

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Gender Inclusive Communications Guidebook

1. Executive Summary	2
2. Purpose.....	2
3. Background	3
4. Use of Pronouns in USDA Communications	4
5. General Communication	5
a. Gender Inclusive Greetings.....	5
b. General Correspondence.....	5
c. Official Correspondence	5
d. Correspondence Formatting.....	6
e. Group Salutations	6
f. Body.....	6
g. Closing.....	6
h. Signature Line.....	6
6. External and Internal Outreach	7
a. Posting Guidelines	8
b. Social Media Manager Responsibilities.....	9
7. General USDA Examples	11
8. Summary.....	12

1. Executive Summary

This document is designed as a resource to promote the use of inclusive language by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) staff in communicating with customers, stakeholders, and employees. The use of inclusive language in communication symbolizes USDA's commitment to the values of equity and equal opportunity for employees and those we serve. This guidance may be applied to any type of communication, whether it is oral or written, formal or informal, or addressed to an internal or external audience. This guidance document intends to:

- Raise awareness about the importance of using gender-inclusive language;
- Provide practical examples of what gender-biased and gender-discriminatory communication is and how to avoid it;
- Provide a resource to help employees make decisions about using gendered language in their written and verbal communication; and
- Reinforce USDA's commitment to the values of equity and equal opportunity.

This guidance document is a living document and will be updated at appropriate intervals to capture new information or approaches to foster a more inclusive USDA.

2. Purpose

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recognizes the need for a skilled, workforce that can provide equitable and high-quality service in all it does. Every USDA employee should have the opportunity to thrive in an inclusive environment that gives them a sense of belonging and develops them so they can make their unique contributions to USDA's mission. This includes employing a workforce that represents the diversity of people served by USDA and supporting capabilities within every employee to provide excellent customer service to all, especially to individuals who have been unable to benefit from USDA programs and opportunities to improve their lives.

The words we use can make the difference between forging positive connections or creating distance in our personal and professional lives. As we build and provide services throughout USDA, we want to ensure the services are accessible and welcoming to all customers, employees, and stakeholders. Gender inclusive language or terms are those that are gender neutral and gender equitable. Such inclusive language helps us be more accurate and build trust with each other and our customers.

This *Gender Inclusive Communications Guidebook* (guidebook) serves as a resource of commonly used and preferred inclusive language for all internal and external USDA communication. Upon publication, this guidebook should be used as the primary guidance document for the standardization and use of gender inclusive language and terminology for USDA internal and external communications going forward.

This guidebook supplements the *USDA Style Guide* and the following Departmental Directives:

- [DR1410-001](#), *Publications Review and Clearance Policy* (01/14/21)
- [DR1420-002](#), *Printing Policy* (09/08/16)
- [DR1430-002](#), *Use of Logos/Marks at the United States Department of Agriculture* (01/08/2013)
- [DR1440-002](#), *Press Operations* (09/07/16)
- [DR1480-001](#), *Photography Policy* (02/07/03)
- [DR1490-002](#), *Creative, Media and Broadcast Policy* (08/04/11)
- [DR1495-001](#), *New Media Roles, Responsibilities, and Authorities* (05/23/11)
- [DR1496-001](#), *Digital Strategy Governance* (11/21/12)
- [DR1497-001](#), *Approval of Communications/Information Products and Services* (10/29/14)

This guidebook serves as a reference document and should be used in conjunction with training and technical assistance [e.g. assistance from employee resource groups and additional guidance documents] provided by USDA. This guidebook is a living document and will be periodically updated as USDA adopts more updated language, or as changes occur to Departmental directives, clearance processes, and other guidance documents and materials.

3. Background

In June 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 140 S. Ct. 1731, 590 U.S. ____ (2020), that employment discrimination based on transgender status or sexual orientation constitutes prohibited discrimination based on sex under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Accordingly, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Bostock* prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. The *Bostock* decision is a demonstration of the changing views at federal and state levels toward strengthening and improving the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex (LGBTQI+) or other diverse gender identities represented by “plus,” including Two-Spirit, LGBTQI+ people in the areas of employment, health, education, housing and other fields.

