Workshop Notes

DEI and Communications

This workshop is focused on ways that commissions can increase their communications and marketing towards a justice, diverse, equitable, and inclusive lens. Diversity and inclusion (D&I) continue to be both a priority and a challenge in today's workplaces. But aside from being a legal and moral obligation, diversity actually makes for more successful, profitable organizations and happier employees – communication has a critical role to play.

Shifting to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Communications

Keep It Authentic

- From a communications perspective, this means considering how to make D&I more relatable and authentic: demonstrating your commitment, but ensuring it is communicated correctly and genuinely.
- Engage in staff storytelling- empowering grass-roots employees with their own voice around the DEI issues that matter to them. Corporate storytelling that focuses on the real experiences of employees and covers everything from vision to implementation and results is also more powerful – and authentic – than quoting policy.

Be Prepared to Move Out of Your Comfort Zone
- You can not continue with the status quo and make your communications more equitable and inclusive. This will require staff and the organization to make a cultural mind shift to amplify new voices, change perspectives on traditional communication strategies and to use language and images to tell a more inclusive story for the work of the organization and its stakeholders.

Be Prepared to Make Mistakes

- Wanting to be more inclusive does not remove the fact that you are learning and overcoming historic bias that may be embedded in your organization's communication.
- Mistakes will happen and it how you handle those mistakes that will let others know how serious you are about representing inclusion and diversity in your communications.
- Prepare policies and statements to respond quickly to mistakes and errors to show ownership of the mistake and the seriousness of your efforts to improve.

Things to Do Now

First steps to move towards inclusive communications and marketing

Guiding Statement

- Every organization should have a basic Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI) statement for the company that informs all communications. These guidelines apply to all modes of communication, including websites, videos, newsletters, social media, reports, press releases, internal communications, promotional materials, advertisements, photography, presentations, opinion pieces, legislative testimony, meetings of all kinds, and speeches.
- This statement should also include the goals for the statement and can include examples to provide clarification to make it easy for people to apply the statement in their work and communications.
- *Example - All communications and marketing materials produced should reflect the vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion. This means that materials should strive to include people of all ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious affiliations, abilities, and ages, for example, in a way that makes no assumptions about the receiver of the communications.*

Inclusive Language

Definition - Visual or verbal communication that does not stereotype or demean people based on personal characteristics including gender, gender expression, race, ethnicity, economic background, ability/disability status, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

Race and Ethnicity

HUGs - Historical Underrepresented Groups

- An acronym for 'Historically Underrepresented Groups.' Given changing U.S. demographics, it is a more accurate term than "minority" and a more inclusive term than

"people of color" because depending on the context, discrimination and bias may be based on gender, age, disability, religion, race, and ethnicity, or socio-economic class.

BIPOC - Black Indigenous People of Color

- Should be used to refer to non-White people in the United States.
- Don't use **minority** and **minorities** as they are distancing and no longer demographically accurate. Ideally, we would refer to racial and ethnic groups specifically. When race or ethnicity is relevant to the piece being written, be as specific as possible in describing a group of people (Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Dominican American; Lakota, Navajo, Inuit, etc.). When specific nationalities are not available, use the appropriate race.

Black, not black.

- Also, be aware that although we use African American and Black interchangeably, Black people of Caribbean, Central American or South American origin may not identify as African American.

Latino, Latina, Latinx and Hispanic

- Refers to Hispanic or Latino people in the U.S. with origins in the Hispanic countries of Latin America and in general all people in the United States who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino.
- Latinx – ungendered alternative to "Latino" and "Latina

**Asian American/Pacific Islander**

- An inclusive term used in the U.S. to include both Asian Americans (AA) and Pacific Islanders (PI). AAPI refers to people in the U.S. with origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent or the Pacific Islands, and in general all people in the United States who self-identify as Asian or Pacific Islander. Other variations of the term include Asian Pacific American (APA), Asian Pacific Islander (API) and Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA).

American Indian/Alaska Native, Native American

- Per AP, American Indian or Native American is acceptable for indigenous peoples in the U.S. However, to truly be inclusive you should do the research to learn the tribes that are located in your state, and do the research to understand the tribal organization so you can refer to individuals correctly and to be precise For example, He is a Navajo commissioner.
- Recognize that you have settler privilege and that communications can continue oppression and colonization so do the work to learn and understand the indigenous communities in your state/community.

