CULTURALLY COMPETENT GENDER-RELATED COMMUNICATIONS (C3) TRAINING RESOURCE ACCOMPANYING SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Background and Purpose

There is increasing conversation at the NIH and more broadly in our society around practicing cultural awareness and competence in communications related to sex, gender, gender identity, and related topics. Culturally competent gender-related communication is a central way through which individuals can help to cultivate civil and affirming personal and professional environments where gender diversity is valued and respected. To further encourage such an environment at the NIH and beyond, the C3 resource was developed to summarize key information and recommendations for demonstrating cultural competence and sensitivity toward sex, gender, and gender identity.

About

This summary briefly outlines the content of the resource, including practical descriptions of sex, gender, gender identity, and related linguistic issues, as well as practical examples and recommended practices for engaging in gender-sensitive and -competent communication in interactions with and discussions about professional colleagues, research investigators, administrative staff, coworkers, and people in general. Audiences of interest at NIH include program officers (POs), scientific review officers (SROs), grants management specialists (GMSs), reviewers, study section members, human resources staff, reviewers, research investigators, trainees, the broader community. The resource may also serve useful for other those at other Federal agencies, through the scientific enterprise, and in the general public.

Resource Content

- Background and description of key issues
    - Assumptions about an individual's gender, gender identity, and pronouns without information from the individual themself or reliable proxies (e.g., trusted associates)
        - Practical example: Using incorrect pronouns in summary statements or conversation
        - Incorrect assumptions about gender and personal descriptors can be offensive, harmful, and may be construed as a sign of broader intolerance
        - Conversely, inclusive gender language promotes health and well-being
    - Inconsistent use of professional credentials
        - Practical example: Calling a man with a Ph.D. "Dr. X," and calling a woman with a Ph.D. "Ms. X" or by their first name
        - Inconsistently applying titles is a form of gender bias, diminishes people and their capability, and can signal inequity in the types of people that an organization values in their workplace
        - Applying credentials equally conveys respect and fosters inclusion
    - NIH is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA)
        - This is a component of DEIA that has not yet been systematically addressed at the NIH
        - This resource represents a step in that direction and towards a more welcoming and affirming climate at the agency and beyond

- Discussion of sex *versus* gender
  - Differences between sex and gender and related language
    - Sex is a biological descriptor
      - Sex can be described by chromosomal, gonadal, hormonal, and anatomical features among others
    - Gender is a social descriptor
      - Key facets include identity, expression, roles, and norms
    - Both sex and gender exist on a spectrum
  - Sex and gender identity terminology and relevant considerations
    - Sex: assigned male at birth, assigned female at birth
    - Gender: cisgender, transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, gender expansive
    - Populations who may not identify within typical sex or gender identity binaries and therefore have unique terminology-related considerations
      - Two-Spirit, intersex
    - Research- *versus* community-based terminology
      - Some terms like difference in sex development (DSD), Latinx, and sexual and gender minority are more frequently used in medical and scientific communications
      - Some terms like intersex, Latina/o/e, and LGBTQI+ are more frequently used by members of these communities to identify themselves
- Importance of language
  - Names and pronouns are ways we portray and share our identities—each person's relationship to their name and pronouns is unique and personal
  - The language that we use is important
    - It is how we develop trust, build relationships, demonstrate respect, create a civil environment, and affirm people's identities
    - Using inappropriate or non-affirming language is disrespectful and can create feelings of exclusion and alienation
  - Practical example: A colleague, Richard, tells you that he prefers to be called by his middle name, Drew. It would be considered disrespectful, non-affirming, or offensive to continue to refer to him by Richard or to call him by a different name like "Rick" even though it is a well-known nickname for Richard.
  - Practical example: Persistent usage of a trans person's dead name is an act of harassment.
- **Recommendations**
  - Cardinal rule: The most effective way to determine the appropriate pronouns and name to use for any individual is to ask the individual directly or use information provided by the individual – do not make assumptions
    - This is important to consider for staff who interact with job applicants as part of the hiring process
    - For grants management specialists and program officials, this will typically be relevant in emails and phone conversations with research investigators or signing officials