U.S. demographic trends demonstrate a shifting perception of gender identity and expression. For instance, research data indicates that about 1 in 5 U.S. adults know someone who goes by

a gender-neutral pronoun¹. By utilizing inclusive language practices, we build upon an organizational culture of respect and belonging for those in the LGBTQI+) community, but also for anyone who in some way challenges the traditional model of gender identity and expression. This is particularly important when data demonstrates that LGBTQI+ Americans face elevated levels of discrimination and mistreatment in education, employment, housing, health care, in places of public accommodations, or from law enforcement. In particular, transgender Americans also experience higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts that are four times and six times higher than the entire U.S. population.²

USDA is committed to fostering an inclusive workplace where individuals are respected, trusted, valued, and work together collaboratively to achieve Departmental goals. This also means promoting an equitable environment that embraces the differences of not just its employees, but also of customers and stakeholders. USDA promotes a culture that uses inclusive language in written and oral forms of communication to internal and external audiences. This entails adjusting communications to use terms that do not refer to gender, rather than defaulting to gender-specific terms such as he, she, her and his without awareness of an individual's preferences. Once an individual makes their preferences known, this should be respected in further interactions. In practice, this allows the individual an opportunity to share how they would like to be identified. For example, sharing one's pronouns should be a voluntary activity, but using a person's pronouns is a sign of respect. USDA is committed to the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunity for employees and those we serve. This guidebook provides practical direction to achieve this standard the Department.

4. Use of Pronouns in USDA Communications

Using an individual's correct pronouns is a powerful affirmation of self for transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. It validates one's identity, encourages authenticity and builds inclusive and supportive cultures. USDA's correspondence and communication should aim to (1) adopt the use of gender-inclusive pronouns; and (2) normalize clarifying pronouns in communication to eliminate the possibility of misgendering individuals. As a default, the pronouns "they/them/their" should be used in USDA sponsored communications, outreach, and correspondence rather than "he/she pronouns, unless Program guidance specifically directs otherwise.

An individual communicates their pronouns. For example, "Hi my name is John Doe and my pronouns are he/him/his" instead of "Hi my name is John Doe." A good practice is to inquire into an individual's preferred greeting. If they share, we must respect an individual's request. This also applies to non-written communication such as when interacting in person, via phone, and video calls.

¹ Pew Research Center. (September 5, 2019). *About one-in-five U.S. adults know someone who goes by a gender-neutral pronoun*. Retrieved January 31, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/05/gender-neutral-pronouns/>.

² UCLA School of Law Williams Institute. (September 2019). *Suicide Thoughts and Attempts Among Transgender Adults: Findings from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*. Retrieved January 31, 2022. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/suicidality-transgender-adults>).

5. General Communication

a. Gender Inclusive Greetings

The USDA's correspondence with the public may include people with gender-ambiguous names, which can place employees in the awkward position of conducting research on the individual's gender without knowing their actual preferred prefixes and potentially using incorrect salutations. However, there are simple steps we can take to use gender-inclusive language. Using gender-neutral salutations in correspondences is the first step towards full gender inclusivity by eliminating the possibility of misgendering correspondence to recipients. It is encouraged to inquire into an individual's correct greeting. If they share, we must respect an individual's preferred greeting.

