NRPA Quick Guide: Event Naming

Introduction to Quick Guides

As professionals entering into a DEI journey, the first barrier we often confront is: Where do I begin?

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) — and sometimes Justice — work is hard. It takes time, asks us to confront uncomfortable topics and requires change. To add to those challenges, we may be met by others who don't understand "why," prefer to stay in their comfort zone and resist change. Some of us have community and agency support, and some of us are still looking for allies.

Quick Guides are designed for all park and recreation professionals, but especially for those who may have limited support and are looking to make tangible, meaningful changes in their communities and places of work. We believe individuals can make profound, positive changes and these guides are available to give individual professions the benefits of the NRPA community. Quick Guides are tools to help you address specific areas where DEI principles can be incorporated into parks and recreation by providing background, research, considerations and examples.

Quick Guides consider that each agency, community and approach is unique. They provide ideas and paths to implementation on a variety of topics and have been created by a team of dedicated NRPA members from all over the country, who reached out to their extended networks to compile multiple perspectives and solutions. Each Quick Guide focuses on a specific area to provide a clear and comprehensive resource.

Back to the original question, the NRPA DEI Network adopted the Quick Guides project to give you an answer — You can start here! Our vision is that you will find a Quick Guide that speaks to you, one that falls within your area of influence, or one that addresses an inequity or barrier that exists in your community. Utilize that Quick Guide to, well, guide you through the process.

Thank you for all that you do and for deciding to start somewhere.

Purpose

The Quick Guide on Inclusive Event and Program Naming is designed to broaden the reach of organizations within their communities by emphasizing — through practice — that everyone is welcome and has a space where they belong.

Why Are We Doing This Work?

- To foster a fair and supportive environment

- To ensure everyone has equal opportunities and representation

- To enhance overall societal well-being by valuing differences and incorporating diverse perspectives

Background

By developing this Quick Guide, we hope to encourage organizations across the nation to think about the hidden implications that can live within program and event names. This guide will also provide support as you take steps toward renaming existing events and developing new programs with inclusive language in mind.

Guide Development Process

As part of NRPA's DEI Network, we distributed a survey to park and recreation professionals around the country asking them if and how they name programs and events to be more inclusive. We also held an optional focus group with respondents to better understand their answers and to learn more about how they apply inclusive practices in their departments. Our goal was to learn more about conversations, obstacles, barriers and successes they have been experiencing.

Strategies and Steps to Development

Creating inclusive recreation program and event titles involves a thoughtful and intentional approach to ensure everyone — regardless of background, ability or identity — feels welcome and able to participate. Here are strategies and further steps to help develop program and event titles: *(steps listed on next page)*

Strategies

1 **Understand Your Community:**
- Identify potential barriers to participation, assess the interests of different groups, and get community feedback.

2 **Ensure Accessibility of Facilities:**
- Ensure recreation facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, make certain that you implement features, such as ramps, elevators and accessible restrooms.
- Consider sensory-friendly spaces and accommodations for those with sensory sensitivities.

3 **Inclusive Language and Marketing to Reflect Title Changes:**
- Use inclusive language in all promotional materials, including brochures, websites and social media.
- Feature diverse images and representations of participants in promotional materials.

4 **Include Flexible Program Structures in Title and Description:**
- Offer flexible schedules to accommodate various lifestyles and commitments.
- Allow participants to join or leave programs at any time without feeling pressured. For example, offer Drop-In or Open House programs and events.

5 **Collaborate With Community Organizations:**
- Engage with local community organizations and advocacy groups to understand specific needs and ensure representation of all demographics.
- Establish partnerships to co-host events or share resources.

6 **Create Feedback Mechanisms:**
- Establish feedback mechanisms to continually assess the inclusivity of your program titles and descriptions.
- Encourage participants to share their experiences and provide suggestions for improvement.

7 **Develop Inclusive Policies and Language Reinforcement:**
- Create and enforce policies that promote inclusivity within programs, such as anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies.
- Communicate the commitment to inclusivity in program guidelines and descriptions.

By implementing these steps and strategies, park and recreation programs can foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment, allowing a diverse range of individuals to participate and enjoy the benefits of programs and events.

