
CSCCE Glossary: Inclusive language in community building

Introduction

Building community is by necessity an exercise in inclusivity. However, the language surrounding this practice is evolving at a rapid pace, and for community managers in STEM who frequently navigate this work solo or in a very small team, it's not always clear where to turn for advice. We wanted to help support nuanced conversations about the role of community managers in ensuring everyone feels welcome in a virtual or in-person space. This includes supporting community members by providing equitable access to activities and information, as well as offering mental models for intentionally creating written, spoken, and any other forms of communications that are as inclusive as possible.

Enter the latest section of the Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (CSCCE) glossary! Our STEM community management glossary is a work in progress, and will ultimately comprise a series of themed sections focused on specific topics. You can find all of the terms to date in our [online glossary](#) on the CSCCE website, where additional terms are added over time.

The Inclusive Language in Community Building section of the glossary described here is conceptualized as an “active glossary,” where we try to provide context for how, where, and why you as a community manager might come across these terms rather than just offering definitions. One way of looking at this resource is as a collection of discussion prompts: If you work with others, try taking a few relevant terms and descriptions to your next staff meeting or coffee hour and see where the conversation takes you.

While we were creating this glossary section, one thing that came up over and over again in our conversations and co-working sessions was that to do the work of inclusivity well, there is a weight of responsibility upon the individual as well as the organization - we need to continually educate ourselves, practice implementing actions that may shift us beyond our comfort zone, and be open to feedback about where we could do better. We were also reminded that our work as community managers is always ongoing and involves balancing intentionality with an iterative process of reflection and course correction.

We welcome feedback on the terms included as well as suggestions of additions and encourage you to [join the conversations](#) in our community of practice.

About CSCCE

The Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (CSCCE) champions the importance of human infrastructure for effective collaboration in STEM. We provide training and support for the people who make scientific collaborations succeed at scale and we also research the impact of these emerging roles.

Find out more about us on our website: cscce.org

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CSCCE uses the CREDiT contributor roles taxonomy to show how the authors listed contributed to the creation of this guide:

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ABLEIST LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR

Using language that places a negative emphasis on disability or a positive emphasis on being able-bodied. Many commonly used idioms are ableist in nature. Examples include: being “blind” to something, referring to an unexpected decision as “insane,” or noting that a point “fell on deaf ears.” In general, use the terminology preferred by the individual or group being addressed.

Additional reading:

- [Best practices for avoiding ableist terminology](#)

ACCESSIBILITY

The concept of whether a product, service, or space can be used by as broad an audience as possible, which differs from general usability by focusing on providing an equivalent user experience to people with disabilities. Factors that make up accessibility include visual, auditory, and mobility components, and the ability of a product, service, or space to interface or be used with assistive technology (such as a screen reader or mobility aids).

ALLY/ALLYSHIP

Being actively supportive of a marginalized group while not necessarily personally identifying with the group. Your identity as an ally is not something you can claim for yourself. Instead, your actions can result in you being seen as an ally by the people you support. Allyship training is increasingly available to facilitators and community conveners.

Note: An individual can be a member of a marginalized group while also an ally to a different marginalized group. Membership in the former does not necessarily confer allyship to the latter since learning about our own biases and the group's needs is a continual process.

Example: <https://frameshiftconsulting.com/>

Additional Reading:

- [The state of allyship report: The key to workplace inclusion](#)
- [How to be an ally: Actions you can take for a stronger, happier workplace](#)

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Sometimes considered synonymous with a code of conduct, although definitions vary.

A set of rules that describe the expected behaviors of all community members and also highlight how the expected behaviors relate to a community's core values. Community participation guidelines may include concrete examples of welcome and unwelcome behaviors, a link to the reporting process, and what to expect when violations occur.

Example: [CSCCE Community Participation Guidelines](#)

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Tactics for intervening, moderating, and resolving disagreements. Community managers may find themselves managing member disagreements without adequate training. Some organizations provide resources to build these skills or have offices that can provide support.

Example: A campus mediator.

Note: Conflict is not in and of itself a negative thing; it can be an indicator that there is sufficient trust in a group that members are able to voice different opinions. Reminding members of community participation guidelines can support conflict that does not cause harm.