b. General Correspondence

- (1) General correspondence refers to written communication, typically sent and received by the public, including program participants and other informal entities. For the purpose of this guidebook, general correspondence refers to all forms of USDA communication not sent on official letterhead, such as emails, Microsoft Teams chats, text messages, and Ask USDA communications. These communications are still subject to records retention requirements as they remain official USDA communication. Examples of gender-inclusive greetings for general correspondence may include:
 - (2) Using the recipient's full name: Dear [First Name] [Last Name] (e.g., Dear Simon Miller). This would be used in correspondence in Ask USDA and other Departmental and Mission Area, agency, and staff office emails with the public. First and last name would also be used for program applicants as we are contacting them as private individuals;
 - (3) If no name is provided, addressing the recipient by "To Whom it May Concern" or using their email address; or
 - (4) If only a first name is provided, using their first name.

c. Official Correspondence

- (1) Official correspondence refers to written communication received or sent on the organization's letterhead. For the purpose of this guidebook, official correspondence refers to, but is not limited to, all forms of USDA communication on official letterhead, such as communications with the White House, Congress, Recipients, and Government entities,
- (2) Examples of gender-inclusive greetings for official correspondence include:
 - (a) Using addressee's title and last name for correspondence with official titles:

Dear [Title] [Last Name] (e.g. "Dear Director Miller" or "Dear Representative Miller"); or

(b) If unknown, address "To Whom it May Concern" or use their email address.

d. Correspondence Formatting

(1) Individual Salutations

(a) Avoid using Sir or Madam since the recipient may not identify with either gender.

(b) If you do not know the person's pronouns, use the format Dear [First name] [last name] such as Dear John Doe or Dear Jane Doe. You can also address them by their first name if the message is less formal.

(c) When writing to an unknown receiver, use a generic salutation such as Dear [Customer], Dear [Stakeholder] or Dear [insert email address here]. Avoid addressing someone by gender-specific titles such as Mr., Ms. and Mrs., unless otherwise noted.³

e. Group Salutations

When writing to a group of people, avoid using gender-specific words like Ladies, Guys, Girls, and Gentlemen. Instead use words like All, Teammates, Employees, Colleagues, and Staff when addressing employees.

f. Body

(1) Use gender-neutral terms or gender-inclusive pronouns instead of gender-specific pronouns.

(2) Avoid using phrases like "his" or "her" if you do not know the person's pronouns.

(3) If you are addressing a person, use your/them/their. For example, "please send me a copy of their resume" instead of "please send me a copy of his or her resume."

(4) If you're not addressing a person, use grammatical articles such as "the" or "a."

g. Closing

Choose standard closings such as Regards, Yours Truly, and Sincerely.

h. Signature Line

³ University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The Writing Center. (2022). Gender-Inclusive Language. Retrieved March 3, 2022. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/gender-inclusive-language/>.

- (1) Whether sending either internal or external correspondence, USDA employees are acting as representatives of their Agency and the United States Government. Signature blocks must accurately reflect the position and culture of the U.S. Government and Federal workforce.
- (2) USDA employees are encouraged to include their pronouns in the first line of their email signature block (e.g. he/him/his). Signature blocks are a simple and effective way for individuals to communicate their identified pronouns to colleagues, stakeholders, and customers. For example, adding pronouns to signature blocks also has the benefit of indicating to the recipient that you will respect their gender identity and choice of pronouns. USDA employees are encouraged to review the *USDA Style Guide* regarding the use of specific graphics, quotes, or logos.

6. External and Internal Outreach

USDA Mission Areas, agencies, and staff offices are encouraged to engage with employees, customers, and stakeholders by sharing important USDA policies, actions, or announcements. Employees throughout the Department regularly communicate to the public in a multitude of ways and for several purposes. Communications may come from Mission Area or agency Public Affairs Directors; partnership and public engagement liaisons; External Affairs officials, and other teams and program offices across the Department., liaisons in Office of Partnerships & Public Engagement, External Affairs, Internal Government Affairs, Office of Communications (OC) and many others throughout the Department.

Videos and Press Media refers to visual and written communication. Within this guidance, press material refers to all forms of official USDA communication typically in the forms of press releases, videos from USDA senior leadership and communication memos. When communicating with employees, customers and stakeholders, we must ensure that the messages engage a wide range of audience members when possible.

