

# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION GUIDE

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# Introduction

At its founding over 100-years ago, the League of Women Voters did not embrace diversity and inclusiveness, a practice sadly reflective of a society that continued to segregate and discriminate against non-white members of the community. The League, as it looks to be both transformative and to address historic racism, is today committed toward working forward on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in principle and in practice and weaving this throughout our organization, our work and our actions. In our work, implementing DEI strategies will help everyone thrive and create growth for the League and our membership. A DEI lens will allow us to examine everything that we do and remove barriers that may exist that prevent the League from being equitable or inclusive of everyone. This toolkit will provide resources and guidance, plus help share best practices over time, to move us toward more effective DEI strategies. We recognize each League looks different and has their own way of doing things, so please use this as a tool to build your own road map towards a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable organization.

## Key Terms from LWV

We have summarized the definitions of these words. For the full LWV definitions, please see [here](#).

**Diversity:** All of the similarities and differences among people, not limited to: gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, appearance, language, accent, ability status, mental health, education, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, and political perspective or affiliation. Diversity exists in relationships between people. Teams and organizations can be diverse, but individuals can not.

**Equity:** Equity is an approach that divides resources to make sure that each person has a fair chance to succeed. It takes into account that people have different access to resources because of systems of oppression and privilege. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society. Equity seeks to balance these disparities.

**Inclusion:** Inclusion refers to the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes within an organization or group. An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It also enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated, and valued for who they are and for their contributions toward organizational and societal goals.

While an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group is not always inclusive. Being aware of unconscious or implicit bias can help organizations better address issues of inclusivity.

**DEI Lens:** A way of examining a program, process, product, etc. with regards to how it is perceived by a variety of communities, voices, and perspectives, and what, if any, barriers may exist that are preventing it from being equitable or inclusive of everyone. We can apply a DEI Lens to every League's work and operations.

# Self Assessment

The process to build a more inclusive organization begins with self-reflection, analysis and understanding on a personal as well as on an organizational level. To assist in this path, we've identified some tools and resources which are located in the resource section. One of these is a Harvard University [collaboration Project Implicit which helps identify implicit bias](#). The test helps provide insight into internally held beliefs which we may not even be aware of.

On an organizational level, the LWV-Oakland had success going through the process of drawing up a strategic plan. The process assists an organization identify strengths, weaknesses, as well as more clearly define goals which align with its mission. Below are also some questions to work through to take a deeper look at your League's current processes and procedures. It's important to have commitment to this process by your League's Board and to approach these tasks with clear-eyed compassion.

The resource section also includes books and other articles on the background and history of our nation. The quote attributed to Edmund Burke, "Those who do not know history are destined to repeat it," applies to DEI work as well.

[Self Reflection Resources](#)

# Re-examining Processes & Procedures

## Local League Questions:

### General Questions:

- Do you have a DEI team or task force that is charged with looking at how to weave DEI throughout your work?
- How is your Board continuing to have discussions about, and learning more about issues of racism, implicit biases and structural and institutional policies which have historically kept communities of color and low-income people from participating fully in society? How do you celebrate the diversity of ideas and people?
  - Holidays, culture, and foods of people who provide new ethnic richness to the community
  - Events and programs affecting and/or impacting disadvantaged communities
  - Spotlights on League members who exemplify and provide leadership around our work on DEI
  - Spirit of the League Awards acknowledging diverse leaders and volunteers or folks who work on DEI
- Has your League committed to improving diversity?
- What goals has your League created to hold itself accountable?

### Leadership:

- Who are your leaders and board members?
  - Is there diversity? Young members, members from communities of color, members from disadvantaged or often misaligned groups? Members from areas of your community which have historically had no voice?
  - What barriers to bringing in diversity are there?
- Who are your volunteers? Committee chairs and members? Actively engaged in League work?
- Who are your interns and (where applicable) paid staff?
- What are you doing to mentor, train, and support your next generation of leaders?
- Are the folks on the nominating committee diverse or do they have goals to nominate a diverse pool of candidates?

- Has the nominating committee reviewed membership and the wider community to find candidates who represent a diversity of views and backgrounds?

#### **Membership:**

- Is there an orientation or onboarding for new members to welcome them and help acclimate them to League?
- Are there opportunities for socializing and community building? (see the section on community building on pg. 13)
- Are there opportunities for feedback and open communication?
- Are leaders constantly mentoring upcoming leaders and sharing power? These may be non-traditional ways to mentor, so be creative and innovative in thinking about how to engage and support newcomers into the League.

#### **Events:**

- Are all meetings on the calendar with contact information in time for sufficient notice?
- Is your League responding to current events and partnering on rallies/events?
- Are there barriers to attending events?
  - Language barriers?
  - Physical barriers?
- Who are your speakers, presenters, and panelists? Are they representative and reflective of the community's diverse population?
- Who are you inviting to attend? (local electeds, community groups, community partners, etc.)
- What images are you using in your presentation? This is important -- as those images can reinforce stereotypes of who the League is!
- How are you starting each program? (Welcome, recognition of Native American land, introductions with gender pronouns, etc.)
- Are you setting aside time to build community at the beginning of each meeting to check-in or welcome new members? (See page # for community building tips)
- How are people introducing themselves? (name, pronouns, position?)
- What types of food options are being offered? (Vegetarian, gluten free, halal, etc.)
- **Annual Meeting:** Are you considering all of the questions above for your annual meeting? This can be an opportunity to bring new folks in.
- **Program Planning:**

- Are you picking issues that are relevant to everyone in your community or just those in power?
- Are there issues that you can focus on that might bring in a more diverse membership?

### **Communication:**

- Does your League have a DEI policy and definitions that it's adopted? See the LWVUS DEI Policy [here](#).
- Are those definitions and policies on your website, social media, etc.?
- Do you trumpet your work around DEI to the community?
- Do you have diversity in your pictures, writers, contributors, and content?
- **Note: Although these things are important, it's important to do the work throughout your organization, otherwise this is just tokenism.**

### **Questions for Individuals:**

These are some questions to ask at your meetings and events and reflect upon afterwards:

- Who is speaking? Who isn't?
- Can you help lift or amplify the voices of others?
- Do you speak up when you see someone being treated unfairly because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or background.

