



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

RACIAL EQUITY LANGUAGE REVIEW

Report and Recommendations
to the NEA Board of Directors



May 2020
Internal Language Review
Stakeholder Group

**Report and Recommendations to the
NEA Board of Directors**

By the

**Racial Justice in Education
Internal Language Review Stakeholder Group**

**Adopted by the Board of Directors
May 2, 2020**

Contents

Introduction and Background.....	3
The Purpose of Our Language Review	3
Specific-Group and Unifying-Group Identity Terms.....	3
Opening Phase: Considering Our Options	6
Establishing a Stakeholder Group and Introductory Engagement.....	6
A Working Group Forms.....	6
Internal Guidance: Our Goals	7
External Guidance: Our Project Statement.....	7
Narrowing Phase: Assessing Our Options.....	8
Historical Analysis	8
Member Research	9
Closing Phase: Reaching Consensus	10
Overview of Recommendations to Governance.....	10
General Findings and Recommendations	11
Recommendations on Specific-Group Identity Terms	11
Recommendations on Specific-Group and Unifying Cross-Group Identity Terms.....	13
Related Recommendations.....	14
Appendices	16
A. Stakeholder and Working Group Members.....	16
B. A Language Equity Review Tool (ALERT).....	17

Introduction and Background

This report describes the completed work of the Racial Justice in Education Internal Language Review Stakeholder Group (referred herein as the “Stakeholder Group” or “Group”) and sets forth all recommendations by the Group for Board consideration (For Group Roster, See Appendix A).

The Purpose of Our Language Review

At the NEA Representative Assembly in 2015, delegates adopted NBI-B and placed the Association on a course to more explicitly address race in both its internal-facing and external-facing work. NEA’s Center for Social Justice has since launched the Racial Justice in Education initiative to proactively and strategically advance racial equity, inclusion, and unity in schools and communities, as well as in the Association.

Working to advance racial justice often begins with normalizing our conversations about race—taking what is often hidden and avoided and making it an explicit part of our everyday work. We must *illuminate* racism in order to *eliminate* racism. As we engage in necessary and sometimes uncomfortable conversations, it is critical that we employ appropriate language to talk constructively and inclusively about racial and ethnic identities. The language we use shapes organizational culture and narratives, so it is imperative that we also approach our language review proactively and strategically.

Words have tremendous power and impact—especially those associated with individual and group identities. Word meanings can shift over time with changing social conditions. What is considered acceptable to one generation may evolve to become pejorative to the next. Words that define realities and identities can create both helpful or harmful labels, messages, and stories—each of which have the power to profoundly impact people’s lives.

Specific-Group and Unifying-Group Identity Terms

Central to the Group’s review work has been a deep analysis of acceptable usage both for specific-group identity and for unifying-group identity terms. Building a collective understanding of the appropriate words for specific-groups designations is critical to the Association’s internal and external communications across a highly diverse membership. Each community has distinct characteristics, compositions, cultures, and histories which must be understood and respected. Consider these reactions by members we surveyed to questions about specific group terms:

“It is easier to say that I am Asian American. But if I get specific, I would like to say I am Chinese American.”

“People say Hispanic first because that's what everybody thinks of, but I am Mexican American.”

“American Indian is what I use. Sometimes I will use Native American. I am too old to use the word 'indigenous' but that is the newfangled thing. If I was really

introducing myself to somebody that knew that I was Native to begin with, I would tell them I am Oneida because that is the tribe I belong to.”

Our challenge is to guard against diminishing or losing the unique and personal characteristics of identity through general or universal terminology. NEA recognizes the importance of each individual and community self-identifying with their own terms.

There is also a need for unifying terms to connect different communities. Consider how the power of words through recent actions—like the U.S. President, Secretary of State, and conservative talk show entertainers who took turns before audiences of millions referring daily to COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” or “Wuhan virus”—has contributed to spikes in verbal harassment and physical assault against Asians and Pacific Islanders. In close relation there are reports of “othering” and blaming for the continuing health crisis in China against its African immigrant population, and in India the pandemic has led to discrimination and physical attacks on Indian citizens in the northeastern part of the country based on their appearance—for “looking” Chinese. Collective persecution with the common thread of racist intent and injury across starkly different communities is just one example of the necessity for cross-group solidarity and building vital movement language to push back against these shameful attacks.