Incorporating inclusive language and genders in USDA press releases, blogs, videos, and speeches must be respectfully considered. For example, when speaking of federal wildland firefighters, one should refer to them as “brave wildland firefighters,” instead of “brave men and women.” Likewise, visuals for press materials should not only represent cisgender people, but also reflect same sex couples and genders that are not normally associated with a particular program or circumstance.

For the purpose of this guidance, multimedia refers to visual aids and graphics such as pictures, fact sheets, infographics, and other types of visual outreach material. USDA Mission Areas, agencies, and staff offices are permitted to establish a presence online to share content and engage with stakeholders through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, and YouTube. Guidance for the use and clearance of information to be used on these media types can be found in the [USDA Style Guide](#) and the Departmental Directives listed in the Purpose section at the beginning of this document. These Directives also outline the clearance processes for publications, print and video outreach.

When developing materials, we must be purposeful creating and sourcing images of diverse people in a wide range of roles. In this way, the images we use should represent multiple voices and perspectives⁴. For example, visuals also reflect same-sex couples or genders that are not normally associated with a particular program. This also means providing alternate (alt) text or alt descriptions to convey the context of images as they appear in printed materials or on online platforms. For platforms that do not offer alt text options, alt text should be included within the post itself. For example: [Image description: alt text]. Keep in mind that when using stock images, it is important to use gender, race, age, or other keywords that have been given in the context of the photo. Do not assume the race or gender of an individual based on the image if that information is not included in the image description. If using images of people who have identified their pronouns, this should also be included in alt text.

The use of emojis, pictograms, or graphic designs, are often used in text and written messages to convey additional ideas or emotions. Social media managers should be cautious when using specific emojis to convey additional meanings. When using emojis, practice using non-gendered faces or if a gendered emoji is used, try to include various genders. More commonly, emojis have been used as a visual representation of the LGBTQI+ community through various icons including the use of rainbows, hearts, and multiple colors to represent skin color, to name a few iterations. Emojis are a valuable communication tool, but they can have multiple meanings that are not appropriate for government use..

Hashtags are a way to connect social media content to a specific topic, event, theme, or conversation. They also make it easier to discover posts around those specific topics, because hashtags aggregate all social media content with that same hashtag. Social media managers should always search hashtags before using them to make sure the conversation surrounding the hashtag is relevant and appropriate to your messaging. Social media managers should research hashtags carefully to be sure they are not being widely used in conjunction with inappropriate posts. Media managers should be sure that the conversation and the meaning of the hashtag has not changed from the intended purpose.

Social media managers should be cautious when using acronyms as part of a hashtag, as the acronym on its own can convey various meanings. Social media managers should consider that many social media platforms will index all terms in a post for discovery in search and trends, regardless if a hashtag is present.

a. Posting Guidelines

⁴ Tien, S. (2018, March 8). *8 ways to make your social media channels more gender inclusive*. Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard. Retrieved February 7, 2022, from <https://blog.hootsuite.com/gender-inclusive-social-media/>.

- (1) The USDA encourages the use of various multimedia outlets to foster a more open and transparent relationship with our audiences. These audiences include but are not limited to employees, customers, stakeholders, and members of the public. USDA Mission Areas, agencies, and staff offices use social media to reach audiences quickly and easily, delivering information through a variety of platforms and formats as part of their integrated communication strategy. Because of this relationship, audiences engage with our content by expressing their thoughts, opinions and ideas through comments, reactions, and direct messages on social media. Social media managers should use best judgment when responding to an individual's comments and direct messages.
- (2) When posting content, social media managers should adhere to the guidelines listed in the [USDA Social Media Style Guide](#). Additionally, social media managers should use gender-inclusive language. When posting about USDA employees, social media managers should verify the employee's pronouns.
- (3) The USDA does not agree with or endorse every comment that individuals post on our social media. Hate speech and harassment toward LGBTQI+ and other underrepresented communities is prevalent in online platforms and needs meaningful content moderation⁵.

