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# BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE VISUALS

Vancouver

Marketing can often exclude underrepresented groups, and travel marketing is not immune to this issue (e.g., imagery often focuses on younger people, certain family or relationship structures, and those with white skin). When diversity is shown, it's often represented in stereotypical or generalized ways (e.g. only representing a culture in traditional dress or relying solely on wheelchairs to symbolize disability).

While there's no "how to", there are principles, overarching goals and tangible steps we can all take to make the travel marketing industry more inclusive.



“Inclusivity in marketing isn’t just about the final creative — it’s about ensuring that inclusivity and equity are built into every aspect of the business, every department, every decision.”

—Lisa Sherman,  
President & Chief Executive Officer,  
Ad Council

# Principles for Inclusive Visuals

Before changing steps in the process or setting inclusivity metrics, think about where and how these principles show up (or don't) in your current visual and production related work, and what you might do or suggest to bring them to the work you do in the future.

## Uplift Underrepresented Voices and Challenge the Dominant Culture Lens

Marketing is often done through a dominant lens (by those with fewer barriers to accessing power in our society) or an ethnocentric lens (which means experiencing one's own culture as more "central to reality" than other cultures). This creates a narrow impression of who belongs, which leads to harmful representation. Our own personal lenses influence everything we do, and we can learn to be more aware of and accountable for this. **By evaluating our own biases, seeking the expertise of those with lived experience, and committing to inclusive growth, we can do better.**

## Impact over Intent

How others receive and experience our marketing is more important than how we hope or believe it will be received. By being

upfront that impact matters more than intent, we're more likely to incorporate consideration of impact into the design and development process (so there is less risk of having to be reactive). Being **thoughtful, accountable, and receptive** to feedback will support a more inclusive approach.

## Embrace Intersectionality

Intersectionality is all about looking at the **interconnectedness between dimensions of identity - that each identity** creates a distinctive lived experience. We want to avoid taking a "checkbox" approach. Instead, incorporate the complex intersectional identities of the people whose stories or images we share. We can show people in a way that's nuanced and human, that **depicts people as unique individuals** and not representative of an entire culture or community. An example of how to embrace intersectionality could be to tell the story of a person who is both Black and Indigenous for National Indigenous People's Day, someone who identifies as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and Asian for Asian Heritage Month, or someone who is both disabled and Black for Black History Month.

# Overarching Goals

Missteps around inclusive visuals can happen because of our assumptions, our reluctance to engage with diversity, a lack of lived experience, generalizations we've made, simply not knowing better, or avoiding accountability and agency for the creative choices we make. By acknowledging these potential pitfalls, we can **move forward with intention and create more inclusive visuals.**

## □ Understand your audience

It's likely your audience includes many dimensions of identity, identifying with various cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, sexual, romantic, age-related and other identities. Avoid broadly characterizing or categorizing the people you're communicating with or talking about, even if you market to a very specific cohort.

## □ Embrace differences

Inclusivity is not about ignoring the things that make us different. It's about preventing these identity traits and characteristics from becoming barriers in the way we communicate and connect as human beings.

## □ Elevate and incorporate lived-experience

Meaningfully involve those with lived experience throughout the entire process to co-create the stories you share. This includes "passing the mic" to under-represented communities so they decide how and what to share about themselves. "By" is best, "with" is good, and "for" is harmful. It's crucial that lived experiences both inform and are uplifted in all aspects of production - from how the process is designed to the final product.

## □ Highlight narratives, not singular traits

Representation should be authentic and contextual. Avoid tokenizing someone by highlighting their race, gender, or identity if it's not relevant to the story you're telling.

## □ Avoid harm

Stereotypes and bias are deeply ingrained. Even seemingly positive associations can be problematic because they put people in boxes and carry preconceived biases.

## □ Adopt a Learning Mindset

Perfection isn't the goal. When mistakes happen, learn from them. Be transparent with your audience. Honest contrition and continual growth are the key signs of genuine commitment.



# Process: Take Tangible Steps

Inclusive visuals only happen through inclusive processes. This is bigger than tasks and outputs and it takes deliberate, intentional, and ongoing action at every stage of production. From conception to the final product, from planning briefs to post-production, each stage needs to consider and include the perspective of the diverse and intersectional identities being shown.

## STEP 1

### Build an inclusive team

Start with creating a team that embeds underrepresented talent. Consider your partners, collaborators, suppliers, and/or content creators. This will ensure that all ideas benefit from a variety of perspectives.

- ❑ Build lived experience into the process, from start to finish, without relying on individuals to speak on behalf of communities.
- ❑ Build safe and inclusive feedback into the process from start to finish. Meet people's needs upfront, and stay agile and flexible throughout. Safe and brave spaces must be fostered at all times. Intentionally set and reset the space throughout each stage of production.
- ❑ Consider how language shows up in every stage of production: learn, unlearn, and relearn language that demonstrates best inclusive practices.
- ❑ Recognize inclusion and lived experiences as expertise. Credit and compensate for this expertise fairly.

## STEP 2

### Embed inclusion into your strategy

Act on inclusive marketing principles at every stage of execution, from overall planning to deploying a brief.

- ❑ Incorporate inclusion as you set goals, analyze gaps, plan, create, and measure outcomes. Ensure everyone understands the need and the expectations.
- ❑ Learn about and avoid tokenism, stereotyping, and harmful narratives related to focus audiences in your visuals and processes.
- ❑ Learn about your own biases and ask those doing the work to also learn about their biases.
- ❑ To avoid making assumptions about people's identity, provide a way for all participants to self identify.

## STEP 3

### Make inclusive creative choices

Avoid stereotypes and strive for authentic representation throughout your creative process.

- ❑ Ensure that the settings, props, wardrobes, and staging decisions chosen are authentic to the story being told.
- ❑ Consider who makes and influences decisions and what impact this has both in the process and visuals themselves. For example, who stages models in a photo? When those models are staged, who is the focus of the image? How are you disrupting traditional representations of privilege and power?
- ❑ Make inclusive post-production choices. For example, what does retouching an image imply? Are we being respectful of skin tone in our editing?
- ❑ Ensure representation feels authentic to your focus audiences (especially equity-deserving people and groups).



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## STEP 4

### Hold each other accountable

Revisit goals set at the beginning of the project and measure your progress to ensure your work is on the right track.

- ❑ Always ask for consent to share dimensions of someone's identity, whether through language or context (ex. never out someone as 2SLGBTQIA+ without permission).
- ❑ Adapt all visuals into accessible formats.



Kelowna



# Resources and Inspiration

This document developed in conjunction with AndHumanity.

## Inspiration was taken from the following sources:

[All-In with Google](#)

[LinkedIn, Business, Inclusive Language for Marketers](#)

## Other sources of inspiration:

### INTERSECTIONALITY

[African American Women and the Struggle for Equality What is Intersectionality](#)  
by [Peter Hopkins](#)

### CO-DESIGN

[What is co-design? Components of co-production](#)

### LANGUAGE

[Decolonizing the language of photography](#)  
[Inclusive Language for Marketers](#)



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