### **Voter Services:**

- Are the members on your Voter Services team diverse? Studies have shown that people are more likely to vote or register to vote if the person approaching them is from their community.
- Are you reaching out to all of the areas that your League covers and focusing on communities that are typically underrepresented?
- Are you leveraging your partnerships to reach underrepresented communities and letting them lead the charge?

## **Collecting Demographics: Why, How, and What to do with the data**

Demographics are important because collecting such data will help measure how successful your League is in bringing in new members from diverse communities as well as new young members. They measure who and what kind of people are involved in your League. These questions are a vital way to measure progress in terms of diversity and



inclusion. Google forms is one great way to collect this information and because you can automatically take that data and put it into charts and graphs.

#### 4 Tips on How to Use Surveys to Get Valuable Demographic Information

1. **Make it anonymous.** If you're looking to unveil certain broad trends or patterns in your league you should consider making your survey anonymous. The fact is, many people are cautious about revealing information they consider private. In case your survey is anonymous, make sure to emphasize that.
2. **Briefly explain the background of your survey.** Include a brief introduction to your survey in which you would clearly state its purpose. Reassure people by sharing exactly how you'll be using their information. Mention how you plan on keeping the data private and anonymous.
3. **Make it easily accessible.** As we live in a digital world, you need to make sure your survey is available to be filled out online. You can consider using LeadQuizzes to create your surveys, you can easily integrate with some of the most popular apps and services, embed your survey to your website, send it via email, and share on Facebook or other social media. You can also help folks who are not able to access a virtual survey by calling them.
4. **Make it brief.** Shorter surveys are easier for people to complete. It also might be a good idea to indicate the total number of questions at the very beginning of the survey, as well as the approximate time it might take to complete.

#### Demographic basics

These are some suggestions for demographics to ask for. It is not required, but this is vital information for Leagues and increasing diversity. Some questions may be harder to ask and they are all up to the League's discretion for what to ask. Nothing is mandatory, so people can ask and answer as they feel comfortable.

1. **Age**  
Questions about age are a part of almost every demographic survey. That's because age is a powerful data to segment your audience by. You can ask for their specific age or give age groups like 25-30 and 31-35, etc..
2. **Ethnicity (Race)**  
A sensitive (and politically-charged) subject, but asking about race is necessary. It's probably best to create checkbox-type questions and a write in portion, which allow respondents to check multiple answers. This is especially important because many countries are melting pots of different races and cultures. As with all

sensitive demographic questions, it's important to give respondents a write-in box option or (perhaps by adding a "prefer not to answer" option.

**3. Education**

Knowing members' levels of education can help understand the best way to communicate more effectively. In most cases, education demographic questions ask about the highest level of education or the highest degree obtained by an individual. This is useful to identify which demographics you aren't reaching.

**4. Availability and Schedule**

It is important to know this because it gives an idea of people's flexibility and how busy they are. This could include their priorities and when they are available for League meetings or participation..

**5. Household income**

Asking about household income may be considered a bit less invasive than asking about an individual's income. It can provide a sense of understanding, recognize any barriers to entry and help with fundraising.

**6. Gender and Sexuality**

This is useful to know who is involved and see if there is involvement with the LGBTQ+ community. NOTE - should we provide the categories that Sharon has developed for Convention registration?

**7. Ability**

When knowing people's abilities allows your League to better accommodate those who are differently abled it helps better serve them and understand strengths as well as limitations to better accommodate them.

**8. Language**

Knowing people's primary language and any other languages they speak is valuable for the future.

# Applying a DEI Lens to Recruit and Retain Members

One of the ways in which we can be a more inclusive organization is by recruiting diverse members as well as put into place procedures that help retain them. Recruiting members is about building relationships and making the League easily accessible. Retention is about helping new members feel comfortable, welcome, connected, and not overwhelmed. The following are some question to ask yourself and ideas:

## **Outreach:**

- Do you regularly partner with diverse organizations or groups (academic, youth, religious, social, etc.)? See our partnership section on page 10.
- Do you send a representative to your partners' meetings? Keeping up these relationships can help others outside of League become familiar with your League and its work.
- Sometimes it can take a while for someone to feel ready to join. Are you staying in touch with prospective members, answering their questions, and inviting them to events without being too pushy?

## **Recruiting Materials:**

- Do your recruiting materials need to be updated? Do they look outdated or overly wordy? You should have something you can hand people to invite them to join.
- Is the website easy to navigate? Can folks pay online? Are you asking for their interests in the membership application?
- Is it time to upgrade your membership system?
- Are you using social media to recruit new members?

## **Accessibility:**

- **Fees:**
  - Are you offering free student memberships?
  - Is there a sliding scale option or a way for people to join at a reduced fee?
  - Is your League membership fee a barrier for those who may not have the discretionary resources to join?
  - Are there other options your League can provide to encourage participation from outside the "usual" League sphere?

- Are the places where you have your events wheelchair accessible? Are there ramps, elevators, lifts, etc?
- If you're holding events at night, have you considered organizing carpools for those who are uncomfortable driving at night?
- Do you offer childcare, a babysitter share, or activities for young children at the event or meeting?
- Can you provide an interpreter for deaf or non-English speaking participants?

#### **Onboarding members:**

- Do you send a welcome email or call new members?
- Is there an orientation session (virtual, pre-recorded or in person) that helps new members get acclimated?
- Do you have any materials that explain the structure of your League, issues you focus on, calendar of events, or other materials that will acclimate new members?