Since the adoption of NBI-B in 2015, NEA has directed resources to create awareness, build capacity, and advance action toward race equity. A critical piece of this work is to build credibility and trust with essential partners and key advocates who have led on racial justice for many years and without whom we could not reach our goals. For both NEA and our partners, language is imperative in advancing racial and social justice. Our partners use the unifying term “people of color” and they do so with intent and deliberation. “People of color” is used to describe any person who is not considered white. The term is seen as a power-building and power-unifying term that emphasizes common experiences of systemic racism by people classified as non-white within the United States. NEA’s elected leaders and Center for Social Justice staff who lead this work are compelled to use the term “people of color” to use language that advantages our members, students, and communities, aligns our work internally and with our external partners, builds power and credibility, and connects with hearts and minds at a strategic level.

NEA also understands that a unifying term and its usage have limits—that there is a time for solidarity and there is a time for specificity. Rachele Hampton, writing for *Slate*, cautions against allowing “people of color” to erase specificity for the sake of ease.

“For example, using people of color when discussing the history of chattel slavery or police brutality flattens the specificities of anti-black racism in America. Using people of color when referring to the genocide of native and indigenous people in America obfuscates particular histories of colonial violence. Suggesting that newsrooms or corporate boards need to hire more people of color when there are specifically no Latino people or Southeast Asians on the payroll suggests that any

nonwhite person will do, that we are all the same and bring the same experience to the table.”¹

But what are we to do when conventional wisdom appears to suggest the unifying-group term upon which we have relied for so long—having been codified into our adopted governing documents and policies—is now considered pejorative? The term “ethnic minority” has historically and internally served the organization for nearly 50 years, following the historic 1966 merger of NEA and the American Teachers Association. The merger of the two organizations led in part to the NEA Constitutional Convention in 1971-1972 which for the first time in our history codified a range of race equity policies—including Bylaw 3-1(g)—into the Association’s modern-day Constitution, Bylaws, and Rules ratified by delegates to the 1974 Representative Assembly. There have, however, been growing critiques of the terms “ethnic” and “minority,” with varying degrees of preference often based on age, race, and geography. Indeed, alternatives to “ethnic minority” such as “people of color” also have their share of proponents and opponents.

The task of reviewing and recommending appropriate language of such complexity is not simply an exercise in wordsmithing or replacement. Language related to race and ethnicity is, fundamentally, about who we are in our Association, in our schools and communities, and in our broader society. We must have words that work effectively within and across our many racial and ethnic groupings, with appeal both to our newest members and our most veteran ones, and to those in our own internal ranks and well as our external partners and social justice movement allies. Ultimately, the purpose for NEA’s internal language review is to ensure that the Association uses inclusive, strategic, and effective language and communications, both internally and externally, to reflect its vision, mission, and values.

There are no algorithms or theories for this work. There are only human relationships, social capital, and intellect. The process for and the deliberations on our language review have not been easy and we did not anticipate any of this would be. There have been widely divergent viewpoints that have called for deeper understanding and trust long before any conclusions could be reached. The words to consider are not just about ethnic and racial identity. For an organization like ours, they are also about representation, resources, and power. Navigating these complexities has required careful facilitation of decision-makers who were building the road while walking it, trusting in a participatory process, and letting go of an immediate destination.

Anchoring this process, dating from our actions at the 2015 Representative Assembly, NEA has sustained a strong and growing commitment to advance racial justice in education, challenge institutional racism, and interrupt patterns of white supremacy. To honor this commitment, the Association has a compelling interest to ensure that the language and terms we use related to race and ethnicity are respectful, inclusive, equitable, and unifying.

¹ Hampton, Rachele. (2019). Which People? <https://slate.com/human-interest/2019/02/people-of-color-phrase-history-racism.html>

Opening Phase: Considering Our Options

Establishing a Stakeholder Group and Introductory Engagement

Addressing delegates to the 2018 Representative Assembly in Minneapolis, President Lily Eskelsen García said, “We’ve had several members who have asked us to consider looking at our own language on racial and social justice in what we call ethnic and racial groups. I am establishing a task force that will be brought together this year to look at our documents and see if we’re using the most respectful terms.” The Internal Language Stakeholder Group was established by the president in September 2018 with the charge of assessing the specific-group and unifying cross-group identities that NEA uses to name, and communicate about, the racial and ethnic identities of Association members.

The Group’s initial configuration comprised nearly 40 racially and ethnically diverse Association member leaders from around the country and external partners with experience and expertise in language matters. While tasked to address race explicitly but not exclusively, the composition also included white allies, members who identified as LGBTQ, and representatives of other member constituencies. The Group’s initial efforts sought to—

- Align our words and actions with our organizational values, priorities, and aspirations.
- Consciously, actively, and continually counteract implicit bias.
- Reduce, minimize, and prevent harm, exclusion, and inequities.
- Ensure that stakeholders, especially those most marginalized, are actively and authentically engaged in needed change efforts.
- Affirmatively review, and if needed, change language and culture to advance racial justice, social justice, equity, and inclusion.

