

Inclusive Language Guide

About this guide

As Councillors, our words and actions carry weight. Whether it's in chambers, with community, or with Council staff, our language sets the tone and signals our values.

The words we use are powerful tools for inclusion and a mirror for our culture. Inclusive language isn't about 'political correctness' – it's about treating everyone in our diverse community with dignity and respect.

What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language describes words or phrases that are **respectful**, **accurate**, and **free from bias**. That means it:

- recognises and affirms people of all genders, identities, backgrounds, and abilities
- avoids stereotyping or reinforcing outdated norms
- is mindful of power, privilege and social context.



A note on intersectionality

It's important to remember **people experience inequality differently** depending on how aspects of their identity *intersect* at any given time – such as Aboriginality, gender, race, disability, or age. Inclusive language helps ensure that no one is made to feel invisible, disrespected, or unsafe.

Simple language swaps

While these **everyday expressions** may seem harmless, they carry gendered biases or assumptions. Here are some ways to promote greater respect and inclusion through words.

Instead of...	Try	Why?
"Chairman"	"Chair" or "Chairperson"	Gender-neutral and avoids default to masculine
"Hey guys" or "Ladies and gentlemen"	"Hi everyone" or "Hi all"	Avoids male-default language or gender binary
"Girls in admin" or "boys in the depot"	"The team" or "Council staff"	More professional and avoids gendering roles
"He/she" e.g. "ensure he/she has completed the task"	"They" e.g. "ensure they have completed the task"	Simpler and inclusive of gender-diverse people
"Females" or "males"	"Women", "men" or "people of all genders"	"Females" and "males" are biological terms better suited to scientific contexts. We want to centre identity, not anatomy.
"LGBT" or "LGB"	"LGBTIQA+"	More inclusive and most up-to-date term for diverse identities
"Mothers and fathers" or "mums and dads"	"Parents and carers" or "families"	Includes all family types
"Wife" or "husband"	"Partner" or "spouse"	Affirms all relationship types
"Boys and girls"	"Young people"	Gender-neutral and affirming
"Policeman", "fireman", "tradesman"	"Police officer", "firefighter", "tradesperson"	Avoids unnecessary gendering of roles
"Manpower" or "manning the event"	"Workforce" or "Staffing"	Gender-neutral; reflects everyone's contribution
"Mankind" or "manmade"	"Humankind", "society", or "artificial", "human-made"	These terms centre men as the default and erase other's contributions.
"That's how men are" or "boys will be boys"	"Let's not excuse poor behaviour"	Avoids normalising gendered disrespect
Phrases like "fairer sex" or "alpha males"	"Women and gender-diverse people" or "competitive people"	These phrases reinforce outdated and often sexist stereotypes

A vibrant City for all

As the level of government closest to the community, here are some ways to make our **everyday interactions** as Councillors more inclusive:

In public

Acknowledge diversity and affirm inclusion

- Celebrate and recognise the diversity of the community, e.g. “It’s great to see such a diverse turnout today, it’s what makes City of Melton great.”
- Do an Acknowledgement of Country that names local language groups and recognises the vital contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In the community

Consider pace and accessibility when you’re on the move

- Speak at an accessible pace, particularly for community members with English as an additional language or communication support needs.
- Choose language that’s warm and respectful, but avoids diminutives like “love,” “dear,” or “sweetheart”, which can feel patronising or unprofessional.

In writing and online

Avoid gendered assumptions and model respectful engagement

- Be aware of tone – written words can come across as more blunt or harsh than spoken ones, so read it back and check that it reflects warmth and respect.
- Avoid posting or sharing content that reinforces gender stereotypes, even if it seems humorous or harmless.
- Moderate public pages or your profile with care and don’t allow offensive comments to remain visible or unchallenged.

Internally

Show respect in action and avoid gendered labels

- Create space for diverse voices by modelling inclusive behaviour, and not interrupting or speaking over colleagues, especially women and gender-diverse people.
- Avoid jokes or comments based on gender, appearance, or stereotypes, even if they’re meant to be ‘light-hearted’ or ‘fun’.
- Support a culture of accountability by gently pointing out inappropriate language or behaviour, and seek support from HR if needed.

Common scenarios

It's unrealistic to expect we will never make mistakes. What's important is how we **respond**. These scenarios offer simple ways to put inclusive language into practice.

Scenario 1: You hear a colleague refer to depot staff as "the boys".

Try: "Hey, I know that's a warm and familiar phrase but it's a bit outdated and not necessarily accurate. How about 'the team' or 'staff' instead?"

Why: Using gender-neutral and professional terms shows respect for everyone's role, regardless of gender. It helps create a culture where no one is unintentionally excluded.

Scenario 3: Someone refers to being "woke" or "political correctness gone mad".

Try: "I get that this might feel new or uncomfortable, but making sure everyone feels respected is important. Language evolves, and as leaders, we have a responsibility to evolve with it."

Why: Pushing back respectfully shows that inclusive language isn't about being trendy or 'PC'. It's about fairness and respect. Councillors play a key role in normalising these conversations and helping others understand that inclusion is a key part of a strong community, not a threat to it.

Scenario 2: You overhear someone being misgendered by accident.

Try: "Hi, just a heads up — I think <Name> uses <they/them> pronouns. Easy mistake to make, but I thought I'd flag it so we can all get it right."

Why: Repeated misgendering is linked to increased rates of stress, anxiety, and depression. Gently correcting at the time helps create a safer, more respectful environment.



Promoting respectful relationships through engagement, excellence, and inclusion.