



USFN GUIDANCE FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE CONTENT

[Approved by the USFN Board of Directors on 2.21.23]

Why make changes to USFN Publications and Event Guidelines?

In principle and in practice, USFN embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Organization recognizes that the perspectives and talents of an inclusive community of members, program leaders, and participants can be a powerful catalyst for excellence, growth, and change in both industries and individuals.

While educational systems do teach us about these issues, they often present them as discrete events that have little real connection to the “dominant” society. As a result, some people may be uncomfortable speaking or writing about them. We simply do not have the vocabulary. By making empathy an essential part of inclusion, the USFN and content creators can improve their audience communications, build trust, and grow our networks. Meeting the functional needs of all USFN members creates a better reputation for the Organization and improved word-of-mouth in the industry.

Inclusive design and content meets the needs of as many users as possible. The use of inclusive language in USFN publications and at USFN events fosters growth and ensures all members of the USFN community feel welcome, included, and heard. To that end, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Section recommends that members consider the following guidelines when preparing USFN publications, events, meeting minutes, posts, videos, panels, and articles. The below recommendations are intended to serve as a guide for members for creating and promoting inclusive content.

Content creation starts from a viewpoint of inclusivity, usability, and accessibility.

What is Inclusivity?

Inclusivity means representing people who have, until now, been underrepresented. Inclusivity issues affect people from specific populations within a community, as well as communities that have been denied the opportunity to participate fully in economic, social, or civic life.

Inclusive content recognizes diversity in the functional needs and abilities of individuals. To make content inclusive, think of peoples’ diverse abilities and create content that can be accessed in a variety of ways.

Inclusive content encompasses diversity in personal needs and experiences. We suggest challenging one another to do better by including different communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs. We suggest taking steps to avoid

“othering” people. By ensuring that everyone feels welcome in our in-person or digital spaces, we can more accurately represent the world we live in and the needs of all members.

What is Usability?

Usability is about designing products to be effective, efficient, and satisfying. Usability factors measure the functionality of a product or design, as well as the design interface’s ease of use. They assess how easy it is for users to learn the basic tasks of the interface, how quickly users can perform tasks on the interface, and whether users can remember how to perform those tasks after time away from the interface. In creating USFN materials or publications, consider the usability of the content. While the USFN’s technology and resources continue to evolve, consider usability when designing new products or content.

What is Accessibility?

Designing with accessibility means more people may be able to use a product, regardless of their abilities. Accessibility addresses discriminatory aspects related to equivalent user experience for people with disabilities. Web accessibility means that people with disabilities can equally perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with websites and tools. Consider adding closed captioning to recorded broadcasts. For in person events, consider if an accommodation may be necessary. As noted above, while the USFN’s technology and resources continue to evolve, consider accessibility when creating content or planning an event.

In other words, all users, regardless of ability or circumstance, should be able to:

- Perceive all interface or document elements.
- Operate the controls easily and intuitively.
- Understand the content.
- Use different assistive technologies, devices, browsers, and operating systems to interact with the content.

Best Practices for Addressing Inclusivity, Usability, and Accessibility in USFN Content:

1. Assess points of bias in your content and design practices.

Does your content or language default to the pronoun “he,” or does it make equal use of “she” and “they”? Review your text content, stock photography, and illustrations. Look at both digital and printed materials aimed at internal and external audiences. Does your content feature mostly white, male, straight, or non-disabled people? If so, it may be time to switch up the terminology and create a new aesthetic – one with more diversity.

2. Use clear, simple, and thoughtful language.

Review words through the lens of inclusivity. Identify and remove all instances of othering and ableism. This boils down to respect. Avoid collective terms and labels, such as “females” or “the

blind,” that group individuals into a category that promotes objectification. Remember an individual’s disability, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, or heritage is just a single facet of their unique and complex identity. Be thoughtful about the imagery you use (in your writing) by rethinking adjectives and other descriptions. For example, words like ‘black’ or ‘dark’ are often used symbolically to express negative concepts. There are many alternatives and ways to diversify our use of certain symbolism.

3. Choose your words deliberately.

As you create content, word choice matters. Labeling a brand or organization as “diverse” and “inclusive” is often not enough. Show your audience inclusivity by using words that reflect those concepts. Words which indicate inclusion to audiences signal connection, openness (being open-minded), and balance (bringing a sense of value to all). Think about incorporating inclusive words purposefully into your content.

4. Avoid making assumptions about your audience, colleagues, or USFN members.

Avoid making assumptions as to how to address or communicate with an individual based on appearance or what you believe to be true about them. Instead, ask an individual how they would like to be addressed or use inclusive language.

Never make assumptions based on someone’s race, gender, orientation, ethnicity, disability, status, etc.

While researching an audience is often useful, do not assume your findings apply to everyone. Relevance matters. Do not identify someone’s race, gender, orientation, ethnicity, disability, status, etc. unless it adds value and context.

5. Think about representation.

Even if a person’s characteristics are not directly relevant to an article or presentation, consider how the content may incorporate the diverse people in the community.

For example, consider if your source material presents only one viewpoint (i.e., from male authors). If so, expanding sources to include other views can help improve representation. A person is shaped by their own circumstances and characteristics to bring valuable views and perspectives.

Consider the examples and anecdotes you use in your content. Are they diverse and representative of the community? For example, if you give an example that involves a family, recognize that family structures are diverse. Not every family is a mom, dad, and kids. For instance, inclusive terms may include “family” or “partners” rather than “mom or dad.”

6. Use responsive design that allows for orientation changes.

Responsive design allows content layouts to display well on many form factors, using “breakpoints” to define different widths. Sometimes content makers lock orientation or turn off the zoom ability. We all need these basic tools from time to time. Instead of disabling them, consider content to accommodate tools of accessibility. Write meaningful and descriptive text. When possible, label images, buttons, and fields. Instead of fixed or absolute font sizes, try using relative units for font sizes, such as percentage units, viewport width, or viewport height.

7. Provide text alternatives for non-text elements, such as images and forms.

Use simple, descriptive language as alternate text for images. If the image serves a specific function, consider including alternative text to explain what that function is, and describe the contents of the image. The goal is to ensure that everyone has access to the same information about the image.

If an image contains a chart or graph, consider including alternative text to summarize the data. If using a creative photo or a photo as an illustration, include text to describe the elements of the image in detail.

When possible, add labels and alternative text to address inclusion and accessibility. Consider using alternative text to describe icons, images, labels, or buttons.

**Source material by <https://moz.com/blog/design-inclusive-content>*