The Group convened over the course of two days in September 2018, working through an agenda that included—

- Identifying existing or possible/proposed internal language that warrants attention, review, and consideration, especially for matters related to racial justice, social justice, equity, and inclusion.
- Developing and using “A Language Equity Review Tool” (ALERT) to guide assessments, recommendations, and decisions on the most appropriate terminology or language to use (See Appendix B).
- Engaging key stakeholders—especially those most directly affected by the language under consideration—in assessing impacts and exploring options.

A Working Group Forms

Drawing from the members of the full Stakeholder Group in fall 2018, the president subsequently formed a “Working Group” of 20 members. While the broader Stakeholder Group served as thought partners in designing processes for reviewing language to ensure it is inclusive, equitable, and strategically aligned with NEA’s mission and goals, the Working Group focused on developing and using assessments for reviewing the term “ethnic minorities” and related terms, generating possible language options, and considering recommendations to bring to the full group for its consideration.

The Working Group convened for two days in February 2019 to—

- Deepen relationships and understanding among Working Group members.
- Share experiences and insights related to addressing internal language challenges.
- Build experience using ALERT to assess usage of the term “ethnic minorities” and related terms (See Appendix B).
- Develop and list language options and further ideas for engaging stakeholders in considering options.

The Working Group reconvened for a second and final in-person meeting in November 2019 to—

- Identify key findings and implications from NEA language review member surveys and in-depth interviews.
- Further experience using the remaining steps of ALERT to assess language.
- Develop draft recommendations to guide future language usage.
- Develop next steps and actions for moving the review process forward.

Internal Guidance: Our Goals

The February 2019 meeting of the Working Group included exercises and presentations on the origins of race and racism and their implications for NEA, and the historical context for NEA’s race equity policies and usage of the term “ethnic minorities” that is codified in our Constitution, Bylaws, and Rules. For internal guidance on NEA’s language review, the Working Group developed and formally adopted the following six goals—

1. *Advance NEA’s mission, values, and goals, while pursuing a racially just world.*
2. *Support our membership mandate to advance racial justice in education, challenge institutional and structural racism, and interrupt white supremacy; and to honor our history and to strengthen strategies and policies to promote the representation and equitable power of ethnic minorities, such as Bylaw 3-1(g).*
3. *Be inclusive, equitable, and respectful to build strength and power without doing harm.*
4. *Recognize and support communities directly and adversely affected by white supremacy to unite within and across our communities to build a cohesive social movement.*
5. *Respect the right of individual ethnic and racial communities to identify themselves and to achieve self-determination even when unifying-group terms are used for the purpose of including and uniting different communities.*
6. *Reflect on the narrative, culture, aspirations, and values of our members and students. And then, to effectively educate and communicate with diverse internal and external audiences with relevance and responsiveness to changing times and conditions.*

External Guidance: Our Project Statement

The Working Group further developed and conducted preliminary assessments within race-alike groups of comprehensive lists of potential specific-group and unifying-group language options. These lists subsequently informed NEA’s Center for Communications design and deployment of a survey and series of in-depth interviews with NEA members conducted in

April, May, and June of 2019. To frame NEA’s language review efforts in support of the member survey and interviews, the Group introduced the following project statement—

NEA’s membership is strongly committed to racial equity in education, challenging institutional racism, and interrupting patterns of white supremacy. To honor this commitment, we want to be sure that the language and terms we use related to race and ethnicity are respectful, inclusive, equitable, and unifying. Words have tremendous power and impact—especially those associated with individual and group identities—and meanings can change over time.

NEA is conducting a language review to determine if current terms the Association uses related to race and ethnicity are the most appropriate and effective, or whether new terms are needed. NEA has created a Language Review Stakeholder Group to take on the task of conducting this review.

Whichever terms are used, NEA is committed to honoring our historic and current commitments to maintain and strengthen ethnic/racial representation goals and guarantees, such as those provided by Bylaw 3-1(g). And while there is a need for unifying terms to connect different communities, NEA also recognizes the importance of each individual and community being able to self-identify with their own terms.

The Stakeholder Group submitted its progress report in June 2019 to the NEA Representative Assembly, outlining its work to date.

Narrowing Phase: Assessing Our Options

Two central components of the Working Group’s efforts for a deeper understanding of all aspects of its language review conducted during its February and November 2019 meetings included a historical analysis and a study of the data from the member surveys and in-depth interviews conducted between April and June.

