



City of Madison

Gender-Inclusive Language Style Guide

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Purpose

The purpose of this style guide is to outline correct and respectful language that is inclusive of all genders. This guide supplements APM 2-52, Inclusive Workplace: Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming, and Non-Binary Employees.

Using gender-inclusive language is important for the health and safety of both employees and members of the public. Gender-inclusive language supports people of all marginalized genders, including women and transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people of all genders.

Language is constantly changing, and we will need to adapt to new ways of talking and thinking to continue to support gender-inclusive communication. This guide will need to be updated to reflect respectful language as it changes.

Resources

To learn more about the topics discussed in this guide, please see the following resources:

Inclusive Language Content Guide

<https://content-guide.18f.gov/inclusive-language/>

Transgender Style Guide

<https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/>

What Is the Singular They, and Why Should I Use It?

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/use-the-singular-they/>

Trans-Inclusive Design

<https://alistapart.com/article/trans-inclusive-design/>

Designing forms for gender diversity and inclusion

<https://uxdesign.cc/designing-forms-for-gender-diversity-and-inclusion-d8194cf1f51>

Respectful Collection of Demographic Data

<https://medium.com/@anna.sarai.rosenberg/respectful-collection-of-demographic-data-56de9fcb80e2>

Gender-Neutral Language

Use the singular “they” instead of “he or she.” The singular “they” is grammatically correct and should be used to refer to an unspecified person, a person whose pronouns are unknown, or a person who uses they/them pronouns.

Example: Before a resident fills out **their** application, **they** should check the eligibility requirements.

Do not assume a person’s gender or pronouns. When communicating with or about coworkers, contractors, and members of the public, do not address them as Sir, Ma’am, Mr., Ms., Miss, or any other language that assumes gender. Only use honorifics (Mr./Ms./Mx.) if the person has indicated their desired honorific. The gender-neutral honorific “Mx.” is pronounced *mɪks (micks)* or *mʌks (mucks)*.

Omit unnecessary references to gender. Do not call attention to gender, gender expression, appearance, or other identities. For example, is it important to the content you are writing that a doctor is a woman, or that a presenter is transgender? If not, remove the language.

When translating documents into other languages, opt for gender inclusion. In Spanish, for example, many South American countries have adopted the “e” in place of “o” when referring to groups.

Example: *Todes* elles están interesades en diversidad e inclusión.

Exclusionary Language	Inclusive Alternatives
He or she, (s)he, s/he	They
Him or her	Them
His or her(s)	Their(s)
Men and women <i>Example: “The men and women working at the City...”</i>	People, employees, etc. <i>Examples: “The people working at the City...” “The City employees...” “Employees of all genders...”</i>
Both genders	All genders
Opposite gender, opposite sex	Different gender
Councilman, alderman	Council member, alder
Chairman	Chair, chairperson
Policeman	Police officer
Fireman	Firefighter
Landlord, landlady	Owner, landowner, property owner
Husband or wife	Spouse, partner
Father or mother, sister or brother	Parent, sibling
Manpower, man hours	Staffing, staff hours
Hello, ladies and gentlemen!	Hello, everyone! Hello, all!
Dear Sir or Madam	Greetings, To Whom it May Concern, Dear [name]

Transgender-Inclusive Language

Always use a person’s chosen name and pronouns. A person’s name and pronouns are not optional or “preferred,” and their correct name and pronouns must be used every time.

Use “gender” instead of “gender identity.” Saying that someone “identifies as a man” or that their “gender identity is non-binary” marks them as different and undermines their gender. Just say, “He is a man,” or “They are non-binary.”

Use “gender identity” only to specify or draw a distinction between gender identity and expression.

Example: The community group recognizes diversity of both gender identity and gender expression.