Gender and Sexual Orientation

- Always ask for the preferred pronoun to avoid making assumptions based upon a person's presentation or gender expression to determine the preferred pronoun.
- Use gender-neutral terms - Use chair, not chairman; workforce, not manpower; meteorologist, not weatherman, etc.; people when referring to a group of diverse genders, use people, not men and women.
- Use they/them/their - The singular they, them and their have become the pronouns of choice for people who don't identify as either male or female. Unless referring to someone who specifically identifies as a man or a woman, use they/them/their.
- Only mention gender or sex when it is necessary to do so.
- LGBTQIA/LGBTQ+ - is more inclusive than LGBT. LGBTQIA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual
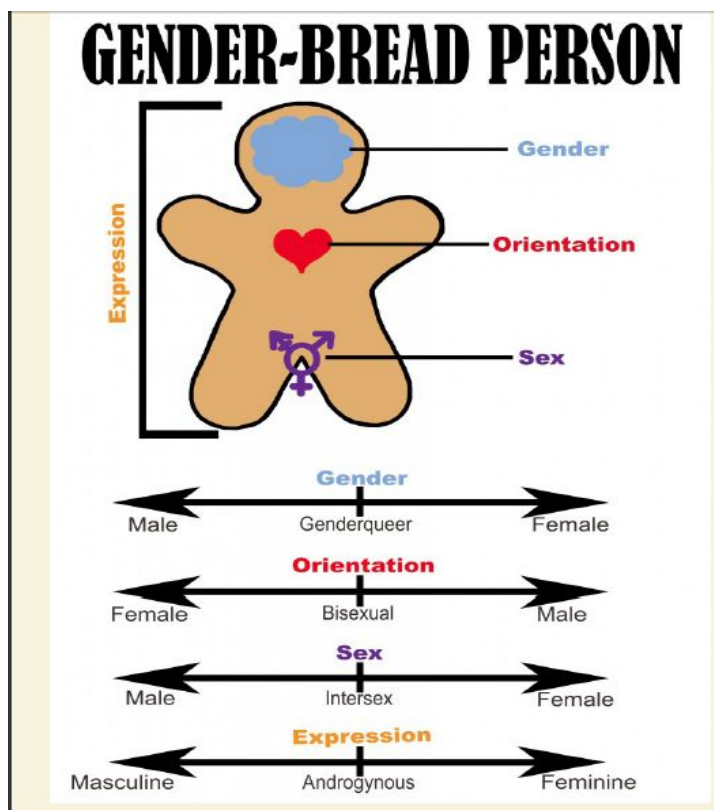
Do Not Use At-Risk

- Using "at-risk" as an adjective for students or young people is problematic. It makes "at-risk" a category like honors student, student-athlete or college-bound student.

- "Risk" should describe a condition or situation, not a person. Therefore, "More Resources for At-Risk Students" might more appropriately be "More Resources to Reduce Risk Factors for Students."
- Some have suggested replacing the term "at-risk" with "at-promise." While well-intended, the problem I see with that is it could easily be seen as a condescending euphemism for the term it was meant to replace.

Skip the Alternatives for At-Risk

- Common alternatives to "at-risk" include "historically underserved," "disenfranchised" and "placed at-risk." These indicators acknowledge that outside forces have either not served the individual student or population well, or have assigned the at-risk label to unwitting subjects.
- These phrases move the conversation in the right direction. However, using these phrases still comes up short because they obscure the problem. For example, research suggests that child abuse, poverty, and racism can place students at risk. However, different strategies can lessen each risk. When the risk factors are more clearly identified, it puts educators and others in a better position to strategically confront the issues that impede student learning. It also better enables educators and others to view the individual student separately and apart from the particular risk.

Be Specific instead of Using Catch- Alls

- Assessments of risk should be based on good data and thoughtful analysis — not a catch-all phrase to describe a cluster of ill-defined conditions or characteristics. If the phrase "at-risk" must be used, it should be in a sentence such as: " 'This' places students at risk for 'that.' " If the "this" and "that" are not clearly defined, the "at-risk" characterization is useless at best, and harmful at worst. But when these variables are clearly defined, it better enables others to better understand the solutions needed to reduce specific risk factors and improve outcomes.