Historical Analysis

The Working Group engaged in two sessions devoted to both U.S. and Association history in relation to ALERT step one in our language review process, which calls for an understanding of relevant history and changing contemporary context. The first session involved a comprehensive historical timeline presented by NEA’s Race Forward consultants which included 60 images and events stretching back more than 400 years. The timeline focused on the construction of race and racism in the U.S. and important race-related events in NEA’s own history. Working Group members contributed to the timeline by identifying actions they were connected to that either helped disrupt, or contribute to, racism. Participants reflected on the impact and implications of this history, and how to use it to move the work of NEA forward.

The second history session featured a presentation by Dr. Al-Tony Gilmore, the former manager and senior program officer of the Leadership, Training and Development Programs at NEA; and Historian and Archivist Emeritus of NEA. Dr. Gilmore presented an etymology of the terms “people of color” and “ethnic minorities,” background on NEA including our merger with the American Teachers Association, the establishment of NEA’s ethnic-minority caucuses, the adoption of Bylaw 3-1(g) addressing ethnic-minority representation in governance, and other organizational milestones. He suggested that the Working Group consider a three-pronged framework for language review by examining strategy, precision, and disaggregation, and how organizational culture and context will often require selecting one particular frame over the other.

Following are highlights from the Working Group’s discussions on relevant historical context:

- There have been moments in NEA history when we have missed opportunities to disrupt structural racism. For example, during the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954, NEA was largely silent and did not file an *amicus* brief nor issue a public statement explicitly supporting the landmark Supreme Court decision. Because of NEA’s disunity about race at the time, it took seven years after *Brown* for NEA to pass a resolution at the 1961 RA which explicitly supported the decision.
- We are up against a lot. Conscious, intentional practices and policies by many institutions—including many unions—constructed race and racism for nearly 400 years in the United States. Racism is deeply entrenched.
- Principled, courageous leadership and unity were required for NEA and other organizations to periodically disrupt structural racism and white supremacy culture.
- When principled, courageous leadership and unity were largely absent, NEA missed some critical opportunities to advance racial justice.
- When NEA showed courageous leadership (e.g., adoption in 2015 of NBI-B on Institutional Racism; adoption in 2018 of Resolution I-50 on White Supremacy Culture) it positioned NEA to lead on racial justice.

Member Research

The Working Group convened again in November 2019 and was presented with the results of NEA’s Center for Communications research project which included a member survey and in-depth member interviews. Approximately 3,000 racially and ethnically diverse NEA members participated in the survey, and 24 racially and ethnically diverse members participated in the in-depth interviews.

Following are some key highlights from the surveys and interviews:

- Members respond very positively to the project statement (see page 8), both in the survey and the in-depth-interviews. Members say the statement is thoughtful and makes them feel heard and represented.

- Members are concerned with the notion of “choosing labels,” suggesting in the open-ended questions that individuals should have the chance to name and label themselves. In the in-depth interviews, members understand the need to identify groups of people but prefer to name themselves in personal conversations.
- Members understand the necessity of having a unifying term such as “ethnic minorities” or “people of color”, although there is moderate concern expressed about grouping all individuals together under one term. Among the key findings, the term “people of color” is preferred over “ethnic minorities.” “People of color” is most popular with members, both in the survey and the in-depth interviews, while “ethnic minorities” is less popular and generates more negative connotations.

Closing Phase: Reaching Consensus

With the final in-person meeting in November 2019, the Working Group had by this time developed considerable background, research, and knowledge required to make informed assessments about our language and usage. In applying the later steps of the ALERT assessment, the Group pivoted to the most critical aspects of this entire endeavor—what language to maintain, change, or introduce that best advances equity and inclusion, and how any such language revisions would alter NEA’s messaging and overall narrative. The Working Group’s meeting concluded with a series of facilitated discussions using race-alike teams and full-group discussion resulting in the development of more than two-dozen draft recommendations.

The Working Group reported to and further revised its tentative recommendations in collaboration with the full Stakeholder Group via conference calls in December 2019 and January 2020. Vice President Becky Pringle reported the group’s recommendations to the NEA Board in February 2020 with the intent of moving the items for the body’s consideration at the Board’s May 2020 meeting.

Overview of Recommendations to Governance

In this section we set forth the Stakeholder Group’s recommendations and—in order to establish the context for assessing these recommendations—indicate some of the considerations that informed the Group’s deliberations. For purposes of emphasis, the Group’s specific recommendations to the Board of Directors appear in bold.

