
Creating a Shared Language Module: Putting the Glossary for an Inclusive Library into Action



THEME 1

Re-thinking Words of Convenience and Buzzwords Used in the Library Profession

The *Serving Communities: Glossary for an Inclusive Library* is a useful tool to understand words as well as their context that may be received in a harmful way. Using words to redirect power and privilege, and to empower and lift the community is an essential quality for an inclusion-centered library leader.

Your Word Choices: A Reflection of Implicit Biases, Power, and Privilege

For library directors and managers: These positions hold power and privilege over library staff through operational decision-making and your communications to the people your library serves. Each day you make decisions about your word choices.

For library staff: Your staff hold power and privilege, and are the outward face of the library to community members and patrons.

Common Language of the Library Profession

Look at **pages 14-27** of the *Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library*. Those words, highlighted in lime green, are considered “Words of Convenience” or Buzzwords within the library profession. Some of these words are represented in the table below. Take a few moments to review this table.

Do you use any of these words?

Word	Cultural Perspective/ Issues with Word	Commonly Used in Library Community
Race — The social construction and categorization of people based on perceived shared physical traits that result in the maintenance of a sociopolitical hierarchy.	The term is not inherent, genetic, or biologically based. It arbitrarily divides groups based on physical appearance.	Continues to perpetuate racial, power, and privilege biases and microaggressions.
Stakeholder — A group of people involved in or affected by a course of action.	Word rooted and complicit with colonist attitudes and values — of staking property out west or something that is owned.	Considered offensive by indigenous Americans and Blacks.
Science/S.T.E.M. — (science, technology, engineering, math) — Science is the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systemic methodology based on evidence.	This is an Eurocentric perspective. Some cultural and ethnic groups do not see the world this way. Also, there may be distrust because groups were historically harmed and/or not confident.	Librarians see S.T.E.M. as focused on youth programs and services. For adult learners, the emphasis is on their ability to access, learn, and act on actionable science information that impacts the quality of their lives.

What do these buzzwords all have in common?

They “lump” diverse cultural and ethnic groups together, or simply only want to use one word to describe them. There are a few reasons why some library professionals continue to use these words.

- 1. Out of convenience.** We are saying that we do not want to take the time to appropriately and positively recognize each group we serve or are not serving.
- 2. Out of tradition.** These are the words that are generally accepted by the library profession and the environments we work in. We do not feel compelled to change it though people may be harmed by the continued use of these words.
- 3. No singular word to replace the Word of**

Convenience/Buzzword. A good example of this situation is the word “stakeholders.” Another way to define this word is “all interested groups” that are part of a process or decision. Look on **page 21** of the *Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library* to find out how that one word “stakeholder” is affected by other cultural and ethnic groups.

The question for you as the library director or manager...

How is the use of these words alienating whole groups of people in the community?

Answer the following:

Have there been words used to describe you, your family, or your community that you felt were mean, harmful, or inappropriate because the speaker did not know any better?

Now consider how members of the community that you serve may feel?

Whether intentional or unintentional, the use of these words:

1. Actively denies individuals the respect and recognition of their own identity.
2. Perpetuates a persistent microaggression of “otherism.” What you can do is to limit the ways in which we group people and consider them as something entirely different from an imagined “us.” The power of definition is a strong one, and when used in the context of othering, it continues to reinforce discrimination.
3. Translates into actions within the library like creating a program or service based on a presumption of what people may want or need (yet another microaggression).

Public libraries as well as the *Serving Communities* model have a broader definition of “underserved” community members to include those invisible groups who need access to additional supports and services like:

1. single moms;
2. grandparents/guardians of children whose parents are dealing with drug addiction;
3. adults with special needs (e.g., Alzheimer’s disease) and their caregivers; and,
4. ethnic and cultural groups the library is currently not serving.

What language is your library using and how is it being received through your website, book lists, and other programs and services that are provided? Are these programs and services inviting, or do they present a barrier?

The end result: Library professionals, individually and collectively, need to be aware and come to terms with the continued use of these harmful words.



QUESTIONS:

Are your library services and programs based on what community members want? Have you asked these members for their opinions or recommendations?

What’s the answer?

1. Don’t presume what people want.
2. Be mindful of the words you are using as library leaders and within library communications.
3. Invite communication and collaboration with community members you want to recognize and serve.
4. Build trust with those you serve by being attentive to these issues.

What is Your Library Really Communicating?

The *Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library* serves as a guide to increase awareness, understanding, and intentional use of language and words. It can be used to explore words commonly used by the library community that are culturally insensitive and may further marginalize people.

The *Glossary* provides

1. the original definition;
2. what the cultural perspectives/issues are with the word; and,
3. alternative language and/or recommendations when using that word.

The following worksheet helps you to become more aware of your word choices as well as those used by staff and within the various marketing and communications that promote your library within the community. How are these word choices being received by different cultural and ethnic groups? Are these words: positive or harmful; inclusive or exclusive? Do they promote access and equity, or continue to marginalize community member groups?



WORKSHEET 1

What is Your Library Really Communicating?

Objectives

- Analyze word choices;
- Create recommendations for alternative word choices going forward; and,
- Provide library directors with the insight to address possible deficit-based, divisive words within library policies, communications, services, and programs.

What You Need

- A hard copy of the *Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library*
- A pen with your favorite color ink
- Copies of your library policies and examples of library communications
- Walk around your library and, if possible, the neighborhoods, restaurants, and community gatherings of those who are not actively using the library. Listen to the words and perspectives being communicated.

Time

120 minutes

Discover

This activity is focused on the **Words of Convenience and Buzzwords** the library profession uses. They are defined as *a word or phrase which is jargon and is fashionable at a particular time or in a particular context but the use of which unintentionally causes harm and is disrespectful.*

Instructions

STEP 1

Take some time to review the *Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library* to explore why certain words have very specific cultural perspectives. Become aware of the words you use and how might they be received by others.

STEP 2

The words in the table below are commonly used within the library profession. Are there words you and/or your library use in communications that are considered a **Word of Convenience or Buzzword**? Complete the table below.

Commonly used Words of Convenience/ Buzzwords	Yes (Y) I use these words or, No (N) I do not use these words	These words are used (Y), or these words are not used (N) in library policies or communications	Reasons to Change/ Reasons to Keep
Minority			
Race			
Poor			
Stakeholders			
Underrepresented			
Elderly/Seniors/ Senior Citizens			
BIPOC			
African-American			
Special Needs			
Physically Challenged			
Hearing and/or Visually Impaired			
Mentally Ill			
Other Words of Convenience/ Buzzwords Your Library Uses:			
Other Words of Convenience/ Buzzwords Your Library Uses:			
Other Words of Convenience/ Buzzwords Your Library Uses:			

Decide

1. If you said “Yes” to you and/or your library using any **Words of Convenience/Buzzwords**, how might their usage be harmful and/or disrespectful to members of your community?
2. Explore the definitions of these words within the **Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library**. What are your feelings and reactions to the Cultural Perspectives/Issues with each of these words?

Act

Action 1: When you walk around the library and when you meet with others, listen to how you speak. How do staff, patrons, partners, and others make word choices and use inclusive-centered language? How often are you using and/or hearing that language and in what contexts?

Action 2: Identify the words that you would like to change. Discuss with staff and others in what ways using these new word choices will affect communication and awareness of the library’s inclusive-centered efforts.