b. Social Media Manager Responsibilities

In addition to the following guidance, additional social media guidance on governance may be found in [DR 1495-001, New Media Roles, Responsibilities and Authorities](#). It is the social media manager's responsibility to assess if a comment is harmful or makes a threat toward an individual or group of people. The social media manager is responsible for communicating any potential and legitimate threat to their Agency. Social media managers should take substantive and meaningful action to prioritize the safety of USDA employees, our customers, underrepresented community members and protected classes. If a social media manager encounters an inappropriate comment or a direct message, such as a negative opinion about LGBTQI+ individuals, then the social media manager may take the following actions:

- (1) If the comment does not warrant a response and is not harmful, then social media managers may ignore the comment. For the benefit of a robust and constructive conversation, USDA will allow comments that relate to the topic discussed within the corresponding post. USDA expects users to show respect, civility, and consideration to all posts and other users.
- (2) If the comment includes false information about the USDA and the social media manager feels that clarification of accurate information is important for the public, then the social media manager may respond to the comment.

⁵ Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). (2021, May). GLAAD Social Media Safety Index. GLAAD. Retrieved February 9, 2022, from https://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/images/2021-05/GLAAD%20SOCIAL%20MEDIA%20SAFETY%20INDEX_0.pdf

- (3) Social media managers should keep in mind the following when responding to comments:
 - (a) Be polite when responding;
 - (b) Correct the message, rather than the individuals who spread it;
 - (c) Use facts and data when pointing out generalizations and inaccuracies; and
 - (d) Aim to show a different perspective and share positive stories;
- (4) If the comment includes the following content, social managers may hide the comment⁶:
 - (a) Hate speech, including targeted slurs, intended to dehumanize, degrade or reinforce negative or harmful stereotypes about a protected group. This includes targeted misgendering or deadnaming of transgender individuals;
 - (b) Profanity, obscenity or vulgarity;
 - (c) Nudity in profile pictures; such as material that contains sexual content, which is overly graphic, disturbing, obscene, or offensive or material that would otherwise violate the law if published;
 - (d) Defamation to a person or people, such as comments that are discriminatory, racist, offensive, obscene, inflammatory, unlawful or otherwise objectionable statements, language or content;
 - (e) Name-calling and/or personal attacks;
 - (f) Comments whose main purpose are to sell a product;
 - (g) Comments that infringe on copyrights;
 - (h) Spam comments, such as the same comment posted repeatedly on a profile; and
 - (i) Advertisements for inappropriate websites or social media accounts;
- (5) If an individual repeatedly makes inappropriate comments that warrant hiding, then social media managers can block the user from the social media page. In these circumstances, it might be best to mute the account that is provoking the harm, and then take actions to block and report the user. Much the same, if the social media manager sees that another user is being attacked, then it is a best practice to report the profile to the appropriate social media platform.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (November 5, 2015). Social Media Public Comment Policy. CDC. Retrieved February 10, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/CommentPolicy.html>.

- (6) Social media managers are encouraged to confer with subject matter experts, such as LGBTQI+ Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs), Out and Equal, Equality USDA, and their respective Civil Rights Offices for additional guidance.

7. General USDA Examples

- (a) For those who don't fall neatly into either category, references to the binary male and female groupings can be alienating. According to the United Nations' guidelines on gender-inclusive language, "Using gender-inclusive language means speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes. Given the key role of language in shaping cultural and social attitudes, using gender-inclusive language is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias."
- (b) In an effort to eliminate the possibility of misgendering correspondence recipients, it is suggested that the following nouns and pronouns be used through the body of any USDA correspondence, guidance and regulations. Please note that this section is not an exhaustive list of examples that may occur at USDA. It is encouraged that each Agency create their own internal guidebook or implementation plan for use.
 - (1) They/them instead of he/she;
 - (2) Spouse or partner instead of husband/wife to spouse;
 - (3) Folks or everybody instead of guys or ladies/gentleman;
 - (4) Humankind instead of mankind;
 - (5) People instead of men or women;
 - (6) Parent instead of mother or father;
 - (7) Sibling instead of brother/sister;
 - (8) Child instead of son or daughter;
 - (9) Members of Congress instead of Congressmen;
 - (10) Councilperson instead of Councilman/Councilwoman;
 - (11) First-year student instead of freshman;
 - (12) Chair or Chairperson instead of Chairman;
 - (13) Artificial or synthetic instead of man-made;
 - (14) Workforce instead of manpower; and