For the most part, the Group’s recommendations are explained in narrative form without attempting to develop the precise language that would be necessary for purposes of implementation. Recommendations regarding amendments to our governing documents (i.e., Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules) and our policy documents (i.e., Policy Statements, Resolutions, and Legislative Program) require transmittal to and action by the Representative Assembly. Certain other recommendations for Board approval—which span from position statements to explicit actions requiring implementation—do not require RA action and are

permissible through the actions of a lesser governance body or by administrative directive.

General Findings and Recommendations

With regard to general findings the Group recommends the following:

- 1. NEA acknowledges there are no perfect or universal terms that work for all situations**, especially collective terms that strive to encompass multiple and unique groups. We need to be mindful of the limitations of each term we use so that we don't contribute to exclusion or harm.
- 2. NEA acknowledges that, as imperfect as they may be, there is a need for collective and unifying terms.** There is a need for specific terms that distinguish and encompass those directly impacted by white supremacy. This can help foster communication, understanding, unity, and the growth of our power across race, ethnicity, and tribal affiliation.
- 3. NEA shall be mindful of the audience, context, and location, and embrace the flexibility to adapt our internal and external language accordingly.** For example, there are many generational and regional differences that must be taken into account. We are striving for unity over uniformity.
- 4. NEA shall strive for clarity and specificity with the terms used.** When referring to a particular group, it is best to specifically name the group, nationality, or tribe rather than use a collective term. Loss of specificity can have an erasing or diversionary effect. For example, it is essential to use "Black lives matter" instead of "all lives matter" to specifically highlight the ways Black people are mistreated by law enforcement.
- 5. NEA shall embrace change and flexibility, rather than perfection or permanence, to ensure that our language is inclusive, respectful, and relevant.** Since terminology and meanings change with the times, we must continually review and revise our language.
- 6. NEA shall ensure that selected terms align with NEA's mission, vision, goals, and values.** Justice, inclusion, and unity are our guiding principles for choosing appropriate language.

Recommendations on Specific-Group Identity Terms

Based on extensive deliberations by race-alike teams within the Working Group and additional review of member survey data, the Group recommends the following for specific-group identity terms:

- 7. NEA strongly believes in the right of individuals and communities to self-identify.** Individual NEA members and racial/ethnic caucuses always have the right to self-identify. Rather than impose or mandate the usage of certain terminology, the aim is to foster

greater understanding, communication, and connections across different identities and communities.

8. NEA acknowledges that perfect specific-group terms, like perfect cross-group terms, do not exist. Even *within* specific racial groups, we must be mindful of the complexities, challenges, and limitations of finding appropriate, inclusive, and unifying language.

9. NEA shall use the specific-group term “Asian and Pacific Islander.” It is also helpful to say, “Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander,” rather than “Native Hawaiian and *other* Pacific Islanders.” (No one wants to be “othered.”) “Asian” can also include “Middle Eastern and North African (MENA),” depending on how people choose to identify.

10. NEA shall use the specific-group terms “Native People,” “Native,” or “Native American/Alaska Native.” The term “American Indian” is becoming outdated. Alaska Natives are distinct from Native Americans, but both are Native People. And Native Hawaiians can also be considered Native People. Since Native Americans have the distinct status as indigenous to this continent and members of sovereign nations, it is appropriate to use tribal, rather than ethnic or simply racial, identities.

11. NEA shall use the following specific-group terms and order for “Latin(o/a/x), Hispanic, and Chican(o/a/x).” Many Latin(o/a/x)s, Hispanics, and Chican(o/a/x)s may also identify as indigenous.

12. NEA shall use the specific-group terms “Black” or “African American.” There are generational preferences (with more older members preferring “African American” and more younger members preferring “Black”) to consider when communicating with different audiences. We must also recognize that people of African descent from other countries of origin (such as Caribbean countries like Cuba, Panama, and Jamaica, and African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Somalia) may not identify with, or feel included in, the term “African American.”

13. NEA shall use the specific-group term “Multiracial” to describe people with two or more racial identities. Our language must honor members’ full identities and recognize the growing population of people who are multiracial. People should be able to claim, and not have to choose between, their different racial heritages and have the option to check multiple races or all races that apply, including a “Multiracial” option, without having to check “Other.”

14. NEA shall use the specific-group term “White.” “Caucasian” is not recommended and is seen as archaic and pseudo-scientific, falsely rooting race in geography and obscuring the political and economic realities of racism. “European American” is also not recommended, as it is often used to treat race as merely another form of ethnicity or nationality, masking the racial realities and privileges of whiteness.

