



COMMUNICATION

“Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy, and mutual valuing.” – Rollo May

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to assure that communications with and among members, partners, and the public are inclusive, asset-based, and foster equitable participation without regard to personal identity.

Identification of Best Practices

Central to building positive, trusting relationships where everyone experiences fairness, dignity, and respect; equitable and inclusive communication also demonstrates a commitment to empowering all to fully engage their genuine selves. The guiding principles that follow highlight evidenced-based practices that facilitate creation of environments that “[let] everyone participate, [make] everyone feel welcome, and [engage] everyone.”¹

- **Affirm commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)** – *Communicate organizational commitment to DEI principles.*
- **Reflect diverse membership** – *Communications should reflect the diversity within ASCE’s membership.*
- **Use equitable and inclusive communications** – *Verbal and nonverbal communications are respectful and accessible for all members regardless of identity.*
- **Practice respectful protocols** – *Treat all persons with respect and dignity in words, images, and actions.*

¹University of Washington, Accessibility and Universal Design of Online Meetings
<https://www.washington.edu/brand/editorial-elements/equity-lens>



Summary of Best Practices

Affirm Commitment to DEI

Communicate organizational commitment to DEI principles

- Include explicit statements regarding ASCE's mission for promoting DEI initiatives.
- Bring visibility to elements in ASCE policy and practices that exemplify DEI principles as integral to the practice of civil engineering. For example,
 - From ASCE's Code of Ethics:²
 - Preamble: "Treat all persons with respect, dignity, and fairness in a manner that fosters equitable participation without regard to personal identity."
 - Society: "Acknowledge the diverse historical, social, and cultural needs of the community, and incorporate these considerations in their work."
 - Profession: "Promote mentorship and knowledge-sharing equitably with current and future engineers."
 - From ASCE Policy Statement 417:³
 - "[Advance] a research agenda centered on equitable and inclusive engineering education, research, and practice."
 - "[Promote] accountability and the use of best practices for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in leadership, engagement, communications, and partnerships."
 - "ASCE recognizes the strategic and critical importance of equitable and inclusive engagement to develop and implement just and holistic solutions with the communities we serve throughout the world."

Reflect Diverse Membership

Communications should reflect the diversity within ASCE's membership

- Include people who are visually representative of diverse racial, ethnic, gender, disability, religious, and other identities in images to ensure the organization is demonstrating the vast diversity of membership.
 - Consider using stock photo websites that offer diverse identity images.⁴
 - Capture photography and/or video footage in academic, professional, and community settings that positively reflects diverse populations.

²American Society of Civil Engineers. 2020. Code of Ethics. <https://www.asce.org/career-growth/ethics/code-of-ethics>.

³American Society of Civil Engineers. 2021. Policy Statement 417: Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. <https://www.asce.org/advocacy/policy-statements/ps417---justice-equity-diversity-and-inclusion>.

⁴Nappy. 2019. Beautiful High-res Photos of Black and Brown People for Free. <https://www.nappy.co>. Christina Morillo and Stephanie Morillo. 2015. WOCinTechChat.com. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wocintechchat>.

- Avoid perpetuating stereotypes through the “use of words, images, or situations that may appear to reinforce racial, ethnic, or religious stereotypes.”⁵
- Ensure that the power dynamics in images are equitable and inclusive, not stereotypical (for example, a man standing over a woman to explain something).
 - Use a mixture of images that display people from minoritized and marginalized identities in leading, teaching, and helping roles rather than being the ones who are being led, taught, or helped.⁶
- Add alternative text (alt text) to all images and graphics to ensure they are readable by people who use screen readers, switch controls, or other assistive technologies.⁷
- Use freely available tools such as materialpalette.com, colorsafe, and others to ensure that images use colors, contrasts, and textures that are accessible for people who are colorblind or have low vision.⁸
- Be aware of communicating with members on religious holidays and avoid the use of religious statements during meetings and events.

Use Equitable and Inclusive Communications

Verbal and nonverbal communications are respectful and accessible for all members regardless of identity.