#### **Micro-tasks:**

- Do you have easier, bite-sized tasks that are well defined so that new members can feel comfortable joining in without getting too overwhelmed? Too often we throw new members into the deep end and ask them to join the board or take on a leadership position before they feel ready.
- Do your tasks/roles have written position descriptions?
- Are you letting the members determine their own capacity? Be careful about assuming that someone may be too busy or unable to complete a certain type of task.
- Are you making assumptions about the type of tasks your new members want to/are able to do? (e.g. giving younger members tech-related jobs)

#### **Membership team:**

- Do you have a membership team that helps with recruitment and retention?
- Do you have a buddy system or something that allows new members to connect to the organization?
- What tools do you have in place to support your team's work? Do you have a spreadsheet with new members to keep track of them?

#### **Support new/different ideas:**

- Are you too focused on maintaining the "League Way"? Old systems, old ways of thinking and performing -- let's toss some of those away and be truly

transformative in our work, opening up ourselves to new ideas and thinking about HOW we do our work. Don't be afraid of trying something new. If it works, great. If it doesn't, readjust and try again or move on and learn from that experience.

- Even if the idea is different from what we usually do, maybe the rules need to change.
- If you need to disagree with an idea, are you clear about why the idea won't work? Are you still supportive of the person who shared the idea?

# Creating Collaborative Partnerships:

## *Opportunities to Listen, Learn and Build Bridges*

Partnerships with different organizations are valuable because they can strengthen your League. It is important to build these connections, especially with diverse organizations, because this expands the reach of your League and promotes engagement and builds relationships with community groups and other nonprofits which work well in communities of color and disadvantaged communities, building our understanding of their issues. Below there are some questions to consider as you start to find and build these partnerships. Success stories have been included to give some ideas for partners and demonstrate how beneficial they can be. These partnerships can help achieve goals and connect with more people, which will benefit everyone.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- Does the partner conform to our nonpartisan policies? [Click on the link for more about nonpartisan policies](#)
- Does this partnership reach a different or new group of people that you don't work with now?
- Have you identified trusted messengers to partner with to connect with the community?
- Are you listening to your partners about issues and concerns that they have?
- Will this benefit both parties in the partnership?
- What are your goals as partners?
- Does this partner value DEI?
- How can you make sure this connection will be continuous?

### **Successful Partnership Stories**

There are many examples of successful partnerships Leagues have had. Below is one example from the Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville League which partnered with three different community organizations. In BaseCamp, people can see and share their experiences with successful partnerships. People should feel free to add their own experiences with partnerships.

### **Nonpartisan Policy**

The League is nonpartisan meaning they never support or oppose any political party or candidate. When considering partnerships, it is important to remember that the League can take action on governmental policies and procedures. The League cannot support or oppose a candidate or political party. For partnerships, remember to give people the tools to make their own informed decisions. [Click on the link for more about nonpartisan policies](#)

**Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville:**

**Partners: Vote16 Berkeley and NAACP Youth Group**

The League created a voter registration “train the trainers’ event. They taught the youth group how to register people to vote. Registering people to vote in your own community is more effective because there is a common bond between people in their own community and it builds trust. It was mostly led by the students because there is value in connecting more with the younger generation and students of color. It also was successful because students registered their peers and that was another common bond.

**Training:** <https://prezi.com/brharvyqcsut/votingmatters-training/>

**Photos:**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19NxFfAiWJltQppUEpWXKaqTaXlpFK-2X?usp=sharing>

**Lesson Learned:** It is important to try and make events like this regular or ongoing. Consistent relationships are how people create bonds. It’s difficult with student groups to maintain a consistent relationship because the students graduate. An idea to fill in that gap is creating a mentoring program where graduating students interact with another group of students to motivate them to be a part of the voting events.

**Partners: Senior Centers/Senior Housing Communities**

They regularly hold voter information sessions where they give the pros and cons of ballot measures and propositions, as well as distribute information. Also, they partner with the centers to co-sponsor candidate forums and help people (re)register to vote.

**Lessons learned:** This was an easy connection since this community is already looking for voting resources. Make sure to keep up a spreadsheet with contact information and stay in touch with folks throughout the year.

**Partner: East Bay Center for the Blind**

It’s not easy for folks who are blind to access information about what’s on their ballot. People helping would read the pros and cons to them and share information about voting. Answering questions and re-register folks to vote were main tasks.

<https://eastbaycenterfortheblind.org/>

**Lessons learned:** It's very challenging for people who are differently abled to access the ballot and people should be doing more in terms of advocating for resources for this community.

## Community building in meetings

There are many ways to build community as a part of retention. Here are some ideas to try:

- **Introductions:** make sure to allow time for individuals to introduce themselves if they are new to the League
- **Food:** Food builds community! There's nothing like sharing a meal (or snack!) together. Make sure you take people's allergies, religious or dietary restrictions, and preferences into consideration. (Remember that not everyone drinks alcohol or caffeine.)
- **Formalized mentoring:** Pairing a new member with a long-time member can be a great way to help acclimate new members and help them learn the culture, history, and work of the League.
- **Finding things in common:** Just simply getting to know people and finding things in common can help people feel more connected. Some of our icebreakers below can help with this.
- **Icebreakers:**
  - Why were you interested in joining the League?
  - What political issue are you most passionate about?
  - How many siblings (if any) do you have? What is your family like?
  - What is your favorite food and why?
  - Can you share one of your favorite childhood memories?
  - What kind of change do you want to make in the world?
  - Make up your own!
- **Activities:**
  - **Roses and Thorns-** Start by having everyone share their rose (any positive that makes them feel grateful, happy, etc.) and also their thorn (a challenge). Both can be League or non-League related.
  - **Big Talk-** Start meetings with a few minutes of organized "big talk" about global events and news. At the start of the meeting, give everyone a minute to share their thoughts without interruption or commentary. Then, set aside 5 minutes after that for open group discussion.