(15) Firefighters instead of firemen.

- (c) Although well-meaning, the use of particular terms may act in completely altering and discrediting a particular group of people or culture. For example, in some communities, the use of the term “Latinx” in place of Latino or Latina is intended to promote gender language inclusivity. However, in the Spanish language, masculine and feminine nouns are engrained in the language itself and in an attempt to make terms gender inclusive, one may essentially alter the meaning of the language.⁷ For these reasons, it is important to know the audience to which you are directing your message.

8. Summary

This guidebook is a living document under the authority of the Office of Communications with support from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights and the Office of the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. The guidebook will be continually updated as USDA adopts more updated language or changes occur to Departmental Directives, policies, procedures, clearance processes, or other guidance direction.

⁷ Guerra, Gilbert and Gilbert Orbea. (November 9, 2015). The Argument Against the Use of the Term “Latinx”. The Phoenix. Retrieved February 17, 2022, from <https://swarthmorephoenix.com/2015/11/19/the-argument-against-the-use-of-the-term-latinx/>.

APPENDIX A

AUTHORITIES AND REFERENCES

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits sex discrimination in employment.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination based on sex under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance; and USDA Implementing Regulation, 7 CFR Part 15a.

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 prohibits discrimination by the Federal Government on the basis of “conduct which does not adversely affect the performance” of an applicant or employee. This includes being LGBTQI+.

Executive Order 13087, Further Amendment to Executive Order 11478, Equal Employment Opportunity in the Federal Government prohibits discrimination in Federal employment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Executive Order 13672, Further Amendments to Executive Order 11478, Equal Employment Opportunity in the Federal Government, and Executive Order 11246, Equal Employment Opportunity prohibits anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination by federal contractors.

Executive Order 13988, Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation extends prohibitions of discrimination on the bases of sex in civil rights laws to also include the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation, so long as the laws do not contain sufficient indications to the contrary.

APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The terms and definitions included in this section are from the [*USDA Departmental Directives Definitions Glossary*](#); the Department of Labor's [*DOL Policies on Gender Identity: Rights and Responsibilities*](#); the Human Rights Campaign [*Glossary of Terms*](#); [*Executive Order 13985, Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*](#); the University of Missouri's [*Language of Identity*](#) inclusive terminology guide; the American Psychological Association's [*Inclusive Language Guidelines*](#); or the Groupe Speciale Mobile Association (GSMA) [*Inclusive Language Guide*](#).

This appendix provides definitions of commonly used terms related to gender inclusion and other references used in this guidebook. Within the context of this guidance, the following definitions apply:

Access/Accessibility. The extent to which an employee or customer has the ability to access and benefit from or obtain available benefits and services.

Agency. Organizational units of the Department, other than staff offices, whose heads report to officials within the Office of the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Assistant to the Secretary.

Agender. An identity under the nonbinary and transgender umbrellas. Some agender individuals have no gender identity, although some define agender as having a gender identity that is neutral.

Ally. A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQI+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQI+ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

Asexual. A term referring to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others.

Assigned Sex. The sex assigned to a child at birth, most often based on the child's external anatomy. Also sometimes referred to as birth sex, natal sex, biological sex, sex assigned at birth or sex.