Additional reading:

- [Conflict in your research group? Here are four strategies for finding a resolution](#)
- [Ten simple rules for avoiding and resolving conflicts with your colleagues](#)

CORE VALUES

These values serve as the foundation for community participation guidelines (see above) and how members participate. An easy pitfall is to choose somewhat generic terms such as “respect” and “diversity” that risk feeling clichéd or lack shared meaning by community members. Moreover, core values should include examples of what they look like in action, and be specific to the community. CSCCE's core values statement activity can help to support deeper conversations about identifying and defining core values collaboratively as a community or team ([see this worksheet](#)).

Example: [CSCCE's Core Values](#)

CREATING A CONTAINER

This term, sometimes used by facilitators, refers to the process of intentionally constructing a space (virtual or physical) in which a set of interactions between a specific group of participants can occur. This approach might include creating terms of engagement for that space and carefully considering who needs to be present within it, with the goal that participants can then produce something within the confines and protection of the space that they might not otherwise be able to do.

Additional reading:

- Author and facilitator Priya Parker considers multiple aspects of intentionally designing interaction spaces in "[The Art of Gathering.](#)"

DEI / EDI / DEIA / JEDI / DEIB

See also Jargon and Use of acronyms.

Different communities, cultures, and geographical areas use a variety of acronyms to indicate the space that includes Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Justice, and Belonging, or some combination of these terms. It is both important to understand what the most commonly used acronyms are for your community, and to be intentional about whether the acronym accurately reflects your intention.

Additional reading:

- [Why the term 'JEDI' is problematic for describing programs that promote justice, equity, diversity and inclusion](#)
- [Why it's time to retire equality, diversity, and inclusion](#)

DOMINANT VOICE / DOMINANT STORY

See also Framing.

This is not just about people speaking more than others in a group, but the underlying assumption of whose perspective(s) are dominating the framing of a conversation or activity. For example, an emphasis on a certain location in the world or an overuse of a simplistic narrative that obscures nuance and diversity. As a community manager it can be helpful to regularly ask whose voice(s) you are prioritizing, e.g., who is mentioned in a newsletter, who is invited to speak, how is a topic framed? Facilitators can ask people to "take space/make space" to ensure multiple voices are heard.

EMERGENT

An idea, project, or movement that grows organically within a community. You might also see this word used in the phrase “emergent leaders,” which refers to members of a community who wish to take on additional roles and/or responsibilities to ensure the success of the community. Emergent phenomena are often ideas and practices that have existed in communities for some time, but which the community manager can responsively help to support by carefully working to balance the needs and perspectives of members with the ability to mobilize and channel resources (e.g., from a parent organization).

Additional reading:

- Social justice facilitator adrienne maree brown has brought the topic of emergence back to the fore in the community-building space with her book “[Emergent Strategy](#).”
- CSCCE describes ways to support emergent community leaders in [our guidebook on community champions](#).

ETIQUETTE

Often used to describe expected norms of behavior in a group setting. Be careful to consider who is privileged by these expectations, who might be silenced, and whether referring to “etiquette” is a way of maintaining the status quo through an existing hierarchy. Community participation guidelines are one way to set expectations around community behaviors in a transparent and inclusive way.

Example: An unspoken rule that only senior managers can speak up at a staff retreat that results in the silencing of more junior staff.

FRAMING

When preparing communications, consider the backgrounds of the recipients of your message. This pause for thought might include recognizing your own privilege to craft wording or create activities that are inclusive.

Example: When facilitating a report-out after a group activity, framing participant questions as opportunities to learn rather than pointing out gaps in understanding will likely result in a more supportive atmosphere where other participants feel encouraged to ask further questions.

HOLDING SPACE

A term often used by facilitators that refers to hosting a gathering that is intended to enable participants to explore a topic or issue together in a way that requires them to be fully present, open, and nonjudgmental to what arises in the space. This approach typically involves actively listening to

the lived experiences of others while also reflecting on their own. In practical terms, holding space might look like a less rigid, more responsive agenda, and more opportunities for participants to express their thoughts and feelings or even sit quietly and reflect together on the topic. Holding space can be important for building deeper relationships and validating emotional experiences, and requires clear expectations about confidentiality and unharmed behavior to support the vulnerability that often emerges.

