

# Celebrating Diversity in the Workplace

## BEST PRACTICES IN DC GOVERNMENT

This one-pager lists some best practices for interacting with colleagues and constituents of color in a respectful and non-discriminatory manner.

## Understanding Discursive Racism

Racism is embedded into our society (systemic racism). As a result, it can manifest and be communicated in a variety of ways, such as our interactions with others (interpersonal or interactional racism), through representations in the media and popular culture (representational racism), and through our policies and law (institutional racism). Racism can also appear in language (discursive racism). This form of racism uses words that are rooted in stereotypical meaning, and typically includes racially tinged forms of everyday communication that sustain racism. Below are several examples; more are provided in our *Words Matter: A Guide to Inclusive Language around Racial and Ethnic Identity*.

### Covert Discursive Racism

On the surface, less obvious forms of discursive racism may seem to be racially neutral, but by using them we may unintentionally or unknowingly aid in perpetuating racial inequities and furthering harm to audiences who come from the communities the terms and phrases originally targeted.

#### Examples:

- “Are your parents legal”
- “Black people are so loud”
- “Can I touch your hair”
- Grandfather clause
- Illegal Alien
- No can do
- “No really, where are you from”
- Off the reservation
- Peanut Gallery
- Uppity
- Urban
- “You people...”

### Overt Discursive Racism

Over discursive racism is typically easy to identify because it is explicit and meant to denigrate or hurt the intended target. All derogatory language used to belittle, show contempt or hatred, is never acceptable in the DC government workplace.

#### Examples:

- Telling ethnic or racial jokes
- Using racial epithets or slurs
- Using exonyms
  - e.g., “Eskimo” or “Spirit Animal”

# Best Practices in Using Inclusive Language

Using inclusive language is important, particularly for people who have historically been excluded and marginalized based on their racial or ethnic identity, their physical characteristics, including skin color, their personal appearance (e.g., hair type and texture), or religious garments (e.g., hijabs or turbans). Here are some general guidelines:

- **Be thoughtful and intentional.**
- **Be sensitive to self-identification** (e.g. Someone who identifies as Black but not African American).
- **Avoid hyphenating national origins** (e.g., Irish American not Irish-American).
- **Replace harmful terms that have racist histories or connotations with more neutral language** (e.g., use “lunch and learn/chat and chew” rather than brown bag lunch).
- **Avoid using demographic categories as nouns** (e.g., saying “the Mexicans” or “the Asians”).

# Creating Inclusive Spaces

We want everyone to feel welcomed, valued, and above all respected in their workplace and in their community. Here are some ways you can be inclusive:

- Acknowledge cultural holidays and observances
- Create awareness of unconscious bias and microaggressions
- Encourage open dialogue and active listening
- Review the interview and selection process
- Provide cultural competency educational opportunities
- Provide resources for mental health support

For more information about protected traits, their updated definitions, or about protected traits in other enforcement areas, please visit [ohr.dc.gov](http://ohr.dc.gov)

If you are a DC government employee, a DC resident, or a visitor to the District you are protected against discrimination under the DC Human Rights Act of 1977. The following protected traits apply to the enforcement area of employment. Other protected traits may apply to educational institutions, housing, and public accommodations and government services.

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|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Age                            | <b>11. National Origin</b>  |
| 2. <b>Color</b>                   | 12. Personal appearance   |
| 3. Credit Information             | 13. Political affiliation   |
| 4. Disability                     | <b>14. Race</b>   |
| 5. Family Responsibilities        | <b>15. Religion</b>   |
| 6. Gender Identity and Expression | 16. Sex   |
| 7. Genetic Information            | 17. Sexual Orientation  |
| 8. Homeless Status                | 18. Status as a Victim or Family Member of a Victim of Domestic Violence, Sexual Offense, or Stalking |
| 9. Marital Status                 |   |
| 10. Matriculation                 |   |