Bigender. An identity under the nonbinary and transgender umbrellas. Bigender individuals identify with more than one gender.

Bisexual. A person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Civil Rights. An expansive and significant set of rights that were designed to protect individuals from unfair treatment or discrimination and promote equal treatment in a number of settings

including education, employment, housing, public accommodations, and more based on certain legally protected characteristics.

Coming Out. The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Cisgender. A person whose gender identity matches with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Deadname. The name a person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning.

Deadnaming. The derogatory act of calling a transgender person by their birth name when they have changed their name as part of their gender transition.

Diversity. The practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures and beliefs of the American people, including underrepresented communities.

Inclusion. The recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of persons of all backgrounds.

Intersectionality. The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups to produce and sustain complex inequities.

Equity. The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

Equality. The state of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities.

Gay. A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Gender. Gender refers to the characteristics of people that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated within society. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over societal timeframes.

Gender-affirming care. An inclusive term for treatments and procedures that help an individual align their physical and/or other characteristics with their gender identity, often called transition-related care.

Gender binary. A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female.

Gender Dysphoria. A term that describes a sense of unease that a person may have because of a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity. This sense of unease or

dissatisfaction may be so intense it can lead to depression and anxiety and have a harmful impact on daily life.

Gender Euphoria. A psychological condition which consists of comfort or even joy when experiencing one's true gender identity, often accompanied by a strong desire to change one's gender presentation to better match their identity or to be referred to in the correct gendered language.

Gender Expansive. An umbrella term sometimes used to describe people who expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond perceived or expected societal gender norms (e.g., trans/non-binary/genderqueer). Some gender-expansive individuals identify as a mix of genders, some identify more binarily as a man or a woman, and some identify as no gender. Gender-expansive people might feel that they exist among genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the man/woman binary paradigm.

Gender Expression. A person's external characteristics and behaviors (such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions) that may be perceived as masculine or feminine. Most people make their expression match their identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Exclusive Language. Language or terms that lump all people under masculine or feminine language or within the gender binary (man or woman), which does not include everyone.

Genderfluid. Refers to an identity under the nonbinary and transgender umbrellas. Genderfluid individuals have different gender identities at different times. A genderfluid individual's gender identity could be multiple genders at once, and then switch to none at all, or move between single gender identities. For some genderfluid people, these changes happen as often as several times a day, and for others, monthly or less often.

Gender Inclusive Language. Language or terms that are gender neutral and gender equitable.

Gender Identity. A person's internal sense of being man, woman, some combination of man and woman, or neither man nor woman. Gender identity can be complex and varies from society to society. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender non-conforming (GNC). A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender non-conforming people do.

Genderqueer. Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Gender Transition. The process by which some transgender people begin living as the gender with which they identify, rather than the sex assigned to them at birth. There is no set process and individual must follow to transition.

Graphic Design. The art or profession of visual communication using various methods to convey information to an audience, especially to produce a specific effect. Multimedia can be distributed in many forms, including, but not limited to, CD, DVD, Flash, internet, computer, etc. and emerging technologies.

Intersex. General term used for someone who is born with a variation in their anatomy, chromosomes or hormones that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Lesbian. A woman who is physically, emotionally, or romantically attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

LGBTQI+. Represents the range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions present in our world, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, pansexual, Two-Spirit, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, intersex, asexual and ally. Also, may be referred to as LGBT, LGBTQIA, LGBTQ2S+ or LGBTQAI+.

Mission Area. A group of agencies with related functions that report to the same Under Secretary or Assistant Secretary. Research, Education, and Economics (REE) is an example of a mission area.

Misgender. To incorrectly identify the gender of a person (transgender or cisgender), intentionally or accidentally, by using an incorrect label or pronoun.

Neo-pronouns. A category of new (neo) pronouns that are increasingly used in place of "she," "he," or "they" when referring to a person. Some examples include: xe/xem/xyr, ze/hir/hirs, and ey/em/eir.