# Examples of Local League DEI Initiatives

Integrating DEI initiatives into our work can take many forms. Here are some examples of how local Leagues have woven DEI into their operational plans:

**Tulare County** League actively uses its Facebook postings to highlight the League's strong concern about diversity and equity issues. Tulare League promoted a workshop on *Systemic Racism in Health Care*, and has running Facebook postings which visually have diverse images and strong programmatic information: a multi-racial Zoom photo of panelists featured at a national Civic Health Conference webinar featuring LWV president Debbie Turner, postings about Hate Crimes against Asian Americans, Cinco de Mayo events, and We Draw the Lines showing Independent Redistricting Commission Isra Ahmed. **Note:** It's important to partner and build relationships with diverse folks and not just use them for diverse photo opportunities. Tokenism isn't enough.

The **Los Angeles** League addresses racism and equity in a variety of ways including programs, such as a recent webinar titled: "How did Election 2020 Ballot Advance Equity and Justice?" and another that focused on "Coded Bias" in new facial recognition technology. In addition, the home page for the local League features a box of rotating dynamic photo images of League members in action (we see young League members, a diverse range of races, plus messaging about League work on the Racial Justice Act). On its inside page About Us, there is a 2:33 minute video clip about the history of the LWV, with a long-time African American member Bessie White, talking about her first voting experience in the late 40's and her joining the League, and new voter Alejandro Orozo, empowered and informed as voter thanks to materials from the League.

Shortly after the 2019 convention, the **Pasadena Area League** established a DEI Task Force, which Identified two key practices: 1) to integrate DEI into its structure, mission and bottom line; and 2) to employ metrics to get an accurate snapshot of its membership. The task force worked with its Membership and Voter Services chairs to refine priorities, develop best practices to build in diversity; and worked to create a new data-gathering process and member questionnaire to focus on long-term membership growth. League members also share their reflections about diversity, equity and inclusion with a regular DEI Spotlight on its website. Topics range from a discussion about "White Fragility", "Societal Fault Lines (exposed by Covid)", to "What's in a Name — Chasing the 'Latino' Vote". The League also uses its Twitter voice to promote concerns about Stop Asian Hate and other League priorities, and has a YouTube channel, link below, that features diversity in speakers, including a program Voting while Black!

Youtube Channel:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8zGsytSihwGtGb\\_6xW4DqA/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8zGsytSihwGtGb_6xW4DqA/videos)

For the **Diablo Valley** League, their website prominently features DEI with a section that highlights its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and provides links and resources, as well as featuring the LWV response to the George Floyd murder as well as the LWVC statement. The League used the lens of DEI in some of topics chosen for community programs presented with Contra Costa County Library such as: “Racism as a Public Health Hazard,” a “Roadmap to Voting” program in Spanish, “Women of Color: Activists Then and Now” and “Diversity and Division in the Suffrage Movement.”

The **Fremont, Newark and Union City League’s** area are majority minority cities, primarily of Asian background. Our experience has been that many from the immigrant communities are not aware of LWV let alone the work we do. However, through concerted outreach, we have been able to partner with diverse ethnic/religious organizations for multiple community and civic events. A relatively recent example of this broad based collaboration was the establishment of the Youth Voter Movement Project (YVM) back in 2018. This project helped us reach out to a demographic in a more focused and effective way than in the past.

YVM was originally the Parkland Voter Movement co-founded in partnership by a mother and son team, Julie and Michael Dunkle, after the Parkland shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. They wanted to find a way to give youth a voice in government and over their own lives. This project was initially an informal collaboration by the Fremont Unified School District, LWVFNUC, and several religious and interfaith organizations as well as unaffiliated community members. The Parkland Voter Movement project soon became a fiscally sponsored project of LWVFNUC as we took on the administrative tasks involved with a budding organization.

Over the course of its short existence, YVM project volunteers have registered and preregistered over 6000 students. In the last major assembly before the pandemic hit, back in March 2020, the project attracted the attention of several elected officials and demonstrated to youth that their vote matters. YVM’s vision was to create content and provide a platform for youth and adult volunteers to share best practices and thus the [youthvotermovement.org](https://youthvotermovement.org) website was developed. This website is available to be used by any other League or other organizations seeking to empower youth through civic participation.

The pandemic delayed voter registration drives but eventually, in the last few months, youth led online registration assemblies have resumed. The initiative, organization and leadership shown by these youth volunteers has been impressive. Some have become members of our League but all of them, including their parents, will now know about LWV and the work we do.

# Curated Resource List

[Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion | League of Women Voters \(lwv.org\)](#) - This is the LWVUS site for DEI and is targeted towards League operations so it speaks our language. There are many videos, webinars, training modules and also success stories from Leagues across the nations. This site is a must visit resource for any League considering DEI implementation.

**Self reflection- implicit bias and internal work - navel gazing** It's important to have insight into yourself and your League as part of the initial journey towards building diversity, equity, and inclusion. Compassion is a valuable tool in this journey for both yourself and others.

- **Gauging implicit bias:** <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. This tool asks questions and evaluates responses to provide some possible insight into your own implicit bias. This tool was designed by Project Implicit, which is a “non-profit organization and international collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition - thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control.
- **Toward Love, Healing, Resilience & Alignment: The Inner Work of Social Transformation & Justice** By Sheryl Petty, Kristen Zimmerman and Mark Leach <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/toward-love-healing-resilience-alignment-inner-work-social-transformation-justice/> - This is a longer article that dives into the complex nature of inner work and how it translates to holistic outer transformation. It is an in-depth read that demonstrates the importance of inner work improving outer work. This tool is beneficial because it looks at all these smaller ideas from a broader perspective.
- **We're All Problematic.... But Here's How to Work Through the Issues We Perpetuate** By Lin Kaatz Chary <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/were-all-problematic-how-to-work-through-the-issues-we-perpetuate/> - This is a short article about how to work through the issues we have with ourselves and acknowledging them to move forward. The article is helpful because it reminds people to reflect on themselves and understand that this is essential for growth.
- <https://nonprofitaf.com/2019/03/so-you-dont-think-race-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-are-relevant-to-your-mission/>. Very readable and concise argument as to why DEI is important.

