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

SERVING COMMUNITIES
A Framework for Inclusion-centered Library Leadership Development

Engaging Adults in Actionable Science Programs and Services that Address Community Needs

INSTITUTE *of* **Museum** and **Library** SERVICES

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THEME 2
Creating Shared Language with Staff, Partners, and Community Members

Words matter. How can you change your word choices to broaden participation, improve community wellness, and provide access to high quality science-based community information for everyone?

Diversify Your Library's Language

The best way to develop a resonant shared language with cultural and ethnic groups of your community is to ask and to create ways for members to serve as advisors to the library. Word choices and preferences within a community are as diverse as the populations you serve. Not all words will resonate with everyone. As a result, advisors will help the library develop a nuanced language that reflects the uniqueness of that community member group. This is particularly important if the library is providing specific science-based information on topics like health and wellness. This group can help extend and expand communications directly to those your library wants to better serve. Using a community's preferred terms and words will go a long way to building trust and relationships with those community members you are currently not serving. In addition, advisors can also help the library stay current on issues of importance to specific cultural and ethnic groups in the community.

Within the **Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library**, there are three Reflection Questions.

These questions will be helpful as you begin to familiarize yourself with the word choices you and your library are, should be using and/or consider no longer using with others.

REFLECTION QUESTION 1
What words do we use to refer to the various communities we serve or wish to serve (e.g., on the website, in program flyers and newsletters, and in the way we refer to diverse groups in conversations)?

REFLECTION QUESTION 2
In what ways can I/we the library staff get feedback on the use of the words we currently use?

REFLECTION QUESTION 3
Where are the opportunities to discuss the words we use, want to use, or changes we want to make with others within our library (e.g., library staff meeting)?

The following worksheet will help you answer Reflection Question 3. Also, this activity can help you begin to identify an advisory group to support your library's efforts to ensure that you are using resonant, inclusive language reflective of the community's unique characteristics and use of their preferred terms and word choices.

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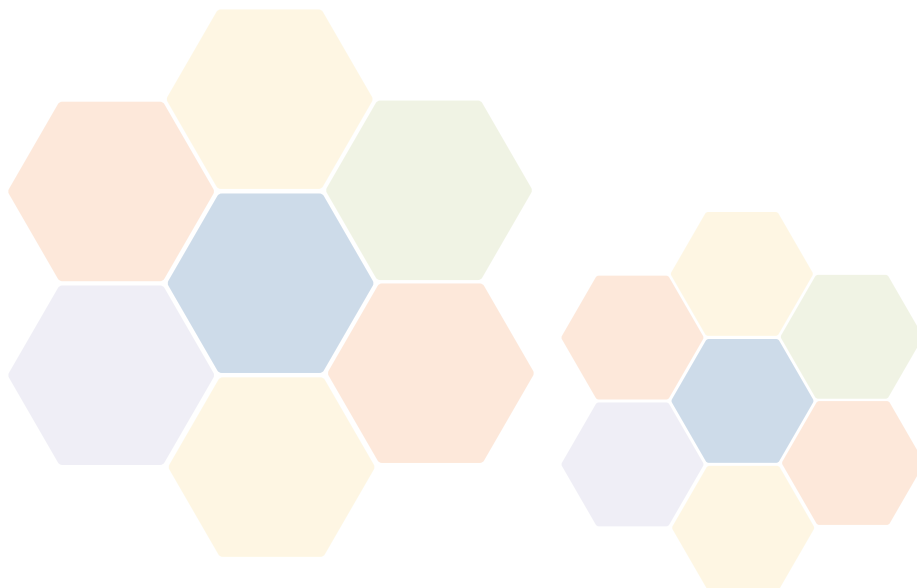
WORKSHEET 2

Developing Shared Language by Building a Common Understanding

This activity was adapted from the Minnesota State Office of Equity and Inclusion's *Equity By Design: A Tool for Developing Shared Language*, Activity for Building a Common Understanding.

Objectives
• The library director along with library staff, boards or friends groups and/or partners and members are able to collaboratively find shared meaning and understanding for difficult words in the community, such as racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. (NOTE: This activity can also be used to find appropriate alternative language for any word deemed difficult by library staff or community group once a basic shared understanding of these definitions is developed, and there is agreement for the need of comparable words).
• To help participants build their understanding of each word, to explore the intricacies and implications of different definitions for each word, and to become more comfortable discussing issues related to equity.
• To help participants learn to appreciate the importance of language in discussing equity and social justice issues, and how the process of discussing the definitions adds to the understanding of the terms.
• To create shared understanding for these terms and ensure people are operating from the same foundational understanding.