Recommendations on Specific-Group and Unifying Cross-Group Identity Terms

Based on extensive deliberations by the Working Group and additional review of member survey data, the Group recommends the following actions in relation to specific-group terms, unifying cross-group identity terms, and the dynamics between these terms and their usage:

15. NEA shall use different racial/ethnic-related terms for internal and external uses. Some racial/ethnic-related terms are more appropriate for internal use (e.g., communications with NEA’s own members, policies and governance documents, officer remarks at NEA convenings, and RA representation), while others are more suitable for external use (e.g., news statements, communications with external partners and others in the racial and social justice movements, videos, and social media).

16. NEA shall use the following seven groups together within internal governing documents: “Native People, Asian, Black, Latin(o/a/x), Middle Eastern and North African, Multiracial, and Pacific Islander.” The intention of this usage is to replace the term “ethnic minority” and its variations (e.g., ethnic minorities, ethnic-minority members) in the Association’s governing and policy documents. Proposed amendments to NEA’s Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules require preliminary action by the Committee on Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules in assessing impact of the amendments if they are adopted, with the affirmative vote of delegates to the Representative Assembly. Amendments to NEA’s Policy Statements, Resolutions, and Legislative Program require preliminary action, respectively, by the Executive Committee and Board, Standing Committee on Resolutions, and Standing Committee on Legislation, with final adoption by the Representative Assembly.

17. NEA shall use the collective term “Native People and People of Color” for external and public communications. This term also refers to the same seven groups: Native People and (in alphabetical order) Asian, Black, Latin(o/a/x), Middle Eastern and North African, Multiracial, and Pacific Islander.

18. NEA acknowledges that the new internal and external terms are intended to replace “ethnic minorities” and refer to the same members that the Association currently considers to be “ethnic minorities.” As such, the new terms will carry the exact same meaning and status as “ethnic minorities,” with the exact same ethnic and racial representational goals, provisions, and protections. The term “ethnic minority,” has had historic and political value within NEA, but with changing times and demographics, it is now considered to be dated and derogatory by many members, young people, and movement allies.

19. NEA shall name Native People first, distinctly, and together with “People of Color” or when all seven groups are named. This recognizes and honors Native People as the first people of this land. This also recognizes that Native People have a sovereign

national and tribal status, as well as a racialized identity, which are both important and related, but also distinct.²

20. NEA recognizes the general acceptance, popularity, and usefulness of the term “People of Color” as a way of connecting, unifying, and building power across diverse communities. NEA acknowledges that the language and lens “of color” may oversimplify the complexities of race, while stigmatizing some communities with harmful labels associated with colors. The term “People of Color” has value and popularity in the broader racial and social justice movements. Because NEA is committed to, and part of, building a broad-based racial and social justice movement—which necessarily involves working with many kinds of members, external partners, and stakeholders.

21. NEA shall name and enumerate all of the specific groups in addition to using the unifying term. When using the unifying term “Native People and People of Color”—it is helpful in the same communication, to also name all of the specific groups to which the term refers so that members of each group clearly know they are being included and represented.

Related Recommendations

The Group recommends the following related actions:

22. NEA shall take all necessary steps to improve the Association’s racial/ethnic membership data collection. Currently, the race and ethnicity of approximately one-third of NEA’s membership is unknown. More complete racial/ethnic data can help NEA understand, include, serve, and unite its full membership. The challenges of aligning NEA data collection with state affiliate autonomy and U.S. Census data need to be explored and addressed. Specific action steps to collect clear, consistent, coordinated, and complete racial/ethnic data need to be identified and taken.

23. NEA shall develop and implement educational efforts to engage White members who resist identifying racially (many of whom currently choose to identify as “other” rather than “White”).

24. NEA shall give more specific attention to language and data collection related to members who are Multiracial and members who are Middle East and North

² Scholar and editor Elizabeth Cook-Lynn of the Crow Creek Indian Tribe writes: “Native populations in America are not “ethnic” populations; they are not “minority” populations, neither immigrant nor tourist, nor “people of color.” They are the indigenous peoples of this continent. They are landlords, with very special political and cultural status in the realm of American identity and citizenship. Since 1924, they have possessed dual citizenship, tribal and U.S., and are the only population that has not been required to deny their previous national citizenship in order to possess U.S. citizenship. They are known and documented as citizens by their tribal nations.”

Hayn, Kaplan & Clemmons. (2017). *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today: Insights, Considerations, and Perspectives for the Classroom Teacher* (2nd ed., p. 242). Rowman and Littlefield.

African (MENA). Further engagement with these communities is needed to identify appropriate language and other actions to provide clear recognition and inclusion.

