

Inclusive Language Guidance

Human language is constantly evolving. The way we speak and words we use change for many reasons including the changes in the environment we live in, to provide a better understanding or greater clarity, or changes in social norms and expectations.

Inclusive language has evolved because of all of those things. Those who dismiss inclusive language as politically correct or feel good language are missing the larger picture. Words, by definition, convey meaning to both our members and our communities. Clear meaning, in-turn, provides clear direction toward action, which allows us to create departments that can capture the many benefits of inclusion.

Inclusive language reflects an environment that is just that: inclusive of different people, perception and ideas. This document should be used as an educational guide. The goal of this guide is not to be politically correct, but to be more affirming, more welcoming, and more accurate with our language.

While inclusive language certainly has a positive emotional impact on the members of a group (when is that *not* a good thing for your team?), the changes to the language of the fire and emergency service are also a reflection of an environmental fact. In fact, firefighters are no longer only men. In fact, volunteer fires are just as professional in performing their duties as paid firefighters. So, inclusive language also improves our ability to clarify the make-up and role of the modern fire department to the public.

Use...	Instead of...	Why?
Firefighter, fire officer	fireman, firemen	Inclusive of all genders.
woman, women	female, girl, lady, gal, etc.	Use firefighter or fire officer to designate any gender. Only clarify when speaking specifically to the topic of women firefighters or fire officers, e.g., "She is an excellent firefighter" "Women firefighters make up 10 percent of our department." Exceptions: gal and ladies are acceptable usage depending on context, particularly used with their male counterparts. (e.g. guys and gals, ladies and gentlemen)
people of color	minority	People of color are 85-90% of the planet's population and before 2050 will be the majority population of the U.S. Additionally, minority is often used in combination with women (as in, "minorities and women") as though these were two insignificant groups. Women are the majority population of the planet and the U.S.
staffing	manpower, manning	Inclusive of all genders.
personnel, people, staff	men	Inclusive of all genders.

chair, chair-elect	chairman, chairwoman	Inclusive of all genders.
career firefighters,	professional firefighter, paid firefighter	Both career and volunteer firefighters provide professional service. Professional may be used when referring to either or both types of departments, but not as a contrast. Paid is an older reference that can be confusing with today's compensation packages. It should only be used as a verb, not an adjective, e.g., "A career firefighter is paid a salary."
volunteer firefighter, volunteers	non-career, non-professional, "volie"	Positive language. Obviously, slang descriptors should not be used.
fire and emergency services, fire and EMS, fire and rescue	fire service	Reflects the depth and diversity of today's departments, including EMS, hazmat, search and rescue, etc. Because it is not always practical to repeat the longer "fire and emergency service" language on repeated references, use it, at least, on first reference. Note: "Fire department" is OK.
municipal firefighter	structural firefighter	Wildland fire reference. "Municipal" as opposed to state or federal firefighters who protect park or other areas. Recognizes that many municipal firefighters are experienced or trained in more than structural firefighting.
sexual orientation	sexual preference	The term preference suggests that a person's state of being is active choice.
multi-generational, or specific identifications (e.g., new recruits, those approaching retirement, etc.)	Greatest Generation, Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, etc. (except when referring to data/ demographic segments)	Labels are equated with stereotypes that may not be presented or perceived as positive and may turn off the listener. Exceptions may apply if the focus of the discussion is about generational differences or related specifically to demographic discussions. e.g. OK – "Millennials are a large segment of our community. Our research shows that 85% of millennial are open to our new dispatch policy." Not OK: "As many of our community members are Millennials, our community is more open minded than those with a larger Baby-Boomer population."
undocumented workers/ immigrants	illegal aliens	Being undocumented in the U. S. is not a violation of U. S. Criminal Code. It is a violation of civil immigration laws, and there can be civil penalties. This happens often to people who have obtained legal visas which have expired. In fact, it is estimated that 40-50% of undocumented workers in the US fall into this category. Immigration laws are complex issues and should be addressed with proper and factual terminology.
limited English proficiency (LEP)	non-English speakers	LEP is federally-recognized language. To say someone is a non-English speaker: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ is not accurate in most cases. Many people can speak some conversational English, but need or

		<p>would like something in their primary language, particularly when it comes to important (like personal safety) or technical information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ puts emphasis on what people are not (problem-focused), not what people are (solution-focused)
White males, Caucasian males	Old white guys	Negative stereotypes or jokes that dismiss men as not-helpful alienate those who are or want to be helpful. The assumption that all men, and particularly older white men, are the enemy does not contribute to an inclusive environment.