- For scientific review officers and reviewers, this will typically be relevant during review discussions and in critiques provided in the Summary Statement
- More broadly, and also beyond NIH, it's important for anybody who has coworkers and colleagues in their office with whom they interact on a regular basis
  - o Use correct pronouns when they are known
    - If pronouns are clarified in an investigator's application packet or confirmed through a reliable associate of the individual in question (potentially, for example, in letters of support), use of those pronouns is acceptable
  - o When there is either uncertainty or no prior knowledge of an individual's gender or correct pronouns, address the individual directly or use gender-neutral language
    - Practical example: Instead of he or she, use the research investigator's name, "The PI," "The candidate," "The applicant," or they/them pronouns
    - When using they/them pronouns:
      - Remember that we already use they/them pronouns in everyday speech when we don't know the gender of a person or just as linguistic placeholders
      - Be mindful of how using "they" can cause confusion because it can refer to one person who uses those pronouns or a group, which is the more typical usage in the English language
  - o Normalize identification of personal pronouns when comfortable doing so
    - Add pronouns to email signatures and video chat platform handles
    - Include pronouns when introducing oneself
      - Practical example: "Hello, my name is X and my pronouns are he/him and they/them pronouns"
    - Keep in mind that some people may not be comfortable identifying their pronouns – pronoun disclosure is a personal decision
      - It may not be appropriate to ask people to identify pronouns in introductions to an unfamiliar group or new audience
      - Individuals may choose to state their own pronouns as a way to model behavior. Others can then follow this example if they feel comfortable. This provides the option of sharing pronouns and signals a culture of inclusion and openness without making it incumbent on everyone to do so.
    - Avoid the phrase "preferred pronouns" or "chosen pronouns" because it signals that there are "actual" or "correct" pronouns or that their usage is optional
      - Just refer to them as pronouns
  - o When appropriate, replace gendered terms with specific conditions or populations of focus
    - This can be done in notices of funding opportunities, workshop or event announcements, agency-authored reports, publications in scientific journals, and other communications with the scientific community
    - Practical example: clarifying specific funding opportunity research interests
      - Pregnancy-associated/related vs maternal morbidity and mortality

- Cancer of the <u>testes</u> or cancer research on <u>people with testes</u>
  o Utilize gender-neutral language and gender-inclusive replacements when appropriate

For example, instead of…	Use…
Husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend	Partner/significant other
Mankind	Humankind/humanity
Mom/dad	Parents/caregivers
Feminine hygiene products	Menstrual products
Pregnant women	Pregnant people/persons
"Dear Sir or Madam"	"Dear [Recipient]"
"Hi guys!"	"Hi everyone!"
Grantsmanship	Grantspersonship

- Keep in mind that some people prefer the use of husband, wife, mom, dad, etc. The term to use depends on the context and the individual or audience, and it's best to glean this information directly from the individual or audience whenever possible.
  o Encourage consistent application of academic credentials in communications, regardless of gender identity
    - If one person with a degree traditionally associated with the honorific of Dr. (e.g., PhD, MD, DO, PharmD, PsyD, etc.) is referred to as "Dr. X" in a team or group setting (including in-person or email conversations), all members similar credential should be referred to in the same manner
    - In groups including people who hold a degree that is not traditionally associated with usage of the title of "Doctor," individuals may choose to introduce themselves with their name and specific degree. This is one alternative way to address people with specialized training and signals a culture of respect, affirmation, and appreciation.
      - <u>Practical example</u>: my name is Hunter and I have a Master's in Pharmacology & Toxicology
    - Some individuals whose title is not associated with "Dr." may use the title of Mx., a gender-neutral replacement for Mr., Mrs., etc. for those who do not wish to indicate a gender in their title
  o Handling missteps
    - Misgendering happens – everyone makes mistakes, even people with years of experience and extensive training
    - Acknowledge mistakes each time, apologize, and then move on and continue to try to consistently use appropriate language
    - The most important aspect is to TRY—this demonstrates respect, affirmation, and civility
  o Bear in mind that the recommendations contained herein apply to language in multiple formats
    - Verbal communications like scientific presentations, meetings, interviews, conversations, etc.

- - - Written documents like position descriptions, job applications, surveys, questionnaires, grant-related documents, etc.
      - Other media like trainings, video recordings, social media posts, websites, etc.

  - Take advantage of available NIH resources if specific questions arise
    - NIH Sexual & Gender Minority Research Office (SGMRO)
      - The Importance of Gender Pronouns & Their Use in Workplace Communications
    - NIH Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)
      - EDI SGM terms and definitions (link)
    - NIH Style Guide (link)
    - NIAID HIV Language Guide (developed by NIAID'S Division of AIDS)
    - Identify or consider training a gender-related communications specialist or "ambassador" at NIH ICOs or other institutions
    - Email C3ResourceTeam@nih.gov

Additional Resources Not Produced or Endorsed by NIH

- - Additional resources not produced or endorsed by NIH
    - Mypronouns.org (link)
    - Language glossaries
      - PFLAG
      - Human Rights Campaign
      - The Trevor Project
      - Trans Student Educational Resources