25. NEA shall educate its members about the meanings and usages of different racial and ethnic terms. This includes learning about and using new or different terms that are appropriate and useful, as well as understanding and discontinuing the use of terms that fall out of favor or may cause harm.

26. NEA shall take steps to deliberately and strategically build unity around unifying terms, interests, and aspirations. The terms themselves will not build unity. We must re-commit to do the deep organizing around racial justice, across racial identities, in order to succeed.

27. NEA shall ensure that the adoption and implementation of any new racial and ethnic terminology guarantees the continuation of all governing and budgetary provisions intended to expand fair racial/ethnic representation in NEA (e.g., Bylaw 3-1.g and Bylaw 12-1.h). Using inclusive and equitable language helps us align our words and actions. The clarity and cohesion this brings is critical to advancing racial justice and our mission to “to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.”

Appendices

A. Stakeholder and Working Group Members

** Denotes service on Working Group*

Nick Archuleta, President, North Dakota Education Association*

Eric Brown, Illinois Education Association; Executive Committee*

Charmaine Banther, California Teachers Association; Chair, Asian and Pacific Islanders Caucus*

Frank Burger, Michigan Education Association; Co-Chair, LGBTQ+ Caucus*

Noel Candelaria, President, Texas State Teachers Association

Miles Carey, Virginia Education Association; Vice Chair, Resolutions Editing Committee*

Angela derRamos, California Teachers Association*

Theresa Dudley, Michigan Education Association; Resolutions Editing Committee

Jaim Foster, Virginia Education Association; SOGI Committee

James Frazier, New Jersey Education Association; NEA Board*

Marisol Garcia, Vice President, Arizona Education Association*

Tracy Hartman-Bradley, Nebraska State Educ. Assoc.; Chair, American Indian/Alaska Native Caucus*

Rachel Immerman, Kentucky Education Association; Aspiring Educators Chairperson

Stephanie Johnson, The South Carolina Education Association; Women's Issues Committee

Cameo Kendrick, Kentucky Education Association; NEA Board*

Christine Kolczak, Montana Federation of Public Employees; SOGI Committee

Al Llorens, Vice President, Illinois Education Association

Gladys Marquez, Illinois Education Association; Chair, Hispanic Caucus; NEA Board*

Ron "Duff" Martin, President, Wisconsin Education Association Council*

Shannon McCann, Washington Education Association; NEA Board

Jo McKim, Kentucky Education Association; NEA Board

Robin McNair, Maryland State Education Association*

Cecily Myart-Cruz, California Teachers Association; Chair, Black Caucus*

Ellen Olsen, Education Minnesota; NEA Board

Becky Pringle, *Group Chairperson*, Vice President*

Alfonso Salais, Michigan Education Association; NEA Board*

Christine Sampson-Clark, New Jersey Education Association; Executive Committee*

George Sheridan, California Teachers Association; Executive Committee*

Charles Smith, Missouri-NEA

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B. A Language Equity Review Tool (ALERT)

Introduction: A Language Equity Review Tool (ALERT) is used for making assessments, recommendations, and decisions on the most appropriate terminology or language to use, especially for matters related to racial justice, social justice, equity, and inclusion. It provides a guide and protocol for race- and equity-conscious decision-making that is thoughtful, transparent, participatory, and systematic.

The task of reviewing and recommending appropriate language is not simply an exercise in wordsmithing. Words carry significant meaning and power. They can create harmful or helpful labels, messages, and stories. They can define realities and identities, which can profoundly impact people's lives. The stakes are real, and the stakeholders are many. Choosing what language to use or rolling out new changes connects to creating organizational culture, shifting dominant narratives, and strategically managing for equitable change.

Why do we need this tool?

- To align our words and actions with our values, priorities, and aspirations.
- To consciously, actively, and continually counteract implicit bias.
- To reduce, minimize and prevent harm, exclusion and inequities.
- To ensure that stakeholders, especially those most marginalized, are actively and authentically engaged in needed change efforts.
- To affirmatively change language and culture to advance racial justice, social justice, equity, and inclusion.

Who uses this tool? This tool is best used by a diverse team of people from different parts of the organization, which can also include external stakeholders and partners. For each specific use of the tool, the team shall identify and engage the most relevant stakeholders, especially those most directly affected by the existing or proposed language and those most marginalized. When using equity tools, *who* is doing the assessment is as important as *what* you are assessing. An inclusive process will yield more inclusive results.

How do you use the tool? The tool involves a series of steps that can be followed sequentially. Each step provides questions for consideration by relevant stakeholders. Be sure to allow ample time to thoughtfully and inclusively address each step. It is not meant to be used and completed in one sitting. It often requires time to gather information and consult with various stakeholders over a series of meetings or engagements.