Other Considerations

Normalize Pronoun Use

- In-person and Virtual Events include the ability to indicate and know appropriate pronouns for all attendees including having people rename themselves in virtual events and including in communications about the event
- Nametags include ribbons or badges for pronouns
- Bios, Agendas, Profiles, and Articles should always include preferred pronouns

Use Census Data to Inform the appropriate diversity strategy.

- Diversity is about representation so images, stories, and other communication items should represent the demographics of your state or community, not just a random increase or use of different racial and ethnic groups.

Avoid Tokenism
- Tokenism is the practice of doing something (such as hiring, promoting, or otherwise lifting up a person who belongs to an underrepresented group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly.
- Inclusion is a cultural mind shift and tokenism is not strategy based or a long term solution for inclusion.

Amplify Voices and Representation
- Communities that you profile or highlight should be empowered in your communications through the amplification of their voice and representation.
- Avoid stories that imply that members or organizations are "saving" the community instead of being a supportive partner or stakeholder working with others.

Create Brand Guidelines Related to DEI

- Outline how communications materials for the commission or AmeriCorps in this state/community should think about inclusion and equity in their development.
- Create a Communications Checklist for DEI in the brand guidelines that include the following at a minimum:
    - Have I checked for bias?
    - Does this reflect the community and the population?
    - Does this follow our values and statements?
    - Have I run this by the inclusion/ JEDI group?
    - Am I speaking for someone rather than amplifying their voice?
- Run a Bias Check on All Communications
    - Are the pronouns used an equal number of times (roughly)?
    - Are the pronouns he and she, or racial and ethnic role models used in reference to non-stereotyped roles?
    - Are "people referenced first" as in, for example, "people with diabetes," or have labels or conditions been used inappropriately as nouns to describe a group?
    - Does someone on our team already know, or do we need to ask which term is preferred for national origin, race or gender identification for a specific audience?

Things to Do Soon

Things to do and create within the next year

Create Communications Standards & Guidelines

- Focus group a values statement related to JEDI specific to your community. Individuals that represent the diversity of the state/community should be included in the development.
- Develop templates and an images bank that that staff and programs can use to be more inclusive but not tokenize members and communities.
- Your website should be reflective of the community and fully accessible for people with disabilities. Resources to check for website accessibility include:
  - WAVE - https://wave.webaim.org/
  - Lighthouse - https://developers.google.com/web/tools/lighthouse/
  - The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C-https://www.w3.org/) maintains an extensive list of web accessibility evaluation tools.
- Have a few standby statements in the event you make mistakes related to quickly use and respond to the situation.

Work with your Local Disability Association

- They can provide information on which venues are most accessible, provide you with interpreters for events, review materials for a variety of disabilities and provide you with the current technology and resources for accommodations
- Askjan.org - An online resource to quickly find best practices for accommodations

Long-Term Investment

True inclusion requires long term strategies and investment

JEDI Cultural Mindset

- **All Staff Trained in DEI -** You need to make an ongoing investment in training and professional development to create knowledge of best practices of inclusion and diversity in the communications team so they can lead from this awareness instead of having to be guided.
- **Lead With Inclusion and Anti-Racism** - To avoid mistakes your communications should lead with inclusion and anti-racism at the front and center rather than an added point or afterthought.
- **Inclusion Committee with Local Stakeholders** - include local stakeholders in determining best practice for DEI in the brand guidelines and images bank to hear directly from the people you are representing. This decreases privilege and other bias in your communications.

- **Mission and Values Guide Your View Towards Justice** - JEDI is mostly like part of your mission statement and values as a commission or organization. If you focus on communicating those values and mission inclusion will be automatic.

Not One Size Fits All

Follow-up with us for specific strategies for your community or organization

Thenera Bailey, BusD
tbailey@sisgigroup.org
201-205-06030
calendaly.com/thenera

Kimberly Wise, MPH, MA
kwise@wisehealthcommunications.com