Invalidating Language	Validating Language
Preferred name and pronouns	Name and pronouns, chosen* name and pronouns <i>*Use “chosen” only when distinguishing from deadname.</i>
_____ identifies as _____ <i>Example: Carl identifies as male.</i>	_____ is _____ <i>Example: Carl is a man.</i>
People who identify as non-binary	Non-binary people
Women and transgender women	Women, or transgender and cisgender women

Other Language to Avoid

This list is not comprehensive, and it is subject to change. *Offensive language is listed here only for the purpose of education. It should not be used in any other context.*

Offensive / Outdated Language	Correct Language
Transgendered	Transgender
_____ is a transgender.	_____ is transgender. <i>Transgender is an adjective, not a noun.</i>
Transman, transwoman, trans male, trans female	Man, woman, transgender man, transgender woman, trans man, trans woman (<i>include space</i>)
Males, females	Men, women
Sex reassignment surgery, sex change operation	Gender confirmation surgery
Sex change	Transition
Biologically male / female, born a man / woman	Assigned male / female at birth <i>It is very rarely appropriate to talk about a person’s sex.</i>
Real name, birth name	Deadname <i>Do not use a person’s deadname. Always refer to the person by their chosen name.</i>

More Information

To learn more about proper language for writing about transgender people, see:

<https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/>

Forms & Demographics

Avoid asking for information you don't need. Demographic information can be sensitive, and can deter users from completing forms. Users may not feel comfortable sharing their personal information, or the available options may not describe them. Data collection can be especially invasive for underserved populations, who may not trust government organizations due to historical and systemic oppression.

Only ask for demographic information if the City needs the data to serve a marginalized population. Demographic data should be de-identified and treated confidentially during analysis and use.

Think critically about whether you truly need to know a user's gender (or any other personal information). Could you omit the question? Could you ask for a person's pronouns instead of gender?

Questions to Consider

Consider these questions before you choose to ask for personal or demographic information:

- How would I use this information to benefit the target audience of this question?
- Do I have the resources and a plan to effectively analyze and apply the information I want to collect?
- What potential harm could I cause by asking this question?
- What potential harm could I cause by *not* asking this question?
- Is this question intrusive? Would I ask this question of a stranger?
- Why might a person with a marginalized identity be uncomfortable providing this information?

Best Practices

If you must ask for demographic information, always follow these guidelines:

- **Be transparent** about why you are asking and how it will benefit the user.
Sample: We use demographic information to help us understand our population and for grant reporting. Please help us serve you better by choosing the options that best describe you.
- **Allow users to choose multiple options** by offering checkboxes instead of radio buttons.
- **Make fields optional**, and include an option "Prefer not to say".
- **Allow users to choose their own language** by making the field a text box, or offering an option "Prefer to self-describe".

Name

Do not require a legal name. If you need a person's legal name in order to comply with state or federal regulations, also ask for their chosen name. Explain why you need their legal name, and use their chosen name in any response.

Gender & Pronouns

Consider what information you need to collect. Do you need to know if a person is transgender? Do you need to know their gender, or just what pronouns they use?

<p>Gender Please select any that apply.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Woman</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Man</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary / Genderqueer</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to self-describe (specify)</p>	<p>Gender Please select any that apply.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Woman</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Man</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary / Genderqueer</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to self-describe (specify)</p>	<p>Do you describe yourself as transgender?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say</p>
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Pronouns
For example: she/her, he/him, they/them.

LGBTQ+ Identity

Avoid asking for a person's sexual orientation or gender if possible. Recognize that this topic is very personal for many people, and some users will be very uncomfortable with this question.

Are you a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

This question may be used in addition to question(s) about gender, as listed above.

Incorrect Fields

Do not use any of these incorrect field configurations.

Sexual Orientation 

Straight

Gay

Lesbian

Bisexual

Transgender

Do not list Transgender under Sexual Orientation.

Gender 

Male

Female

Other

Do not place non-binary genders into an "Other" category or use the labels "Male" and "Female".

Gender 

Woman

Man

Transgender Woman

Transgender Man

Non-binary

Do not list Transgender Woman/Man separately from Woman/Man.