Non-binary. Identities that are not defined along the male/female binary. Non-binary people may feel that they exist as both, neither or a mix of identities.

Outreach and Engagement. Outreach and engagement efforts targeted to specific audiences in support of USDA mission areas, agencies and staff offices program activities. These activities are intended to inform and engage constituents and stakeholders on various issues and to increase participation in the collaborative decision-making process as USDA mission areas, agencies and staff offices meet their mission objectives. Services and activities may include, but are not limited to, town hall-style meetings, meeting facilitation, online forums and so forth.

Outing. Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender non-binary identity to others without consent. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on personal safety in the workplace.

Pansexual. A term that describes a person who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Program. An activity within an organization primarily concerned with the delivery of food or agricultural services.

Prohibited Bases. Discrimination that is prohibited in employment and program activities based on race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), genetic information, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, familial status, parental status, veteran status, religion, reprisal and resulting from all or a part of an individual's income being derived from any public assistance program.

Protected Groups. Any person, group, or class of persons protected under Federal laws and regulations and any Executive Orders from discrimination based on a prohibited basis.

Pronouns. Linguistic tools used to refer to someone in the third person. Gendered pronouns include she/her and he/him. Gender-neutral pronouns include the singular they/them and ze/hir. Many other pronouns exist as well. If unsure of someone's pronouns simply ask "What are your pronouns?"

Queer. An umbrella term which embraces a variety of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of those who are not among the exclusively heterosexual and monogamous majority. Although the term was once considered derogatory and offensive, the LGBTQI+ community has reclaimed the word and now uses it widely as a form of empowerment. Younger generations tend to use the term "queer" for reasons such as the fact that it does not assume the gender of the queer person or the gender of any potential romantic partners and/or in order to make a political statement about the fluidity of gender.

Questioning. A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation. The direction of one's erotic attraction. Sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity. Asexuality, lack of sexual attraction, is also a sexual orientation.

Social Transition. The process of presenting in public (part or full-time) in an identified gender other than what has been assigned to a person at birth. This is the process of making your gender identity known to friends, family and co-workers.

Staff Office. Departmental administrative offices whose heads report to officials within the Office of the Secretary.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Federal law that prohibits sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation and gender identity) discrimination in any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Federal law that prohibits discrimination

based on race, color, national origin, sex and religion in employment.

Training. Training is teaching people the knowledge and skills that will enable them to do their job more effectively. Training is the next step beyond awareness and most commonly involves formal instruction on how to perform specific tasks.

Transgender. Someone who does not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth.

Transition. A broad term commonly used to refer to the ongoing process by which a person alters components of their gender expression and/or other personal characteristics to better align with their gender identity. A person's transition may or may not include a combination of social changes (e.g., name, pronouns, appearance and/or clothing), legal changes (e.g., legal name and/or legal gender markers) and medical changes (e.g., gender-affirming hormone therapy and/or surgeries). Note: Not all transgender and/or non-binary people want to transition or are able to access the resources necessary to do so. However, regardless of whether, how, or when a person takes any, some, or all of these actions, their gender identity is valid and should be respected and affirmed.

Two-Spirit. A Native American identity which embodies traits of both men and women or of another gender than assigned. Not all Indigenous people who hold diverse sexual and gender identities consider themselves Two-Spirit, many identify themselves as LGBTQI+. Due to its cultural, spiritual, and historical context, the term Two-Spirit is to be used only by Indigenous people.

Underrepresented Groups. Groups of people who traditionally and currently are represented in lower proportional numbers to dominant groups.

Underserved Communities. Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, who have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. This term includes individuals who belong to communities of color, such as Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and North African persons. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (LGBTQI+) persons); persons who face discrimination based on pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions; parents; and caregivers. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration; persons who live in rural areas; veterans and military spouses; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination or inequality. Individuals may belong to more than one underserved community and face intersecting barriers.