INTENTIONALITY

Taking a considered approach to communications, programming, and other aspects that focuses on thinking about desired outcomes and how to support all members. This approach might look like carefully considering goals, participants, resources, and context (including who is being centered) to make sure that there is clarity about each before moving forward on a project.

JARGON

Language that is specific to a discipline or other in-group. Often jargon arises organically, and its original intention is to streamline communication between members of a group. It can also offer members of the in-group a sense of belonging; however, an overreliance on jargon can alienate newcomers. When facilitating discussions or editing text, be sure to define the first instance of jargon.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

This phrase exists to explain how someone gained their knowledge. For example, someone may know about institutionalized discrimination because they themselves were a victim (a lived experience) or because they read about it in the local newspaper. As a community manager, it is important to recognize the difference between these ways of knowing and the impact they have upon the knower.

MULTIMODAL PROGRAMMING

The importance of providing a range of inclusive, accessible programming options that support community members in engaging in a way that matches their current availability, preferences for engaging, and accessibility needs. Community members' changing modes of engagement can be influenced by time, interest, and other things happening in their lives. (See [CSCCE's Community Participation Model](#).)

Example: When sharing an invitation to a public webinar, you might also offer the information that a recording will be made available by a specific date for those who are unable to attend.

REFLECTION

Regular reflection as an individual and as a community is important both to note progress made but also where improvements might still be needed or have emerged. This practice includes examining intrinsic bias. Note the emphasis on an ongoing process of learning and improvement rather than a final moment when all the work is done.

RESTORATIVE APPROACHES

May overlap with repair.

Often violations of community participation guidelines might be unintentional or based on gaps in awareness (e.g., about how to use more inclusive language or how specific behaviors can exclude others). A restorative approach to addressing the harm caused by these violations emphasizes the importance of seeking to learn, repair, and grow where possible, rather than resorting to punitive measures as the default. (Note, some violations will still need to be addressed punitively.)

Example: Scheduling a private conversation with a community member after they use ableist language in the forum to explain why their word choice is problematic and seek a remedy.

SEXIST LANGUAGE

Language that unnecessarily identifies gender with the subject being discussed, particularly that which reinforces gendered stereotypes about a title or role. Best practices involve using gender-neutral language whenever possible (examples include using “staffed” instead of “manned,” “humankind” instead of “mankind,” or the gender-neutral pronoun “they” instead of defaulting to “he/she” when a person or group’s gender is unspecified).

SILENCING

See also Dominant Voice / Dominant Story and Etiquette.

The process by which voices can be excluded from a conversation. Activist and writer Rebecca Solnit (in her essay [Cassandra Among the Creeps](#)) describes three concentric circles of silencing: from self-editing and fear of speaking out, to threats intended to silence, to the discrediting of a shared story and its narrator. A dominant culture or set of group dynamics can result in silencing, without any individual intending to do so.

SILO

See also Jargon.

A category or “box” we put ourselves or others into based on professional or personal identity (e.g., researcher, journalist, expert, nonexpert). Silos can be useful for defining the boundaries or scope for participants in a community space; however, they can be problematic when they create barriers to the sharing of knowledge, for example, collaboration across scientific disciplines. Bridging between silos is important in knowledge work (e.g., communities of practice are one mechanism for doing this).

USE OF ACRONYMS

Best practices here vary, but by examining your intention behind using an acronym, you might decide instead to be more specific or intersectional. For example, if you’re discussing an issue that specifically impacts Black women, you can say so instead of defaulting to the broader term “BIPOC”. In addition, acronyms are a form of jargon (see Jargon), and using them can create an in-group/out-group dynamic.

USE OF PRONOUNS

Asking people to share pronouns should be framed as an invitation rather than a requirement, and never as “preferred pronouns.” It’s important to recognize that while you might feel comfortable and safe sharing your pronouns, others in the community might not. Just as you would never assume someone’s name before meeting them, you should also not assume their pronouns.

Additional reading:

- [Recent work related to gender equity and inclusivity: Guidelines, survey options, and pronouns](#)
- [GLSEN pronoun guide](#)
- mypronouns.org

Citing and reusing this guide

CITATION AND REUSE

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