

Tipsheet for Organizations: Using Inclusive Language in the Workplace



The Mining Association of Canada (MAC)'s Towards Sustainable Mining (TSM): Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Workplaces Protocol ¹ relevance: **Indicator 2: Advancing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Facility Criteria)**

This tipsheet helps organizations understand how to meet the requirements described in the TSM Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Workplaces Protocol. Note that the advice in this tipsheet is generally based on achieving Level B criteria of the Protocol, Workplace communications are accessible, inclusive and culturally appropriate.

Importance of Inclusive Language

Language reflects culture and is not neutral. We create and recreate the world through the language we use, casting people, places and things in different lights. Our use of language is based on both conscious and unconscious choices and even biases or stereotypes. Sometimes, our narrative – or way of presenting information or describing events – reflects our views and can also reflect or signal our understanding, acceptance and valuing of diversity.

Using inclusive language is more than just avoiding outdated or harmful terms. It's a lifelong process of learning about the complexities of language and communication, understanding the roles that everyone plays in creating welcoming and comfortable spaces, accepting responsibility for words, behaviours and actions, and taking action to create lasting change. Using inclusive language helps to ensure respect for human dignity, contributing to an equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace culture.

Inclusive language is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudice, stereotypes or discriminatory views of particular people or groups. Such views often reflect dated, culturally-bound perspectives and can be embedded in words, phrases, idioms or expressions.

Using inclusive language in the workplace is important to creating a positive work environment. It helps to set the tone and reinforce a culture of respect, safety and belonging. Embedding inclusive language practices into the workplace empowers people and helps break the cycle of exclusion/discrimination that stems from harmful assumptions, stereotypes and stigma. Inclusive language enables people to be better able to focus on their roles and exchange ideas, which contributes to problem solving and innovation. Organizations benefit from the resulting workforce cohesion and improved productivity and performance.

¹ See: [Towards Sustainable Mining: Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Workplaces Protocol](#)



Acknowledging or accepting when we've made a mistake or that our ways of communicating can be improved, and taking time to reflect on the factors that influence how we communicate are the first steps. Taking action to check our assumptions, unlearn negative terms and exclusionary communication practices and learn positive ones are the next steps to using inclusive language.

Guiding Principles to Foster Inclusive Language in the Workplace:



1. Use inclusive language to convey respect.

Using inclusive language is an important way to demonstrate and communicate respect for one another. When communicating, we have the opportunity to build understanding and awareness, augment information and enhance perspectives whether in relation to a problem, situation, project, individuals, groups or people. Inclusive language practices put people first, as in a person has a disability, as well as supports individuals to communicate how they wish to be identified, as with the use of preferred pronouns.

Employers can promote a respectful workplace culture by modelling the use of clear, accessible, inclusive and culturally-appropriate language in their communications, offering glossaries of key terms² and writing guides as well as opportunities for individuals to build inclusive language skills through training.



2. Use inclusive language to communicate effectively.

Using plain language (i.e., grade 8 level or lower) and clear phrasing supports effective communications. Avoiding idioms, biased words and terms as well as expressions that may harbour sensitivity, such as those that convey aggression or violence, helps to ensure that messages are understood as intended. Inclusive language, because it is clear and respectful, does not use terms, imagery, descriptors or cultural references that serve to exclude groups or that are harmful or degrading.

To use inclusive language for effective communication in the workplace, begin with a review of workplace documents, including policies, procedures, guidelines, job advertisements, job descriptions, training and communication materials for biased or degrading terminology. Also review workplace procedures, including talent management processes (connected with recruitment, skills development, management/leadership, performance management, advancement and retention), procurement and other operational processes.³

² See MiHR's Glossaries within this Toolkit.

³ See TSM Protocol, Indicator 2, Level AA 1a – Using inclusive language helps to mitigate potential for bias.





3. Use inclusive language to acknowledge diversity in the workplace.

Inclusive language avoids biases and stereotypes and instead accurately and authentically reflects the diversity of the broader population and/or the workplace. In this way, diversity is recognized as an important attribute of the workplace culture and/or of society. Not only does inclusive language support equity in the workplace, it also serves to remind staff of workforce diversity by reflecting, for example, gender and racial/ethnocultural diversity. This, in turn, creates opportunities for learning more about staff diversity, encouraging staff to introduce aspects of their identity that they choose to share by creating a feeling of safety or when sharing diverse perspectives and ways of seeing things when problem-solving, for example, or addressing workplace hazards. Organizations that want to learn more about using inclusive language to acknowledge diversity in the workplace can consult with subject matter experts with specific knowledge of communities such as local rightsholders, communities of interest, service providers mandated to support specific groups (such as immigrant-serving organizations, in-house employee resource groups, equity committees or roundtables).



4. Inclusive language involves continual improvement.

Language is fluid and constantly evolving. Organizations that commit to using inclusive language effectively embrace the practice of monitoring and reviewing terms and their evolving usage to value diversity, support a respectful workplace culture and advance their EDI commitment. Staff are encouraged to learn about the importance of inclusive language in relation to successfully carrying out their role and working as part of a team and are provided with the tools and training necessary to enable the use of inclusive language. In this way, inclusive language becomes part of the workplace culture and an expected practice.

Among individuals, reflection is key to using inclusive language and involves acknowledging personal biases, avoiding stereotypes and 'unlearning' harmful language. Adopting inclusive language is a process of acknowledging mistakes when they are made, apologizing and learning from them, and working to do better in the future. Further to encouraging continuous learning and self-reflection among employees, cultivating a culture where staff are empowered to respectfully assist one another in learning and using inclusive language also promotes respect in the workplace.

Resources

BC Public Service Agency. (2023). Words Matter: Guidelines on Inclusive Language in the Workplace.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/all-employees/working-with-others/words-matter.pdf>

CCDI. Glossary of IDEA Terms. <https://ccdi.ca/glossary-of-terms>

Centre for Equity, Gender & Leadership. (2022). Understanding Inclusive Language: A Framework. Berkeley Haas.

<https://haas.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/Understanding-IL-Playbook-3.pdf>

Government of Canada. (2022). Inclusive Language: Background and Principles.

<https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/inclusive-writing-background-principles.html#pr1>

Wellness Works Canada. (2022). Inclusive Language in the Workplace: An Introduction.

<https://www.resources.wellnessworkscanada.ca/post/using-inclusive-language-in-the-workplace-an-introduction>

