USC Price

Sol Price Center for Social Innovation

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Equity Glossary

Developed in collaboration with

Homelessness Policy Research Institute

NEIGHBORHOOD DATA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
A Project of the
USC Price
Sol Price Center for Social Innovation

The purpose of this document is to provide a framing for how the USC Price Center for Social Innovation approaches framing our writing through a lens of equity. The document seeks to outline some common policy areas, or social classifications, which the Price Center uses most often in writing, in works with community partners and with the work that we publish more generally. This document seeks to provide a set of guidelines and options for language use in certain areas, and encourage a set of questions for staff, faculty, and research assistants to consider when producing published work through the Center. In producing this guide, we recognize that it can be challenging to properly balance descriptive precision, sensitivity, concision, and other concerns. **Our philosophy is to defer to the partners with whom we work, who are perhaps more aware of the preferred terminology of a given person, social group, or community.** However, in the absence of guidance from partners, we offer the suggestions below.

For our purposes at the Price Center, we have identified four key areas to center our offered language: Socioeconomic Status, Housing Status, Criminal-Legality, and Race and Ethnicity.

Language is constantly evolving and we are continually learning about how to properly balance the considerations above. As such, this will be a living document and the terms listed below may change over time. This glossary represents our offerings of preferred terminology as a research center and they reflect our best intentions and understanding as of the drafting of this document.

For more specific questions on inclusive language, please consult the [APA's guide to bias-free language](#). The guide covers appropriate guidelines when writing about gender, sexuality, race, disability, socioeconomic status, and intersectionality.

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General Guidelines
- "Wherever categorization and labels are used to oppress groups of people, self-identification becomes an act of resistance. At the same time, people who are robbed of opportunities to self-identify lose not just words that carry political power, but may also lose aspects of their culture, agency, and spirit. Progressive writing, as much as possible, should strive to include language that reflects peoples' choice and style in how they talk about themselves. If you aren't sure, ask" (Progressive's Style Guide).
- Prioritize person-first language when possible and accurate. Person-first language centers the individual rather than the circumstances within which they live or identities that they carry.

Equity
- Our work at the Price Center broadly centers around creating a more equitable and just world. As such, what do we mean by equity?
  - *"The notion of being fair and impartial as an individual engages with an organization or system, particularly systems of grievance. "Equity" is often conflated with the term "Equality" (meaning sameness). In fact, true equity implies that an individual may need to experience or receive something different (not equal) in order to maintain fairness and access. For example, a person with a wheelchair may need differential access to an elevator relative to someone else."* (Morton and Fasching-Varner, 2015)
- Working towards equity means working towards providing requisite resources and opportunities to all in order to live a fulfilling life, including adequate resources for those who have been structurally disadvantaged.
- **Anti-Blackness** can be defined as when institutions and individuals marginalize Black people while also devaluing their contribution and livelihood. (Racial Equity Toolkit, True Colors United)
- In our work, we invite you to consider racial equity as both an outcome and a process. **Racial equity as an outcome** is when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes and everyone has what they need to thrive no matter where they live. **Racial equity as a process** is when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives. (Race Forward)

- We offer the definition of **anti-racism** as an active process of identifying and challenging racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes in order to redistribute power in an equitable manner. (NAC International Perspectives: Women and Global Solidarity)

Socioeconomic Status
- When describing communities that are financially under-resourced (previously described perhaps as "poor" or "living in poverty"), we prefer the term *low-income communities (of color,* if applicable)

- In addition, we encourage the use of *structurally disinvested* to further describe the systemic conditions that have created disinvestment and disadvantage for communities

Housing Status
- When describing individuals or communities based on their housing status, we prefer as much accuracy as possible.
  - For instance, if an individual is facing high rent costs and challenges maintaining secure housing, we might use the term *housing precarity* to describe their experience.
  - If an individual does not currently have available housing, then we might describe them as *experiencing homelessness*
    - Alternatively, we offer centering our *unhoused neighbors* to properly reflect the presence of those experiencing homelessness in our community

Criminal-Legal

- When discussing the criminal legal system (policing, courts, litigation, etc.), we offer the term *criminal-legal system* to highlight that, unfortunately, the so-called "criminal justice" system frequently perpetuates injustice, rather than the opposite.
    - We believe that criminal-legal is a more accurate term to describe the system that concerns criminality, punishment, and legal restitution.
- If describing individuals who are incarcerated, we do so in a way that returns to person-first language, centering the humanity of individuals rather than their incarceration. For instance, "prisoners," "felons," "offenders," "convicted criminals," etc. are not acceptable terms for our purposes. For individuals who were previously incarcerated, we offer "formerly incarcerated" or "returning citizens."