**Historical context to current inequity in the US:**

- **The Color of Law**, by Rothstein. Discusses historical implementation of systemic racism in housing.
- **How Unjust Social Structures Help Some But Harm Others**  
<https://theconversation.com/how-unjust-social-structures-help-some-but-harm-others-113622> - This article explains how structural inequalities are woven into our society. It builds on how these inequalities turn into privilege that is used as a form of power against others. It is an approachable look at these complex topics.
- **Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing**  
<https://extension.umn.edu/mental-health/historical-trauma-and-cultural-healing> - The site gives information on historical trauma including a five minute video. There are guiding questions for the video and links to additional resources. This is a good tool because it explains how historical trauma connects to people today and how it is perpetuated in society.

### **Barriers to change and overcoming them - Bringing about an Equitable Society**

- **Champions for Change: Upending Structural Racism and Barriers to Equity Barriers** By Yodit Mesfin Johnson  
<https://racetolead.org/champions-for-change-upending-structural-racism-and-barriers-to-equity-barriers/> - This is a short article about a Washtenaw County-based nonprofit support organization that strives to empower and improve the impact of fellow nonprofit leaders and could address the racial leadership gap. The article focuses on how important it is to upend structural racism and put people of color in leadership positions. It is informative and to the point.
- **What Does an Equitable Executive Leadership Transition Look Like?** By Cyndi Suarez  
<https://racetolead.org/what-does-an-equitable-executive-leadership-transition-look-like/> - The article is about nonprofits and their civic role. Suarez discusses how nonprofits can have beneficial transfers of power and how to keep things equitable. It goes in depth on different models including a new model that will continue promoting equity.
- **Intent vs. Impact: Why Your Intentions Don't Really Matter** By Jamie Utt  
<https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/07/intentions-dont-really-matter/> - This an informative article about intent, impact, and privilege. It addresses all these topics in a clear way. It is important to understand these things and know that the change is rooted in listening. When people realize the difference between someone's intent and their impact it will help them realize that these things are not always the same.

- **Breaking Generational Cycles of Trauma by Brandy Wells**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXbg6e-A9V4> - In this TED Talk, Wells speaks on her experience as an African American woman who grew up without a present father and how this affected her as a mother. She covers how your childhood connects with your adult mental health. Wells discusses the importance of uncovering your traumas to break the cycle and leave a better legacy. Her main focus is challenging the old ideals for parenting, thinking with a mental health framework, and parenting with comfort not fear.
- **Gem Droppin' with Amanda Seales: White Savior vs Ally**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBYPxzuGiYc> - Amanda Seales explains the difference between white saviors and allies. This video is a good tool because it uses humor to approach a difficult topic. Seales acknowledges privileges white people have and how mainstream media portrays allies incorrectly.
- **So You Call Yourself an Ally: 10 Things All 'Allies' Need to Know By Jamie Utt**  
<https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/11/things-allies-need-to-know/> - The article summarizes another piece by Mia McKenzie about acting like an ally instead of saying you are an ally. It covers the importance of being an ally that will help people not help themselves. The term is not something simple, it is an action that people choose to do every day. This piece is very eye-opening because it challenges people who consider themselves allies to reevaluate their practices.
- **Examining Cultural Competency in the Nonprofit Organization By Lawanda Horton-Sauter M.S.**  
<https://socialinnovationsjournal.org/editions/issue-42/75-disruptive-innovations/2720-examining-cultural-competency-in-the-nonprofit-organization> - This article defines cultural competence and other important terms. It is a valuable resource because it mentions how to address specific issues and improve cultural competence. The piece is concise and easy to understand.
- **Fakequity** <https://fakequity.com/>: Blog about what is equity and what is "fakequity" which the writers define as equity without action. Several thought-provoking posts.
- **How to Push DEI Conversations Out of the Comfort Zone By Chera Reid & Jara Dean-Coffey**  
[https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_to\\_push\\_dei\\_conversations\\_out\\_of\\_the\\_comfort\\_zone](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_to_push_dei_conversations_out_of_the_comfort_zone) - The article is a clear list of ways to push pass your comfort zone when it comes to DEI. It is insightful because it is from two African American women authors. This piece has good tips to approach these conversations from a different perspective.
- **A Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment**  
<https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/> - The article is

so useful because it shows why this is important, while giving tips and factors to consider when writing an indigenous land acknowledgment.

- **CSULB Land and Territorial Land Acknowledgments**  
[https://www.csulb.edu/sites/default/files/u69781/csulb\\_land\\_and\\_territorial\\_acknowledgments\\_faq\\_002.pdf](https://www.csulb.edu/sites/default/files/u69781/csulb_land_and_territorial_acknowledgments_faq_002.pdf) - This document is an important tool because it explains what these are and why it is applicable. It includes samples and resources, which makes it easy to learn more about this.
- **Beyond Acknowledgments**  
<https://infoguides.pepperdine.edu/landacknowledgment/beyond> - The guide includes many tools like podcasts, blogs, organizations, library guides, and ally resources. It is useful because these tools can further teach people about land acknowledgments.

## Toolkits

Toolkits can be helpful “turn-key” options for your League. The ones identified below are no means an exhaustive list but these are the ones we thought were fairly comprehensive.

- <https://www.lacountyarts.org/building-your-plan-cultural-equity-inclusion-toolkit>  
In the toolkit they include many different resources. There are definitions, explanation videos, examples, and activities. It is a shorter toolkit that can be used as a starting point for introducing these topics.
- [The MSW@USC Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege](#). The information in this toolkit does a good job of explaining all the different vocabulary and including different activities to incorporate. There is more material going in-depth on diversity and bias topics.
- [National Council of Non-Profit – Why diversity, equity and inclusion matters for non-profits](#) This toolkit is beneficial because it is short and contains many direct links to all of the topics. The specific resources within this kit and easy to read format make it very useful.

