encompassing their sovereign status.

“the term “people of color... became a way to just kind of group all nonwhite people together in ways that weren’t necessarily productive...” Sometimes the inclusivity and solidarity of the term “people of color” remains legitimately useful. Ex: the work of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, an organization founded in the 1970s to provide resources for Black and brown queer and trans people. Using a term like “people of color” while discussing their work “would be highly appropriate...because it’s homing in on the mission of that specific organization.”

Sources:

1. [White Allyship 101: Resources to Get to Work](#)
2. [Why the term BIPOC is so complicated. explained by linguistics](#)
3. [The Journey from “Colored” to “Minorities” to “People of Color”](#)
4. [How to Fix A Broken Tongue](#)
5. [APA Style Guide](#)
6. [Multiracial In America](#)
7. [What makes you “Multicultural”](#)

Reminder: When writing about someone or interviewing someone, use the terms they use to describe themselves. Do not make assumptions on terminology if you do not know how the subject or communities of that population feel about a term. When in doubt, ask the individual.

Any questions about or suggestions for this document can be sent to dei@allianceforthebay.org