Gender Identity

- *Sex* is typically presented in the binary of either "female" or "male." It refers to "physical and physiological features including chromosomes, hormone levels and function, and reproductive anatomy" (University of British Columbia, n.d.).
    - Using the female-male binary to categorize people by their biological attributes (i.e. reproductive organs) is exclusionary because it removes queer, transgender, and non-binary people from the equation.
    - Asking people to select "Female" or "Male" forces queer, transgender, non-binary people, and people who prefer not to reveal their sex generally, to fit into a box they might not feel comfortable identifying as.
- *Gender* is a social construct and thus refers to the learned and socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities various cultures assign to men, women, and non-binary people (University of British Columbia, n.d.). Unlike sex, which refers to biological sex assignment and focuses more on the physiological features of people, gender is about how people perceive themselves and others in society (University of British Columbia, n.d.).
    - For example, referring to all women as "females" is incorrect and harmful because it erases the existence of transgender, queer, and non-binary women who may not have female reproductive organs.
    - *Gender identity* is "about a person's internal identification as a man, woman or another gender, regardless of their gender expression. It may or

may not be consistent with a person's legal gender marker that was assigned at birth" (University of British Columbia, n.d.).

- ■ The preferred way to ask someone about their gender is, *"What is your gender identity?"*

- ■ It is harmful to ask people what their "biological sex," *"legal sex,"* or "real sex" is after they have already shared their gender identity, usually in the form of stating their **preferred pronouns**. Even if their gender identity may not align with their physical appearance or societal expectations, respecting their gender identity and using preferred pronouns helps to validate their existence.

- ○ *Gender expression* is "about how people express and communicate their gender through their appearance…hairstyles, clothing, physical expression and mannerisms, physical alterations of their body, or by choosing a name that they feel reflects their gender identity" (University of British Columbia, n.d.).

- ○ *Non-binary* is "used to talk about people whose gender is outside of the binaries of man/woman and, sometimes, masculine/feminine" (University of British Columbia, n.d.).

- ○ *Cisgender* is a "common umbrella term to talk about people whose gender matches the gender they were assigned at birth" (University of British Columbia, n.d.).

  - ■ Can be shortened to "*cis*"

- ○ *Transgender* is a "term to talk about people whose gender does not match the gender that they were assigned at birth" (University of British Columbia, n.d.).

  - ■ Can be shortened to "*trans*"

  - ■ It is more inclusive to ask people if they have *"lived experience as a trans person,"* (especially on a survey), rather than asking them if they identify as a "trans woman" or "trans man" because the identities and experiences transgender people are not limited to gender binaries.

Race and Ethnicity

- Say what you mean. If you are talking about Black Americans, say so, but if you are talking specifically about nativity (e.g., Chinese-Americans, Ghanain-Americans, etc.) use the proper term.

- Be mindful of the differences between race and ethnicity.

  - Ethnic identity: "an individual's sense of being a person who is defined, in part, by membership in a specific ethnic group. This sense is usually considered to be a *complex construct involving shared social, cultural, linguistic, religious, and often racial factors but identical with none of them*" (APA, n.d.) [Emphasis ours].

    - Example terms: French, American, Catholic, etc.

- Regarding race, we offer two different definitions that we believe comprise a sufficient, initial understanding.

  - "The social construction and categorization of people based on *perceived shared physical traits* that result in the maintenance of a sociopolitical hierarchy" (APA, 2021b) [Emphasis ours].

  - "A specious classification of human beings, created during a period of worldwide colonial expansion, by Europeans (whites), using themselves as the model for humanity for the purpose of assigning and maintaining white skin access to power and privilege" (Racial Equity Institute, 2019).

    - Example terms: Black, white, Latinx, Asian, etc.