Considerations for Naming

When renaming existing events and programs or creating new ones, the following should carefully be considered carefully in regard to inclusive language:

1 **Parental identifiers** (e.g., mother, father)
- Not all families have a mother and father. If possible, avoid using strict parental roles in program events, so as to not unintentionally exclude participants who don't fit the "traditional" family model.

2 **Age classifications**
- Unless age is a restriction for attendance, try to use other descriptors to name your programs and events.

3 **Gendered terms**
- Tying closely with parental identifiers, assigning a "gender" or "gender implication" onto a program limits participation for those who don't fit those roles or who are interested regardless of gender. Try to use broad terms that include everyone when choosing a name.
  - Example: Mother-Daughter Tea Party – Implies that all children have a mother figure and that only girls want to attend a tea party. By replacing "Mother-Daughter Tea Party" with "Royal Tea Party," the program is now open to all children and families, increasing the potential for participation from groups formerly not included.
- Gendered terms are acceptable if there is a gender requirement, like in certain leagues.
  - Consider Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming and Trans folx who may want to participate in programs that use gendered requirements. Develop plans, policies, and statements in advance.

4 **Religious terms/holidays**
- Using religious holidays in event and program naming can exclude large groups of people from feeling welcome in the community.
  - Example: "Breakfast with Santa" implies a strong tie to Christmas. Families who don't celebrate Christmas or who don't believe in Santa might not feel welcome to attend this event. By changing the name to "Flannels and Flapjacks," the focus shifts to a winter-themed community breakfast. You can keep Santa around at the event for those who want to see him, but now, Santa is an optional part of the event, as opposed to the focus. This creates a more welcoming environment for those who don't celebrate a Santa-centered winter.

5 **Family vs. family-friendly**
- Using "family" in naming is an easy way to be inadvertently exclusive by attempting to be inclusive if your descriptions and intentions are not clear. "Family" can imply that only those with families (e.g., kids and parents) are welcome, not adults on their own. You can clear things up by using "Family Friendly," which sends the message that families are welcome, but they are not the only audience.

6 **Adaptive-only vs. accommodation-friendly**
- Some organizations have specific adaptive programming opportunities in addition to policies that allow for reasonable accommodations to standard programs. Be clear in your descriptions of standard programs and events if the adaptive community is welcome to participate.

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When making decisions about renaming or creating new events and programs, it's beneficial to involve a diverse group of individuals who can provide input and perspectives from different backgrounds. Additionally, conducting sensitivity reviews or seeking feedback can help identify any unintentional biases in language choices.

Also, consider who, if anyone, in your organization needs to be a part of the naming or renaming process. An individual program might only need the approval of the programmer or program manager, but a large, long-standing community event might need input and support from organization leadership, such as a city council, city manager, mayor, department director or superintendent.

Our Definition of Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is language that avoids expressions, terms, or phrases that could be interpreted as excluding or marginalizing certain groups of people based on characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion or other factors.

Inclusive language aims to promote equality and respect for all individuals by using words and phrases that are considerate of diverse perspectives and identities. When inclusive language is used, programs and events naturally attract a larger, more diverse audience and become more accessible to community members. Inclusive naming is not meant to take away from the types of events and programs being offered or their content, and it certainly is not meant to exclude an already included group. Instead, it should be viewed as an opportunity to provide a sense of belonging to those who previously felt unwelcome.

Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities:
- Consider bringing together representatives from a wide variety of backgrounds and organizations for an open discussion on what kind of program and event names best personify your community.
- Review any existing policies or guidelines your agency has for program and event naming and update them to reflect the new inclusion and sensitivity standards.
- Consider updating marketing materials and logos to reflect new name changes.
- Involve staff across your department or organization in providing feedback on prospective program and event names.
- Review program and event descriptions for inclusive language.

Challenges:

- Community Pushback
  - Prepare your staff to receive questions about or comments on the name changes.
  - Prepare positive statements or talking points about the benefits that updating existing program event names will have in the community.
- Staff Training/Education
  - Provide all staff with information about name changes so they can communicate confidently with patrons.
  - Ensure all staff are educated on the importance of using inclusive language in their positions.

