

Equity Language Bank & Workaround Guide

Background

Effective prevention services and related messaging must be grounded in equity to ensure that programming reaches all people, and that our collective work drives the systems change needed to prevent harm and reduce inequities. Across the CSAC, prevention providers bring a deep commitment to this work. But without a shared understanding of the language we use to describe equity-centered work, we risk communication gaps, inconsistent framing, and fragmented impact.

The Equity Language Bank & Workaround Guide was developed to create a common foundation and shared voice of equity across Chicago's prevention ecosystem. This is a co-designed, provider-driven resource built through monthly workgroup discussions, a council-wide survey on approaches to equity, and multiple rounds of provider feedback.

What's Included

This guide provides two tools for organizational use:

- **Language Bank:** A reference table of equity-centered terms and shared definitions to be utilized systems-wide. Terms are organized across three categories: Equity & Inclusion Terms, Core Prevention Terms, and Systems-Thinking Terms.
- **Language Workaround Guide:** Alternative language for grant applications, reports, and communications in restrictive policy environments.

Using the Language Workaround Guide

The Workaround Guide has a specific use case - most commonly federal grant applications and reports where DEI-related language may be flagged. In our daily prevention work, we can and should continue using equity-centered language. The alternative language in this guide exists to protect the populations we serve by sustaining funding for equitable, effective prevention services. The integrity of prevention services and our values remain unchanged.

When DEI-related language must be avoided, anchor your narrative in data and outcomes. Ground your language in specific references (e.g., populations, characteristics, and outcomes) and in measurable need, such as documented conditions and rates.

Equity & Inclusion Terms

Term	Shared Definition
Anti-Racism	Active process of identifying and challenging racism. The goal of anti-racism is to change the systems, organizational structures, policies, and attitudes that perpetuate racist ideas and to equitably redistribute power.
Accessibility	A practice of meeting youth where they are – physically, emotionally, and socially. Accessibility also includes intentionally removing barriers to ensure that prevention services are inclusive of all people.
Belonging	A sense of being secure, recognized, affirmed, and accepting of the variety of people’s intersectional identities so that full participation in prevention services is possible.
Bias	Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Unconscious or implicit bias refers to biases that we carry without awareness.
Culture	The ways of living, including languages, customs, beliefs, art, rules, values, knowledge, communication styles, and collective identities developed by members of all social groups.
Cultural Competence	The ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence is grounded in respect and appreciation of cultural differences.
Cultural Humility	Maintaining an interpersonal stance that is open to individuals and communities of varying cultures. Cultural humility includes an awareness of cultural differences and power imbalances, as well as a commitment to self-evaluation.

Cultural Responsiveness	An approach through which prevention services are adapted to incorporate the attributes, customs, perspectives, and lived experience of the participating community's cultural background, thereby increasing program effectiveness and relevance.
Discrimination	The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on age, race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, religion, citizenship status, and other categories.
Diversity	All the ways in which people differ. As a practice, diversity is the intentional and ongoing process of ensuring an environment is representative of many different cultural backgrounds, identities, and perspectives.
Equity	Fairness and justice achieved through assessing disparities in opportunities, outcomes, and representation and remedying those disparities through actions that prioritize communities with the greatest need.
Inclusion	A state of belonging where people of different backgrounds and identities are valued, integrated, and welcomed equitably as decision-makers and collaborators in prevention services.
Individual/Personal Racism	A bias that takes place when a person's beliefs, attitudes, fears, behaviors, and actions are both based on and driven by racial biases.
Institutional/Systemic Racism	The practices and policies that maintain racial disparities, uphold White supremacy, and serve to the detriment and harm of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and other marginalized groups. This is the institutionalization of systemic oppression.
Liberation	A state of being where one can freely exist, think, dream, and thrive in a way that operates outside of traditional systems of oppression.

Marginalization	A social process by which members of a dominant group push out or exclude members of a particular group by denying them access to power and resources.
Oppression	A system of discrimination for the benefit of a limited dominant class that is maintained through differential treatment and institutional control. Oppression reflects the inequitable distribution of power, in which a dominant group hoards wealth and resources at the expense of many. This creates a lack of access, opportunity, safety, and security for marginalized groups.
Power	The ability to define, set, or change situations. Power is also the ability to influence others to believe, behave, or adopt values as desired by those in power.
Racial Equity	Race is no longer a predictor of outcomes, leading to more just outcomes in policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages.
Restorative Justice	A theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by violence, crime, and conflict. It places decisions in the hands of those who have been most affected by a wrongdoing, and gives equal concern to the survivor/victim, the offender, and the surrounding community.
Social Justice	A process which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities • Challenges the roots of oppression • Empowers all people to realize their full potential • Builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action

