

TALKING THE WALK

*Why
Language
Matters*

October 28, 2020

10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Talking The Walk

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LISC DEIJ Coordinating Committee
Subcommittee on Language

LISC



“

“Give your daughters difficult names. Give your daughters names that command the full use of tongue. My name makes you want to tell me the truth. My name doesn't allow me to trust anyone that cannot pronounce it right.”

– Warsan Shire

Words Matter.

Language is a powerful strategic tool.

- It can alter people's perceptions of others and themselves.
- It can influence public opinion with respect to certain policies and agendas.
- It can create barriers or build bridges.
- It is complicated and evolving.



Intentionality in our Language Choices is Critical...

...to fully embodying our core values of partnership, trust, and collective impact.

Language not only reflects our priorities and principles as an organization, but also actively shapes them.

LISC's DEIJ Subcommittee on Language was tasked with developing a set of principles and best practices to guide our thinking on this topic from a DEIJ lens.

Guiding Principles

About the Guiding Principles

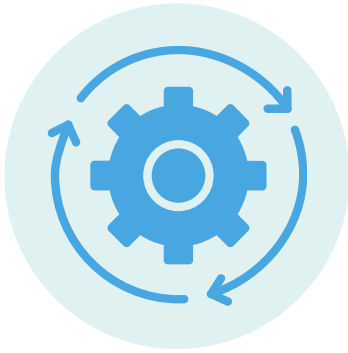
Our intention is not to be prescriptive.

The principles are intended to be a starting point to promote a common understanding of why we believe certain framings or language choices are preferable to others.

We aspire to be truth-tellers who center the humanity of the individuals we work with.

Our goal is to communicate with precision, clarity, and power across different audiences.

Guiding Principles



Root problems in systems:

Center challenges around issues and systems rather than individuals and communities. Whenever possible, call out power dynamics and historical and structural forces that have done harm and created inequities.

e.g., community that has been abandoned and disinvested vs. impoverished community



Center people, not their

circumstances: When discussing individuals or groups – particularly those whose identities have been marginalized or stigmatized – center the person rather than their circumstance.

e.g., person experiencing homelessness vs. homeless person

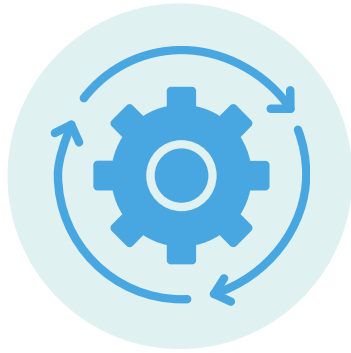


Focus on assets, not deficits:

Focus on opportunities, strengths, and what can collectively be achieved rather than problems and needs. Instead of characterizing individuals or communities by their struggles or the likelihood of their failure, focus on our collective aspirations for their success.

e.g., increase graduation rates vs. reduce dropout rates

Guiding Principles cont'd.



Lead with empathy, not assumptions: Emphasize collective responsibility for achieving a more equitable and just society. Instead of language that implies that we are working on behalf of/for those who need our support, center the focus on our role as an equal partner.

e.g., we amplify the voices in our partner communities vs. we give voice to the voiceless



Communicate with clarity and specificity: Prioritize clarity, specificity and precision so that messages resonate with broad-based audiences, not only specialists.

e.g., Strive for messaging that can both mobilize people to action and provide political education.



Just Ask: Whenever possible, ask people about their language preferences.

e.g., Some people on the autism spectrum prefer the language of “a person with autism,” while others prefer “an autistic person.”

Process

About our Process

LISC's Subcommittee on Language developed Guiding Principles in the context of LISC's core values.

Developed Lexicon

Included commonly used terms in community and economic development and proposed alternatives

Conducted Research...


...on framing, messaging, language, and communications

Enlisted Input

- Solicited extensive feedback across LISC, through focus groups, and via one-on-one conversations with Program Heads.
- Shared lexicon with several external partners, including funders

Lexicon Examples

People & Places

Instead of...	Use....	Why
Low-income person	Person living on low income	Alternatives to ‘lowing-income person’ proposed here focus on using person-centered centered language that separates a person's identity from their circumstances.
	Person with income below living wage / area area median wage	‘Low income’ is often used as a catch-all term to encompass a variety of financial situations.
	Individuals who are housing cost-burdened; or or individuals who cannot afford safe and quality	Where possible, specificity about the relevant relevant circumstances is preferable (for example, use ‘person with income below living living wage’ in the context of income building building work; ‘person who is housing cost-burdened’ when discussing affordable housing, etc.)
	Individuals striving to grow their assets or person striving to increase their wages	Where possible, be mindful of passive vs. active constructions; active statements like ‘person striving to increase their wages’ is empowering because it emphasizes the individual’s agency.