# Curated List of Trainings, Events, and Conversations on DEI

Most of the other trainings and webinars had a cost feature which may or may not be within your League's budget. LWVUS webinars however are free of charge and accessible. We recommend that you review these before investing in other resources. We have highlighted one of the earlier ones below. [Click on the link here to check out the series.](#)

[May 2020 DEI Webinar from LWV.](#) This webinar is a helpful broad overview of many of the terms and implementation of the DEI Lens. The webinar discusses the following article as a case study:

- Why Detroit Residents Pushed Back Against Tree-Planting? By Brentin Mock <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-01-11/why-detroiters-didn-t-trust-city-tree-planting-efforts> - This article is an interesting read about how Detroit residents didn't want trees planted because they couldn't trust the city. It talks about how the real downfall was not including people in the plans and making the decision for them. Reading this is a useful tool because it gives a real-life example about the importance of inclusivity when it comes to enacting change.



# People First Language Guide

The purpose of the People First Language Guide is to help League volunteers and staff use people-first language and avoid terminology with negative, dehumanizing connotations. This guide aims to standardize the terminology used by staff, volunteers, and local Leagues in both our advocacy and educational work. The guidance here should be used when framing all communications from letters to government officials, social media content, and action alerts to editorials, Pros & Cons, and the Easy Voter Guide . The League recognizes that our language is still evolving as we become more inclusive, and that many of these terms and their usage may change.

The League of Women Voters of California is fully committed to [diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical to our ability to engage all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy. Our volunteers and staff should consistently use terminology that uplifts rather than stigmatizes the individuals and communities we support and stand in solidarity with. Further reading on diversity, equity, and inclusion can be found [on the LWVUS site](#).

## What is people first language?

[People first language](#) emphasizes personhood and views other social identities that one may hold as secondary.<sup>1</sup> [Defining a group by its condition](#) - such as housing status, disability, and past or present involvement in the criminal justice system - places an undue focus on the condition.<sup>2</sup> By emphasizing that people with disabilities, people who are experiencing homelessness, people who are formerly incarcerated, and so forth are people first and foremost, we can [minimize generalizations and stereotypes](#) about these communities.<sup>3</sup>

In the sections below, we list some dehumanizing yet commonly used terms and provide alternatives to refocus our lens on the person, and not their social identity or condition.

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<sup>1</sup> Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion, [askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language](https://askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language)

<sup>2</sup> Sum Of Us, [s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/SUMOFUS\\_PROGRESSIVE-STYLEGUIDE.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/SUMOFUS_PROGRESSIVE-STYLEGUIDE.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> DC Fiscal Policy Institute, [dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language\\_Dec-2017.pdf](https://dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language_Dec-2017.pdf)

Each section is grouped with similar League issue areas, but it's important to note that these issue areas can intersect beyond these groupings.

## ISSUE AREAS

### Criminal Justice, Death Penalty, Sentencing Policy, Violence Prevention, Juvenile Justice

✗ “(Ex-)Offender / (Ex-)Convict / (Ex- or former) Felon / (Ex-)Inmate / Parolee / Perpetrator / Criminal.” Avoid terms that [define a person based on their history within the criminal justice system](#).<sup>4</sup>

✓ Instead: Describe people as people first and foremost, using terms such as: “people who are incarcerated / people who are in prison / people who are formerly incarcerated / people who are on parole / people impacted by the criminal justice system / people with felony convictions / people coming home...”

✗ “Served their time / Paid their debts to society / Second chances.” Avoid terms that assume someone had a first chance given over-policing and racial inequities in the carceral system. This terminology also suggests that conditioning voting rights based on incarceration status is acceptable, unless a person has “reformed.”

✓ Instead: Use terminology that emphasizes the need to **support individuals in their re-entry from the criminal justice system** and to **build a more inclusive democracy**.

✗ “Violent communities / bad or disadvantaged neighborhoods.” [Avoid terms that label a community as “violent,”](#) thereby demonizing all individuals living within it.<sup>5</sup>

✓ Instead: Use terminology such as “**communities or areas that experience high rates of violence**.”

✗ “Status offender / Juvenile offender / Juvenile delinquent / Offender / Truant.” This language defines a young person by their involvement in the juvenile justice system.

✓ Instead, use people-first language such as “**young people impacted by the juvenile justice system**.”

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<sup>4</sup> DC Fiscal Policy Institute, [dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language\\_Dec-2017.pdf](https://dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language_Dec-2017.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Underground Scholars Initiative, [osborneny.org/resources/resources-for-humanizing-language/language-guide-for-communicating-about-those-involved-in-the-carceral-system](https://osborneny.org/resources/resources-for-humanizing-language/language-guide-for-communicating-about-those-involved-in-the-carceral-system)

## Housing and Homelessness, Meeting Basic Human Needs, Equality of Opportunity

✗ **“The homeless / transients.”** Avoid defining a person or group in terms of their housing status. This can be [stigmatizing and lead to readers relying on generalizations or stereotypes](#).<sup>6</sup>

✓ Instead: Use **people-first language**, such as **“people who are unhoused / experiencing homelessness / housing insecure.”** This terminology describes people as people first and foremost, rather than framing people by their ‘condition’ or status.

✗ **“Inner-city / Poverty-ridden / Poverty-stricken / High poverty / Disadvantaged / Low-opportunity” area or community:** Avoid terms which are vague and frame poverty as a disease, an affliction, or other stigmatizing connotations.

✓ Instead: Use **“under-resourced / neighborhoods with high poverty rates / neighborhoods with access to fewer/more opportunities.”** [Use clear language to convey specific information about an area or community](#).<sup>7</sup> Statistics can be helpful: for example, instead of describing a neighborhood as “poverty-ridden,” state that 75% of households in this area earn \$12,000 or less.

✗ **“Disadvantaged / Vulnerable / Struggling.”** [Frame issues of poverty with an agency lens](#), rather than depicting people living in poverty as helpless.<sup>8</sup>

✓ Instead: Use **empowering language**, such as **“people facing barriers or challenges due to poverty”** which maintains people affected by poverty as the agents in their own story rather than as victims.