Talking Points

When talking to patrons:

- Approach the situation with respect and empathy for their point of view.
- Be open to a conversation about the change in event and program names or know which staff to call in for that conversation.
- Listen to the patron; people are naturally averse to change and sometimes just need a chance to talk about it.
- Explain the NRPA and industry standards for using inclusive language in all aspects of parks and recreation.
- Refer patrons to your organization's next level of leadership if they need to have additional conversations.

When talking to employees:

- Ensure employees understand the goals of creating inclusion and community as they relate to program and event name changes.
- Allow them to ask questions about changes and give, transparent answers.
- Ask for staff input when working on developing new names.

Common Barriers and Advice for Overcoming Them:

The advice offered here is based on opinion and experience. It may not be applicable in all situations or for all organizations. Please refer to your internal policies and procedures or direction from your leadership when implementing changes.

1 **"Do we need to change things? No one is complaining."**
- Names that focus on a particular culture, gender or family structure can unintentionally signal to individuals in other demographics that the event is not for them. Your events are likely experiencing community-avoidance from people who feel marginalized, even if you are not getting complaints.
- Being inclusive means moving beyond providing events and programs solely for people who ARE showing up. Updating event names will promote engagement with people who have NOT been participating.

2 **"My team needs better a understanding and education on why inclusive naming is important."**
- Start with implementing staff education opportunities in areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. Use NRPA as a resource for educational materials and articles. You can also start highlighting important months and weeks of recognition (e.g., Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Women's History Month, and Pride Month) and important bills and policies being passed in your state that might impact your patrons. Use those educational nuggets to share and show how your organization can be involved with those topics and use them to build connection in your community.

3 **"I don't have support from my city council."**
- Start with gaining interest from community members. Councils are there to represent what the people want and should listen to their voices.
- Connect with community allies for support as much as you can.

4 **"Some of my coworkers understand DEI, but some of them don't."**
- Implement DEI training for all staff, so as not to single anyone out.
- Open a forum for staff to ask questions about what they don't understand or to get more information on why DEI is important. But be sure to do so in a way that is anonymous or doesn't embarrass someone for their lack of understanding.
- Lead by example. Instead of saying parents or parent/child classes, you can begin saying adults or adult/child classes to include any grown-up/guardian in that child's life. As you continue to use that inclusive language, you'll likely start seeing it trickle down to other areas and other staff.
  - If necessary and appropriate, offer gentle corrections.

5 **"DEI is new to us, and staff is not confident in using inclusive language and terms."**
- Provide a "How to" or "FAQ" for your staff to reference when implementing DEI and inclusive language. If no one on your staff feels comfortable or qualified to develop those guides, reach out to a community ally with more experience.
- Have an open discussion with staff about what is holding them back. Have your leadership talk about the importance of DEI work and why it is being implemented in your organization.

6 **"My patrons are going to push back and be upset by a change in program/event names."**
- The "it's always been this way" mindset is difficult to overcome. Change is hard and can take time and understanding to get past.
- Start with small initiatives first, instead of jumping in and changing the name of your largest, most popular event.
    - Implement new programs and events with inclusive naming first, without changing the existing ones right away. Then, gradually phase out or edit the old names that need updating.
- Make all messaging about the new changing names extremely positive and focus on the enhancements that these changes will bring to your community.

7 **"I want to engage in DEI initiatives like inclusive naming, but I don't know where to start."**
- We've all been at the start. Congratulations to you for taking that first step!
- Research organizations that are similar to yours in size or demographics or other local organizations that are already implementing DEI initiatives and reach out to them for advice and resources. Most people are going to be happy to help someone else who is getting started with DEI.

8 **"I'm afraid that we aren't doing things correctly."**
- While it can be worrying that you are not doing things correctly when you are trying to be inclusive, you should be proud that you are taking steps to be inclusive.
- Start small and build up in scale as you learn more.
- Remember that any effort is better than no effort. Don't be afraid to reach out to area experts to receive feedback as you plan.

9 **"I want to be inclusive, but I don't want to offend anyone."**
- Unfortunately, there's never a situation where everyone is happy. Sometimes, we just have to make a decision, stick to it, and do what's right by our fellow humans and their rights.
- However, we can help educate those who are resistant to change and hopefully guide them to a place of understanding, in regard to DEI.