What You Need
• Copies of the *Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library*
• Copies of the *Commonly Used Buzzwords or Words of Convenience Table Worksheet*
• Your library staff team, library friends group, board members and/or invited community partners and members
• Participants that will come prepared to address key words, such as racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.
• Participants that will bring a list of an additional 3-4 words that they would like to explore to find a shared definition and where a shared understanding is needed for the library and community.
• A completed copy of *Worksheet 1: What is Your Library Really Communicating?*

Time
• Preparation for Developing Shared Language Session: 10 hours
• Facilitate Developing Shared Language Session: 60-90 minutes

Audience(s)
The library director, library staff, diverse community partners, and community members. Group size should be no more than 12-15 participants.

Discover
Library Director/Facilitator Preparations
There are no "right" or "wrong" answers in this exercise. People will likely have a different understanding of key concepts and terms. Remember and recognize that everyone is coming to this space with very different backgrounds and at different places in their equity journeys. It's okay if someone doesn't know how to define something. The purpose is to develop a common understanding.

Definitions for each word should come from two sources: the person's existing understanding of the word and the *Serving Communities: A Glossary for an Inclusive Library.*

You may want to practice this exercise with staff first to experience the types of conversations that could arise.

Instructions
PART 1
Identifying and Defining Difficult Words
The goal is to explore and listen to community member responses on how the buzzwords/words of convenience that you and your library currently use (as identified on your completed *Worksheet 1: What is Your Library Really Communicating?* found on **page 11**) make them feel and how they perceive the library. Provide each group member a blank copy of the *Commonly Used Buzzwords Table* found on **page 15**. For this activity, provide them with the definitions of *Buzzwords and Words of Convenience Commonly Used in the Library Profession.*

Each group will begin their session by having each participant share the buzzword/word of convenience that the library would like to explore further in order to enhance services and programs. The group will proceed with the rest of the definitions attempting, if possible, to reach a consensus on one definition for each word.

STEP 1
The library director and/or facilitator should divide the participants into groups of 2-4 to ensure that everyone will have ample chance to participate.

STEP 2
Begin by asking all participants to briefly discuss a

few words in the *Commonly Used Library Buzzwords and Words of Convenience Table.* Which words are generating the most conversation and/or lack of consensus?

STEP 3

Participants develop their own definitions. Allow each group 10 minutes to define the following terms based on how they understand them.

STEP 4

Bring the group together to discuss and to create a shared language to replace any of your library's Buzzwords or Words of Convenience that may be considered harmful, dehumanizing or offensive.

PART 2
Reflect and Share Definitions
When the small groups are finished, bring everyone back together.

STEP 1

Participants reflect on this exercise. Was it challenging? Easy? What themes arose? Did they come to a consensus on any terms?

STEP 2

Consider the issue of power. Discuss the concept of power and how that impacts diversity, equity, and inclusion work. What are participant responses to their power and that of the library's position?

Commonly Used Buzzwords/ Words of Convenience Table

Commonly used Words of Convenience/ Buzzwords	Yes (Y) the library uses these words or, No (N) the library does not use these words	These words are used (Y), or these words are not used (N) in library policies or communications	Agreed Upon Word
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:			
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For example, a definition of racism might be *"prejudice or discrimination based on race, plus the power to enforce it."* In that case, think about who holds positions of power, how that power was derived, and in what ways that shapes one's experience. This perspective can have a major impact for individuals who may be inclined to insist that the "other" group can be just as racist as their majority group.

Decide

Now that everyone on your team or group has spent time defining and reflecting on some key terms and concepts, it's time to move into developing shared language.

PART 3

Developing a Shared Language

After defining these terms, think about them conceptually. Again, the greatest benefit will occur when all participants develop a shared understanding of what these terms and concepts mean. Here are some guiding questions and suggestions to consider during the process for developing a shared language.

1. Consider what terms and concepts are important for having shared understanding and consistent definition.

2. Determine the process by which your group will establish and come to a shared agreement.

3. Identify other resources (e.g., examples of lived experiences, current community events, other shared language efforts done by other community service groups in your area) for defining terms and concepts.

4. Consider the language used by the library when communicating with diverse community members. Ask staff or a participating community group their perspectives of how equitable and culturally-responsive the access to your public library is? Have library staff and community members considered library language for elements of power, privilege, bias, and perspectives?

5. Identify definitions that reflect the library's context and values, particularly equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Act

After developing a shared understanding of key terms, begin to review and change wording in library policies. Consider how the library should communicate with patrons, partners, and community members going forward. Publicize the response on your library's website and within the library to continue the conversation.

NOTE: Consider spending time discussing power. Many participants (particularly those of a majority status) may have a hard time understanding it.

Have the team reflect on who has power over language, the evolution of language, and how that shapes our understanding and experience.