    - "Some American people of African ancestry prefer 'Black,' and others prefer 'African American'; both terms are acceptable. However, 'African American' should not be used as an umbrella term for people of African ancestry worldwide because it obscures other ethnicities or national origins, such as Nigerian, Kenyan, Jamaican, or Bahamian; in these cases use 'Black.'" (APA, n.d.)

    - On Latinx in particular: We offer the use of *Latinx or Latine* whenever possible in order to use the most inclusive and gender-neutral term, but - as always - we defer to what our partners or what community members prefer. As explained by APA, *"There are compelling reasons to use any of the terms "Latino," "Latina," "Latino/a," "Latin@," and/or "Latinx" (see de Onís, 2017), and various groups advocate for the use of different forms. Use the term(s) your*

participants or population uses; if you are not working directly with this population but it is a focus of your research, it may be helpful to explain why you chose the term you used or to choose a more inclusive term like "Latinx." In general, naming a nation or region of origin is preferred (e.g., Bolivian, Salvadoran, or Costa Rican is more specific than Latino, Latinx, Latin American, or Hispanic)."

Intersectionality
- It is important to understand that many of the aforementioned identities are intersectional. That is, identity, power, and oppression are frequently not experienced in one way but rather as an intersection of identities and characteristics. Consider that a person or community's identity may be best represented intersectionally and should not be simplified to a single frame.

Conclusion
The purpose of the Equity Glossary is to provide a set of standards, a series of important questions, and a set of guidelines for certain important topic areas that the Price Center engages with. This Glossary touches on Socioeconomic Status, Housing Status, the Criminal-Legal System, as well as Race and Ethnicity –– which are all important issue areas that are central to the work that the Price Center does, as well as areas that are characterized as sites of tension and opportunity. These topic areas are both sites of tension because they are often sites where equitable language isn't fostered, and which can be unsuitable, harmful, or estranging to both Center staff, as well as our partners and the general public who engages with this work. These topic areas are also sites of opportunity –– with each area there is a great possibility for framing issues in ways which prioritize equity, in using phrases or words that more accurately define and/or provide dignity for oppressed populations, or in describing matters that lift up their connection to inequality. We affirm that the language that the Price Center uses to describe conditions of inequality extend far beyond our office walls; the work that the Price Center produces has impacts in many fields of policy and framing matters. The language that we use to describe peoples and social problems has a direct impact with how the broader public who engages with our work perceives certain classifications of peoples and certain social problems.

Rather than stating that this brief document is an original and non-amendable document whose purpose is to register the language for the Center in its future, in an all-knowing capacity –– we instead affirm that this document is iterative and subject to additions/critiques as we learn more about subjects, peoples, or social problems which this document doesn't currently address. We welcome additional reflections on framings surrounding the topic of equity, and how the Center might embrace an extensive equity framing in all that it does. Lastly, this document offers certain framings and certain phrases that might be used for different policy areas, but maybe the most important toolkit that any staff member might have is a way of questioning their work or production through a lens of equity:

- How might the way I describe this people group or this social problem reflect on ordinary people, and people who are organizing at a grassroots level?

- What does the stakeholder I'm working with think about this particular issue, and how can we lift up their agency and voice in this process?

- What are ways of describing people groups or social problems that give dignity back to oppressed people, while still describing people groups or social problems in a way that's accessible?

We encourage everyone to consider these guiding questions in their work.

If there are any thoughts about this document or any additions that you might request be included in it, then please contact Elly Schoen at ebschoen@usc.edu. We really welcome your feedback and hope you know that the work we do at the Center is possible only because of you all, and all of your wonderful contributions. Thanks!

*This document was made with the efforts of Kyle Hulburd, Elly Schoen, Victoria Ciudad-Real, Joshua Cantong, Stephanie Liem, and Megan Goulding (September 2022)

<center>Sources</center>

- [APA](#)
  - [APA Bias-free language](#) should be the primary resource that RAs/staff use if they have questions about a term – definitions are cited
- [Diversity Style Guide](#) - SF State
  - Includes derogatory language, overall weird vibe

Morton, B. and Fasching-Varner, K. (2015). "Equity." Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice. Vol. 1. (Ed. S. Thompson). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. p. 303-4.

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University of British Columbia. (n.d.). *Equity and inclusion in data collection.* University of British Columbia. https://isotl.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2019/03/eio-gender_guidelines.pdf