✗ Avoid describing people as being **“on welfare / food stamps / Section 8.”** This phrasing places an undue focus on recipients of these types of social services and reinforces the [scarcity-based view](#) that community welfare programs do not also benefit society overall.<sup>9</sup> For example, we do not refer to people as being “on the US Postal Service.”

✓ **“People / families who receive (TANF/SNAP/EITC/etc.).”**

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<sup>6</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, [usich.gov/news/people-experience-homelessness-they-arent-defined-by-it](#)

<sup>7</sup> Conscious Style Guide, [consciousstyleguide.com/covering-poverty-what-to-avoid-and-how-to-get-it-right](#)

<sup>8</sup> DC Fiscal Policy Institute, [https://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language\\_Dec-2017.pdf](#)

<sup>9</sup> Advancement Project, [advancementproject.org/resources/the-social-justice-phrase-guide](#)

✗ The “achievement gap” refers to disparities in educational outcomes by race and class. However, this term [places responsibility for lower academic achievement](#) onto students, parents, and teachers for failing to meet the standards of their white, economically advantaged counterparts.<sup>10</sup>

✓ Instead, use: “**Opportunity gap.**” This term frames educational inequality in terms of larger structural factors which shape academic opportunities.

## Immigration

✗ “Illegal.” Do not use “illegal” to refer to people. Phrases such as “illegals” and “illegal aliens” create an assumption of guilt that has been used to [justify mistreatment of immigrant communities](#).<sup>11</sup> “Alien” also dehumanizes immigrant communities.

✓ Instead, use: “**Undocumented people / individuals who are undocumented / undocumented immigrants / unauthorized immigrants.**”

✗ Avoid language that creates, even unintentionally, a “[good immigrant / bad immigrant](#)” dichotomy.<sup>12</sup> Some immigrant groups, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, are presented as educated, hard working, and therefore “deserving” of citizenship. Immigrants who have not met these criteria are labelled as “lazy,” “job stealing,” “felons,” and “criminals” and [therefore not deserving of fundamental human rights](#).<sup>13</sup>

✓ Instead: Emphasize that California benefits from the existence of immigrants regardless of education, economic status, and other common indicators of “worthiness.”

✗ “Detainee.” [This language can dehumanize](#) people in immigration detention.<sup>14</sup>

✓ Instead, use: “**Person in immigration detention / detained person.**”

## Reproductive Choices<sup>15</sup>

✗ “Baby / Unborn baby / Unborn child.”

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. Camika Royal, [good.is/articles/please-stop-using-the-phrase-achievement-gap](http://good.is/articles/please-stop-using-the-phrase-achievement-gap)

<sup>11</sup> Radical Copyeditor, [radicalcopyeditor.com/5-language-practices-in-graphic-form](http://radicalcopyeditor.com/5-language-practices-in-graphic-form)

<sup>12</sup> Underground Scholars Initiative, [osborneny.org/resources/resources-for-humanizing-language/language-guide-for-communicating-about-those-involved-in-the-carceral-system/](http://osborneny.org/resources/resources-for-humanizing-language/language-guide-for-communicating-about-those-involved-in-the-carceral-system/)

<sup>13</sup> The Guardian, [theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/12/break-the-myth-immigration](http://theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/12/break-the-myth-immigration)

<sup>14</sup> Freedom for Immigrants, [freedomforimmigrants.org/terminology](http://freedomforimmigrants.org/terminology)

<sup>15</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation, [ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf\\_abortion\\_messaging\\_guide\\_web.pdf](http://ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_abortion_messaging_guide_web.pdf)

✓ Instead: Understand in what context to use the following [medically accurate terms](#). “**Embryo**” can be used up to week 10 of gestation. “**Fetus**” is used from week 10 of gestation onwards. “**The pregnancy**” can also be used as a catch-all term.

✗ “**Keep the baby / keep the child / get rid of the baby.**” ‘Keep’ implies a positive outcome which may not accurately reflect the situation. It is also medically inaccurate to describe the pregnancy as a baby or child.

✓ Instead, use: “**Choose to continue the pregnancy / decide to end a pregnancy / have an abortion.**”

✗ “**Mother / Father / Parent.**” Use of these terms during a pregnancy assigns roles that a pregnant person and their partner may not accept. It is also important to recognize that not all individuals who can become pregnant are women; using language such as “**pregnant women**” [excludes transgender individuals](#).<sup>16</sup>

✓ Instead, use: “**Pregnant person / partner of a pregnant person.**”

✗ Avoid using “unwanted pregnancy” and “unintended/unplanned pregnancy” interchangeably.

✓ Instead: Use the specific term for what pregnancy situation you are referring to. “**Unwanted pregnancy**” is a pregnancy that a pregnant person decides they do not desire. An “**unplanned/unintended pregnancy**” is a pregnancy that occurs when a person is not trying to get pregnant, and may be either wanted or unwanted.

## Mental Health Care

✗ “**Drug / Substance Abuse.**” Classifying users of substances as “abusers” [dehumanizes and vilifies individuals who use drugs](#).<sup>17</sup> This is also problematic given that the prohibition of substance and drug use has been used as [a tool to police communities of color](#).<sup>18</sup>

✓ Instead, use: “**Drug / substance use.**”

✗ “**Addict / Abuser / Alcoholic / User.**” These terms are dehumanizing because they [label a person by their mental illness and imply a permanency to this condition](#), leaving no room for change to this status.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Insider, [insider.com/how-to-support-trans-men-non-binary-going-through-pregnancy-2019-11](https://www.insider.com/how-to-support-trans-men-non-binary-going-through-pregnancy-2019-11)

<sup>17</sup> Pacific Standard, [psmag.com/social-justice/substance-abuse-label-reject-77416](https://psmag.com/social-justice/substance-abuse-label-reject-77416)

<sup>18</sup> Underground Scholars Initiative, [osborneny.org/resources/resources-for-humanizing-language/language-guide-for-communicating-about-those-involved-in-the-carceral-system/](https://osborneny.org/resources/resources-for-humanizing-language/language-guide-for-communicating-about-those-involved-in-the-carceral-system/)

<sup>19</sup> The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment, [naabt.org/documents/NAABT\\_Language.pdf](https://naabt.org/documents/NAABT_Language.pdf)

✓ Instead, use people-first language such as “**person affected by drug or substance use / person with a substance use disorder.**”

✗ Similarly, [avoid identifying people based primarily on their mental illness or condition](#), such as “**the mentally ill**” or “**schizophrenic.**”<sup>20</sup>

✓ Instead, use terms such as: “**People with mental illnesses / people diagnosed with / living with schizophrenia.**”

✗ “**The disabled.**” People who have disabilities are not monolithic.

