

#EVAL25

How to avoid divisive politicization of your findings while advancing equity

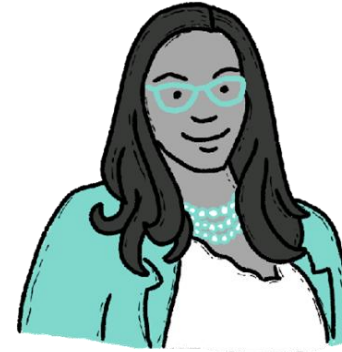
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We facilitate meaningful learning and evaluation with and for our partners to advance equity and social justice.

www.innonet.org



Hi! I'm **Shelli**! My first career was as a biomedical researcher.



Hi! I'm **Rebecca**! My first eval job was an internal evaluator for global advocacy teams.



Hi! I'm **Cory**! I started my career at a community foundation.

Now what?

GOALS

- We maintain our commitment to equity.
- We recognize that language has become politicized and weaponized.
- We need a strategy to avoid this politicization.

HOW WE'RE LEARNING

- Researched ways that we can avoid/avert this language challenge.
- Co-learning with our peers as we will be doing today



Lessons from the Field



Strategically speaking without losing substance

The goal is progress. Using less politicized language and framing our work around a common need can help us keep our momentum during these times.

“Messaging is not about saying what’s most true, it’s about saying what’s most strategic.”

-Dr. Julie Sweetland

How to speak strategically

Use values-forward communication. This involves using language that resonates with shared values so that the equity work that you are doing doesn’t trigger resistance

Disclaimer

“Remember, the goal is not to water down equity—it’s to keep momentum in the face of opposition.”

Shift from **problem-fixers** to **community builders**

We want to strengthen a system we know has room for improvement. By identifying its flaws and working together to share solutions, we can help **shift the narrative toward what's possible**—and show that meaningful change is achievable.



“Rather than starting with a problem statement and how to ‘fix a broken world’, next narratives assume that the sector exists to ‘build a better world’.”

-SSIR, 2025

How to shift to community builders

Use asset framing from people to systems. Focusing on the many flaws of our current system shapes a narrative that there are no aspects to be saved. Positive framing helps us consider ways to solve these challenges and keep, not nix, the system.

Disclaimer

“Including positive framing for our institutions doesn’t mean ignoring harm. But it does mean pairing harms with successes and potential remedies.”



Double Down on Community Collaboration

By looking again at the Equitable Communications Guide, we see opportunities to strengthen how we share stories—grounding them in community, creating space for dialogue, and protecting the trust that makes our work possible.

How to double down on community collaboration

STRATEGY 1:

Involve community in constructing narratives

STRATEGY 2:

Create space for dialogue, not just dissemination

STRATEGY 3:

Protect anonymity and trust



Honor the Emotional Weight of Strategic Shifts

This work can take a heavy toll, especially for people from marginalized communities. It is **hurtful and exhausting** to have to avoid using **terms** that explicitly define what this system is doing. This is an emotional labor that should always be acknowledged.





Learning from each other

Group Discussions

LOGISTICS

- **30-minutes** in rotation with small groups
- Option to move to a “**No rotation**” **group**, if you don’t want to talk but want to hear insights from the group later.

DISCUSSION

- How do you use language to advance equity and social justice?
- How has this political climate affected the way you and others talk about equity work?
- What framing and language strategies have you seen or used that keep momentum despite a more hostile environment?

VENT BOX!

- We have every right to feel frustration and anger in this moment
- You deserve to voice these frustrations
- We want to share your frustrations!



Further Reading

1. [The Equitable Communications Guide.](#) (Publication)
2. [Talking Data Equity with Julie Sweetland](#) (Video)
3. [From Fixers to Builders](#) (Article)

Thank you