Principles for Equitable Language Review

- ***Language is an expression of our core values:*** The words we use and messages we communicate reflect and project what we value most. Our words and messages can highlight our core values such as equity, inclusion, solidarity/unity, and dignity.
- ***Acknowledge that words have power—and those who choose the words have power:*** Expect this process to be contentious. Be mindful of how you use your own power in this process. And stay focused on the goal of arriving at language that helps affirm people’s identities, validate their realities, and balance and share power among many diverse and differently-situated stakeholders.
- ***Honor self-definition over imposed labels:*** People, and groups of people, need to be able to define themselves with their own terms (e.g., preferred gender pronouns and racial identities). Self-chosen identities need to be honored as much as possible, especially for marginalized people, whose identities and realities are too often defined by established powers and dominant culture.
- ***Embrace change over permanence:*** Culture and language are ever-changing. Rather than seek language and terminology that will last forever, strive to find terms that work best now, even if things are in flux and further changes may be needed on the horizon.
- ***Embrace pragmatism over perfection:*** Language is not perfect—there will be pros and cons to using certain terms. We can still do our best to figure out what works best. The sweet spot is to find terms that are principled and pragmatic, even though they may not be perfect.
- ***Embrace differences and divisions:*** Don’t expect to reach unanimity on selected language. Even people who are similarly situated and share the same identity may not agree. We can acknowledge and accommodate differences as best we can, but do not expect to fully eliminate them. At times, we will need to agree to disagree, or even tolerate something we are not fully behind.
- ***Use language to affirmatively drive equitable culture change:*** Culture change can drive language change. Or, changes in language can drive culture change (like the introduction of a new term, frame, or hashtag). A reactive or “late adopter” approach only changes once it is clearly established that certain terms have become outdated or offensive. A proactive approach or “early-adopter” approach leads with, and models, new terms and language that advance equity and inclusion in this moment.
- ***Embrace flexibility and nimbleness:*** An equitable and inclusive language review process should be a strategic, nimble, and ongoing organizational function. It requires sufficient attention, time and resources, so we can strategically change with the times. Effective language, messages, and narratives will support growth, power, and change.

Steps for Assessing Language Equity

Step	Questions to Consider	Findings/Notes
Step 1: Identify Language to be Reviewed and Reasons	What language, terms, or messages need to be reviewed? What are the reasons for this review? Is there a current problem or request for change? What is the relevant history and changing contemporary context of the language under review?	
Step 2: Identify and Engage Stakeholders	Who is most directly affected by the language under review? Who needs to be involved or consulted, especially those who are under-represented or marginalized (e.g. different racial communities, Native Americans, LGBTQ people, students of color, new members/educators, etc.) How can each be authentically represented and meaningfully engaged in this process?	
Step 3: Clarify Purpose and Goals	What are the specific goals of this language review? (What changes or results are you seeking? What bias, inequities, or exclusion do you seek to address? How will this review/revision advance racial and social justice?)	
Step 4: Collect Data and Conduct Analysis	For current or proposed language, what are the positive or negative impacts? Who benefits and who is most burdened? How are different racial/ethnic groups affected differently? If there are problems or negative impacts, what are the root causes, contributing factors or dominant narratives involved? In addition to race, what other intersectional factors need attention? How have local or state affiliates addressed this?	

Step	Questions to Consider	Findings/Notes
Step 5: Brainstorm Options	What language options will best advance equity and inclusion? How will those most disadvantaged benefit? How will this interrupt white supremacy practices? How will proposed changes align with, our mission, vision and values and increase representative democracy? How does it honor our history, while addressing current and future conditions?	
Step 6: Assess Impacts	What are the pros and cons of each option? What are the impacts of each option on different racial or other communities? What data can help us project impacts? Who do we need to consult with about the different proposed options?	
Step 7: Decide Best Option	Which option best advances equity and inclusion at this time?	
Step 8: Craft New Language	What terms need to be maintained, changed, or introduced? What messages do we want to convey? What new or changed narratives and images do we want to project?	
Step 9: Develop Implementation Plan	What course of action or change is needed (e.g. policies, resolutions, plans, style guide, etc.)? How can we foster learning and publicize changes? What mechanisms, staffing, and funding are needed to ensure success? What is the implementation plan and timetable? Who can help us move this forward?	
Step 10: Develop Evaluation Plan	What are the benchmarks and success indicators? How will we document and evaluate results? How will we ensure ample communication, learning, participation, and accountability?	