Inequities & Inequality

Instead of...	Use....	Why
Disparity	Inequity	<p>Whereas disparity is a neutral term that implies a difference of some kind, inequity implies unfairness and injustice. Therefore, inequity is the preferable term to connote a difference between groups that is caused by systemic bias or an unfair system.</p>
Disproportionately (e.g., COVID is disproportionately infecting African	Systematically (e.g., COVID is systematically infecting African Americans and Latinos.)	<p>The former is a passive and neutral term that that may lead people to believe that the group group experiencing the greater harm is culpable for the differential. When possible, using more active terms can avoid connotations of responsibility on the part of the group that is experiencing the differential.</p>

Race & Ethnicity

Instead of...	Use....	Why
Minority	Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) or or identify the specific groups being discussed	BIPOC is appropriate as a blanket term for people of color, but if you are referring to a group or population, be specific about who you are discussing (e.g., Black, Indigenous, or Latinx)
Racially charged, racially divisive, or or racially tinged	Racist	Use the former when there are very obvious questions of fact and the indications are that individuals have not been found guilty of specific statements or acts. Use the latter when the actual statements and acts are clear, unmistakable and verified.
Slave	Enslaved person	The latter separates a person's identity from from his/her circumstance; it also puts the onus on the slaveholder.

(Dis)Ability

Instead of...	Use....	Why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled • Special needs • Suffering from... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with disabilities or disabled person • Person who has... • Person who is... • Person with... • Accessible (regarding parking) 	<p>The latter recommendations separate a person's identity from his/her circumstance and puts the person first. In general, use person-first language when describing individuals with disabilities.</p>
<p>Able-bodied</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People without disabilities • Non-disabled 	<p>Some disability rights activists oppose the term 'able-bodied' because it implies that all all people with disabilities lack the ability to to use their bodies well. Keep in mind that many chronic conditions and disabilities are invisible, so it is important not to assume whether or not someone is living with a disability.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchair-bound • Confined to a wheelchair 	<p>Uses a wheelchair</p>	<p>Wheelchairs enable mobility, so terms such as as 'bound' and 'confined' do not fairly reflect reflect the value these devices provide to individuals who use them. Furthermore, using using such terms as nouns to describe people people conflates their circumstances with their</p>

Contact

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Reframing Aging

A Social Change Endeavor
designed to improve the
public's understanding of aging

 @ReframingAging

*Original research conducted by the
FrameWorks Institute and sponsored by the
Leaders of Aging Organizations*



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John L. Santikos Charitable Foundation



Research Identified the Challenge

Public Perceptions about older people that are incomplete and unrealistic: older people are either living a life of leisure or are frail, decrepit, and dependent.

Ageism is not considered a “problem.” For ex., the Age Discrimination in Employment Act that prohibits workplace discrimination should take care of this.

Cultural Models are cognitive short cuts that we rely on to interpret and understand all sorts of experiences, thoughts and feelings. They are taken-for-granted and largely automatic assumptions.