10 **"What do I do if I face resistance from people in power?"**
- Start small and do what you can within your jurisdiction. Maybe the larger organization isn't onboard, but your department is. Do what you can within your department.

11 **"I struggle with creating new program and event names."**
- Have fun and don't be afraid to try new things! Sometimes, the silly names are the ones that stick.
- Ask for input from your entire department or even those outside of it. At times, people who are removed from the planning process can look at it with a different lens and come up with an angle you weren't thinking about.
- Instead of completely eliminating traditional programs or program names, try adding an additional event or program that is more inclusive.
    - Example: Offer a general, winter-themed event even though the department is offering a more Christmas-focused event. That way, you are creating equal opportunity for those who don't celebrate Christmas without taking away from those who do.

Outcomes:

Examples of program and event names that have been changed using inclusive language.

Original Program Name	New Inclusive Program Name
Adaptive League	Summit League
American Indian Heritage Festival	Indigenous American Celebration
Boys and Girls Afterschool Sports Program	Afterschool Sports Program
Breakfast With Santa	Flannels and Flapjacks
Dad and Daughter Tea	MY VIP Tea
Daddy-Daughter Dance	Boots and Bells Dance
Daddy and Me Squirt Gun Painting	Squirt Gun Painting
Daddy Daughter Dance	VIP and ME Dance
Easter Egg Hunt	EGGstreme Spring Fling
Easter Egg Hunt	Springtastic Egg Hunt
Easter Event	Fitness in the Park
Family Fishing	Learn to Fish
Family Nature Trivia Night	Nature Trivia Night
Father-Daughter Dance	Sweetheart Soiree
Friday Camp	Adaptive Adventure Camp
Girls Softball	Softball
Mother-Daughter Tea Party	Royal Tea Party
Mother-Son Superhero Challenge	Superhero Challenge
Parent-Tot Swim	Grown-Up/Tot Swim; Big Fish/Little Minnows
Princess Dance Camp	Fairytale Dance Camp
Senior Center	Adult Center; Activity
Tiny Tot Swim	Preschool Aquatics

Glossary of Terms:

This glossary provides a starting point for understanding DEI terminology. It is essential to continue learning and engaging with DEI topics, beyond this guide, to further foster inclusivity and equality.

Link to NRPA Equity Language Guide

nrpa.org/siteassets/nrpa-equity-language-guide-10-21-2021.pdf

Affinity Groups: Groups or networks within an organization where individuals with shared identities or experiences can come together, share experiences and support each other

Allyship: The act of actively supporting and advocating for marginalized groups and individuals, often by people who do not share the same identities

Bias: Unconscious or conscious preferences, prejudices or stereotypes that influence how individuals perceive and interact with others, often resulting in unfair treatment or judgment

Cultural Competence: The ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures and backgrounds, including an understanding of cultural norms and practices

Diversity: The presence of a variety of different identities, backgrounds and experiences within a group or organization, including differences in race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and more

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO): A legal framework in many countries that prohibits discrimination in employment based on characteristics, such as race, gender and religion

Equity: The concept of ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities, resources and treatment, with a focus on addressing historical disadvantages and structural inequalities

Folx: A gender-neutral term used to explicitly signal the inclusion of groups commonly marginalized

Implicit Bias Training: Workshops or programs designed to raise awareness of unconscious biases and provide tools to address and mitigate them

Inclusion: Creating an environment where all individuals, regardless of their background or identity, feel valued, respected and included in decision-making processes and everyday activities

Intersectionality: The idea that an individual's identity is shaped by multiple factors (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) and that these factors intersect and interact, influencing their experiences and opportunities

LGBTQIA2+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit and more): An inclusive acronym representing a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities

Microaggressions: Subtle — often unintentional — comments, actions or behaviors that communicate negative stereotypes or assumptions about someone's identity, leading to harm or discomfort

Privilege: Unearned advantages or benefits that individuals from certain social groups may have, often based on factors like race, gender or socioeconomic status

Restorative Justice: An approach to conflict resolution and accountability that focuses on repairing harm, promoting healing and addressing the needs of all parties involved

Systemic Racism: The ongoing, pervasive and often hidden patterns of discrimination and disadvantage that disproportionately affect people of certain racial or ethnic groups.

Acknowledgements