- Learn from communities of people how they want to be addressed and use reputable resources such as the American Psychological Association’s Guidelines for Bias-Free Language to keep up with changes as language and best practices evolve. For example, some people use person-first language when referring to disabilities (e.g., person with disability) while others use identity-first language (disabled person).⁹
- Use members’ pronouns (e.g., she, he, they), and encourage members to optionally share their pronouns during introductions, on nametags, and on membership applications.
- Be prepared to include multiple languages,¹⁰ braille,¹¹ and text-to-voice in written communications (for example, flyers, emails, and written programs).
 - Provide translation, including sign language(s) and braille, to optimize communicating with members who require it.
- Become aware of terms that are derogatory to people from various identities and avoid using that language in all communications.
 - Do not use broken English that makes fun of non-native English speakers such, as “no can do” or “long time no see.”¹²
 - Avoid derogatory slang or negative descriptions of a person’s disability. For example, refer to a person as being a “wheelchair user” as opposed to being “confined to a wheelchair.”¹³

⁵University of Washington, Accessibility and Universal Design of Online Meetings <https://www.washington.edu/brand/editorial-elements/equity-lens/> <https://uw-s3-cdn.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/98/2021/12/14171207/UMAC-Equitable-Language-Guide-v.6.pdf>

⁶Pearson, Yvette E. Climate Change: Promising Practices for Inclusivity in Academic and Professional Organizations. ASCE Committee on Advancing the Profession Winter Meeting, Austin, Texas. January 2018.

⁷Beene, S., Koelling, G., Thompson, D.S. 2020. Recommendations for creating inclusive communication during a pandemic. VRA Bulletin, 47(2), 15 pp.

⁸Ibid.

⁹American Psychological Association. <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>

¹⁰Yandex Translate <https://translate.yandex.com/>

¹¹Braille Translator.org, <https://www.brailletranslator.org>

¹²APA (2021).

¹³University of Washington, Equal Access: Universal Design of Registration <https://www.washington.edu/doi/equal-access-universal-design-registration>



- Avoid the use of visual stimulation (e.g., flashes of light) that may cause seizures for members with photosensitive epilepsy.
- Avoid sounds and/or images in videos that could trigger posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) responses from audience members.
- Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes, and use plural pronouns and gender-neutral words.¹⁴ For example, words that have typically ended in -man, such as spokesman or chairman, should be replaced with spokesperson or chairperson. Here are additional examples:
 - Say this: "A staff member in Antarctica earns less than [she, he, they] would in New York." Instead of this: "A staff member in Antarctica earns less than she would in New York."¹⁵
 - Say this: "A complainant who is not satisfied with the board's decision can ask for a rehearing." Instead of this: "If a complainant is not satisfied with the board's decision, [he, she, they] can ask for a rehearing."¹⁶
- Be aware of technology used to aid communication between multiple age groups (that is, some members may not prefer electronic mail or phone calls).

¹⁴<https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>

¹⁵<https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>

¹⁶<https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>

Practice Respectful Protocols

Treat all persons with respect and dignity in words and actions.

*This section relies primarily on checklists developed for college registration offices.¹⁷
Visit the cited source for details and for additional recommendations.

- Ask before attempting to assist a disabled person and provide assistance only if requested.
- Speak directly to the person who is using a translator or sign language interpreter as opposed to speaking to the person translating/interpreting.¹⁸
- Sit down so that you can speak with someone in a seated position (for example, wheelchair user), especially if speaking for an extended period.¹⁹
- Use alternative means such as spoken word or diagrams to provide information.
- Avoid interacting with a person's guide or service animal unless you have obtained permission to do so.
- Do not be afraid to use common terms and phrases like "see you later" or "let's go for a walk" around people with disabilities.
- Do not touch a person's mobility devices or assistive technology without their consent.
- Ask permission before extending any form of physical contact, like a handshake or hugs.
- Be aware that not everyone uses eye contact.
- Guidance for communicating with individuals who are blind or have low vision includes:
 - Be descriptive. Say, "The computer is about three feet to your left," rather than "The computer is over there."
 - Speak about all the projected content when presenting and describe the content of charts, graphs, and pictures.
 - When guiding people with visual impairments, offer them your arm rather than grabbing or pushing them.
- Offer directions or instructions both orally and in writing for persons with learning disabilities.
 - Read instructions if requested.
 - Listen carefully and with intent to understand when communicating with persons with speech disabilities.
 - Seek clarification by repeating your understanding and ask for confirmation or clarification.
- Follow these guidelines for communicating with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing:
 - Face the person and do not cover your mouth. That will allow the person to see your lips.
 - Refrain from talking while chewing gum or eating.
 - Talk at a volume that is clear and calm. Speak louder only if requested.
 - Use paper and pencil, or type things out on your cell phone, if the person who is deaf does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- Speak in a clear, calm, and respectful tone when communicating with persons who have psychiatric disabilities.

¹⁷Burgstahler, S. 2018. Equal access: Universal Design of registration. <https://www.washington.edu/doiit/equal-access-universal-design-registration>

¹⁸Pearson, Yvette E. 2018.

¹⁹Pearson, Yvette E. 2018.



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