Word Choice Matters

Competence Level



Term by Age

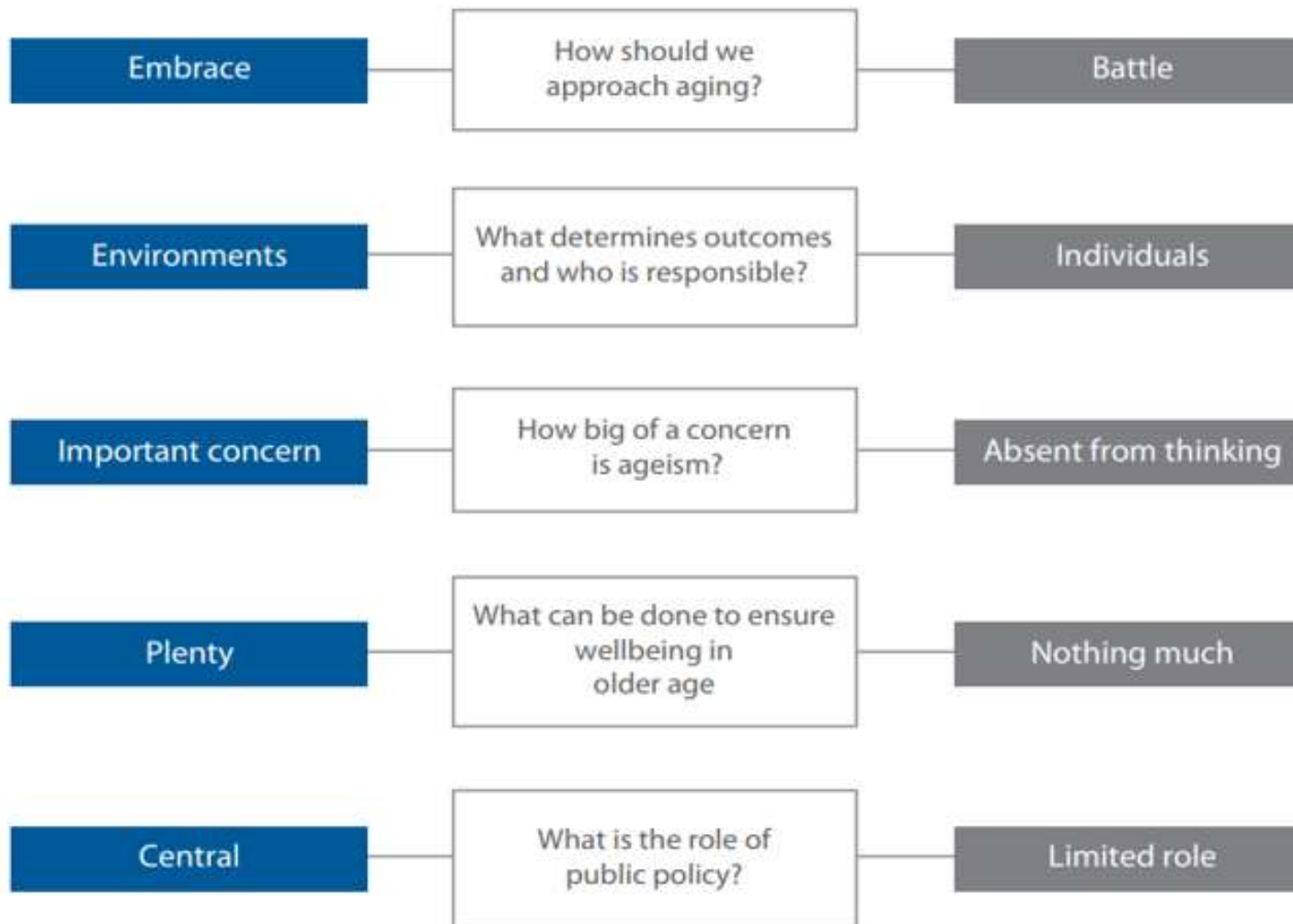




Experts

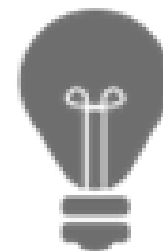


Public



Mapping the Gaps

Collective contributions to change



Communications

Discourse

Thinking

Policy



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Changing American culture is challenging and changing attitudes and behaviors around the universal experience of aging especially so.

- A generational change
- Ongoing impact
- Positive perceptions of aging: Priceless

LSC



Talking the Walk: A Person-Centered Approach

SCOTT ACKERSON, LMSW
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Person-Centered Language and Approach

- “Homeless people”, “the homeless”, “the homeless population”
- Homelessness is a state, not a trait
- Marginalizing people becomes easier when they don’t have a face or a name, “those people”
- Helps to obfuscate our collective and systemic responsibility for social conditions—“It’s a choice”, “they lack motivation” vs. factors of historical oppression, institutionalized racism, poverty, unemployment, etc.
- Instead, “**People** experiencing homelessness”

Person-Centered Approach

- Affords people individuality, independence, privacy, partnership, choice, dignity, respect and rights
- Coercion and compliance are replaced with self-determination
- Person-centered approach uses a non-authoritative process that allows people to take more of a lead in discussions and actions so that, in the process, they will discover their own solutions.
- ‘Customer service’ in human service work often lacking
- Person-centered approach important in both language *and* practice

You and the person may see things differently...



What are the things most important to you in
your life?

Person-Centered Approach in Practice: The Psychiatrist and the 'Dog'



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Q&A

Please submit questions
through the chat.

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**Thank You
for Joining Us**

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