Core Prevention Terms

Term	Shared Definition
Adaptation	The modification of aspects of a prevention program or practice, including content, delivery method, and length of program sessions. (see Cultural Responsiveness)
Best Practices	Prevention strategies and programs that have been shown through substantial research and evaluation to be effective.
Comprehensive Approach	The delivery of prevention services in multiple domains or spheres of influence (youth, families, school, and communities) that target the same population in each sphere to reinforce consistent messages.
Data-Driven Decision Making	The process of examining and utilizing data to make informed decisions regarding prevention program planning, selection, implementation, improvement, or discontinuation.
Environmental Approaches	Strategies that help alter policies, procedures, systems, or attitudes, and aim to change or influence environmental factors that shape individuals' behavior. Environmental approaches are used to change public perceptions, improve and enforce laws and regulations, and address other factors affecting public health and safety.
Evidence-Based Prevention	Principles, strategies, and programs that are based on theory, are well implemented, and have demonstrated a positive effect on specified behaviors or risk factors. Evidence-based prevention is based on research that meets commonly agreed-upon criteria and is guided by credible and substantiated research evaluation.
Impact	Long-term, global effects of a prevention program or intervention on the behavior of the target population.

Prevention	A proactive process that empowers individuals and systems to meet the challenges of life events and transitions by creating and reinforcing conditions that promote help-seeking and healthy behaviors.
Protective Factor	An attribute, situation, condition, or environmental context that mitigates risks, fosters resilience, and increases health and well-being.
Resiliency	The ability to cope successfully with significant adversity or risk to overcome the negative effects of risk factors.
Risk Factor	An attribute, situation, condition, or environmental context that increases the likelihood of a specific outcome or harm.
Tailored Services	Prevention services that reach all people while prioritizing and adapting services to the communities with the greatest need.

Systems-Thinking Terms

Term	Shared Definition
Capacity Building	Increasing the ability and skills of coalitions, individuals, groups and organizations to plan, deliver, and evaluate prevention efforts.
Coalition	An alliance or cooperation between individuals or groups that share a common vision or goal in regards to a specific outcome.

Collective Impact	A model through which a group of important actors from different sectors commits to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem and advancing equity. This is done by learning together, aligning, and integrating actions to achieve systems-level change.
Common Agenda	A collective definition of the specific problem, as well as agreed upon goals and approaches for action.
Movement Building	The effort of social change agents to engage power holders and the broader society in addressing a systemic problem or injustice while promoting an alternative solution. Movement building requires a range of intersecting approaches across distinct stages over a long-term period.
System	A set of interacting, interdependent entities that form an integrated whole.
Systems-Level Change	Shifting parts of a system, and the interactions between these parts, to ultimately form a new system that behaves in a different way.
Systems-Thinking	<p>A framework by which to analyze and understand the ways in which a set of interacting, interdependent entities works together to produce results. Systems-thinking generally involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing the whole rather than just parts; • Seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots; • Understanding key interconnections within a system and between systems; • Engaging different perspectives; • Constantly learning and adapting; and • Probing assumptions.
Theory of Change	A tool to strengthen strategies and maximize results by identifying the work to be undertaken to address a social issue, the expected signals of progress, and the presumed or possible pathways to achieving the desired goals. This tool reflects the beliefs, working assumptions, and/or hypotheses about how change will occur.

Language Workaround Guide

Flagged Term(s)	Alternative Language Options
Accessibility	Usability for all, ease of use, removing roadblocks, open to everyone, ensuring full participation
Allyship, activism	Partnership, standing alongside, shared commitment, solidarity
Barrier(s), barriers to opportunity	Obstacles, roadblocks, challenges to pursuing opportunities
Bias	Unfair preferences, favoritism, skewed judgment, hidden assumptions
Cultural competence/ responsiveness	Awareness of traditions, responsive to local and community context, appreciation of practices
DEI training	Respectful workplace training
Discrimination	Differential treatment, differential exposure, unequal treatment in [specific context]
Disparity	Gaps in resources, unfair/uneven differences in opportunity, variability in conditions, higher rates of [outcome] relative to [reference group]
Disproportionately impacted	More significantly affected, those most in need of services, facing greater challenges, experiencing higher impact, higher rates of [outcome] relative to [reference group]
Diversity	Variety of perspectives, spectrum of ideas, celebrating unique contributions, broad representation, range of viewpoints, variation in [specific characteristics], representation of [specific groups]

Equity	Fairness, ensuring fair opportunities, leveling the playing field, fostering opportunities for full participation, closing gaps in [specific outcome] across populations
Inclusion	Engagement and involvement, full participation, embracing all voices, engagement of [specific populations] in [process, study, or intervention]
Inequity, inequalities	Unfair differences, imbalance, unfair access, higher rates of [outcome] relative to [reference group]
Liberation	Expanding freedoms, securing rights, clearing the path forward, advancing opportunity
Marginalized	Specific racial/ethnic group(s), experiencing structural barriers to [specific system or resource]
Oppression	Unfair systems, structural unfairness, entrenched barriers, exclusionary practices
Racism, anti-racism	Unfair treatment, addressing unfair systems, advancing fairness across identities, promoting fair practices
Social justice	Advancing fairness, promoting just outcomes, working toward fairness
Underrepresented, underserved	Communities with unmet needs, fostering opportunities where most needed, lacking sufficient resources, resource-limited communities, populations with limited access to [specific service/resource], populations with limited representation in [specific setting, dataset, or workforce]

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