✓ Instead, use: “**People with disabilities.**” People first language is not preferred by all people with disabilities, so be specific and ask how individuals identify when possible. [The Disability Language Style Guide](#) provides guidance on terminology for individuals with specific disabilities.

✗ “**Afflicted with / suffering from / battling...**” [Avoid making assumptions](#) about how someone with a mental illness is handling their life.<sup>21</sup>

✓ Instead, use neutral terms such as “**being treated for / diagnosed with / has...**”

## Race and Ethnicity

**Note:** Terminology regarding race and ethnicity, as with other subjects discussed in this guide, is constantly evolving. Terminology also varies from individual to individual and across communities.

✗ Generally avoid using “**racial minorities,**” especially since this does not accurately reflect California’s racial and ethnic demographics. “**Non-white**” also defines people as lacking some quality that would place them in a majority category.

✓ Instead, reference the communities that are impacted in a phrase like this: “**Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and other people of color.**” After the initial inclusive reference, it may be reasonable to use the shorthand “**Black and Brown communities / Black and Brown people / people of color.**” However, when discussing issues pertaining to a specific racial or ethnic group, avoid using umbrella terms. For example, [the](#)

<sup>20</sup> American Psychiatric Association, [psychiatry.org/newsroom/reporting-on-mental-health-conditions](https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/reporting-on-mental-health-conditions)

<sup>21</sup> Health Partners, [healthpartners.com/blog/mental-illnesses-terms-to-use-terms-to-avoid](https://www.healthpartners.com/blog/mental-illnesses-terms-to-use-terms-to-avoid)

phrase “person of color” is not interchangeable with “Black” when explicitly referring to issues of anti-Black racism.<sup>22</sup>

✗ Avoid using the term “Blacks.”

✓ Instead: Use terms such as “Black people / Black Californians / Black community / African-American.”<sup>23</sup> If referencing a specific person, receive their input first on how they identify.

✗ Avoid using “Hispanic,” “Latino/Latina/Latinx,” and “Chicano/Chicana/Chicanx” interchangeably.

✓ Instead: Understand that each term carries a different meaning and preference to community members.<sup>24</sup> “Hispanic” generally refers to Spanish-speakers and descendents of Spanish-speaking ancestry. “Chicano/Chicana” and the gender-neutral “Chicanx” refer exclusively to Mexican-Americans. “Latino/Latina” and the emerging gender-neutral “Latinx” refer to individuals of Latin American descent. If referencing a specific person, receive their input first on how they identify.

✗ When discussing the legacy of slavery which has created unequal opportunities and outcomes for Black Americans, avoid using the term “slaves.” This term further contributes to the dehumanization of people who were treated as property.<sup>25</sup>

✓ Instead, use: “Enslaved people.”

## Gender and Sexuality

Breaking through the binary: Gender explained using continuums - This article contains an illustrated infographic with gender and sexuality terminology.

Do You Know The Difference Between Sex and Gender? | Queer 101 | The Advocate - This video covers basic terminology regarding sex, gender, and sexual orientation.

✗ Avoid using “his or her” or “he or she” when unsure of someone’s pronouns, and when people use different pronouns.

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<sup>22</sup> Wired, [wired.com/story/rethinking-phrase-people-of-color/](https://www.wired.com/story/rethinking-phrase-people-of-color/)

<sup>23</sup> National Association of Black Journalists, [nabj.org/page/styleguideA](https://nabj.org/page/styleguideA)

<sup>24</sup> Remezcla, [remezcla.com/features/culture/latino-vs-hispanic-vs-latinx-how-these-words-originated](https://remezcla.com/features/culture/latino-vs-hispanic-vs-latinx-how-these-words-originated)

<sup>25</sup> Slate, [slate.com/human-interest/2015/05/historians-debate-whether-to-use-the-term-slave-or-enslaved-person.html](https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/05/historians-debate-whether-to-use-the-term-slave-or-enslaved-person.html)

✓ Instead, use **“they / their / them”** as a gender-inclusive option.

✗ **“Both sexes or genders / opposite sex or gender.”** This language erases transgender people outside of the male-female binary, including non-binary and intersex people.

✓ Instead, use: **“All genders.”**

✗ Avoid language that, even unintentionally, undermines transgender and non-binary individuals. For example, we generally do not describe cisgender women (who identify as their sex assigned at birth) with the language “They identify as women” so [using this language from transgender women marks this group as different](#).<sup>26</sup> Similarly, avoid language such as **“biological women / men”** or **“women and trans women.”**

✓ Instead, use language such as: **“Transgender people / all women, including transgender women...”**

✗ Be respectful of in-group versus out-group terminology when using **“queer.”** This term [may be acceptable for members of a community to use](#), but it is best practice to avoid referring to someone or a community as “queer” unless this is how they explicitly identify.<sup>27</sup>

✓ Instead, use **“LGBTQ+ communities / people”** as an umbrella term. When discussing issues that pertain to a specific subset of this community, such as transgender women, this umbrella term should be avoided.

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<sup>26</sup> Radical Copyeditor, [radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/](https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/)

<sup>27</sup> University of Illinois, Springfield, [uis.edu/gendersexualitystudentservices/about/lgbtqaterminology/](https://uis.edu/gendersexualitystudentservices/about/lgbtqaterminology/)