INCLUSIVE '–E' SPANISH GUIDE

By: Denise Merino Cavero and Yao Xiao

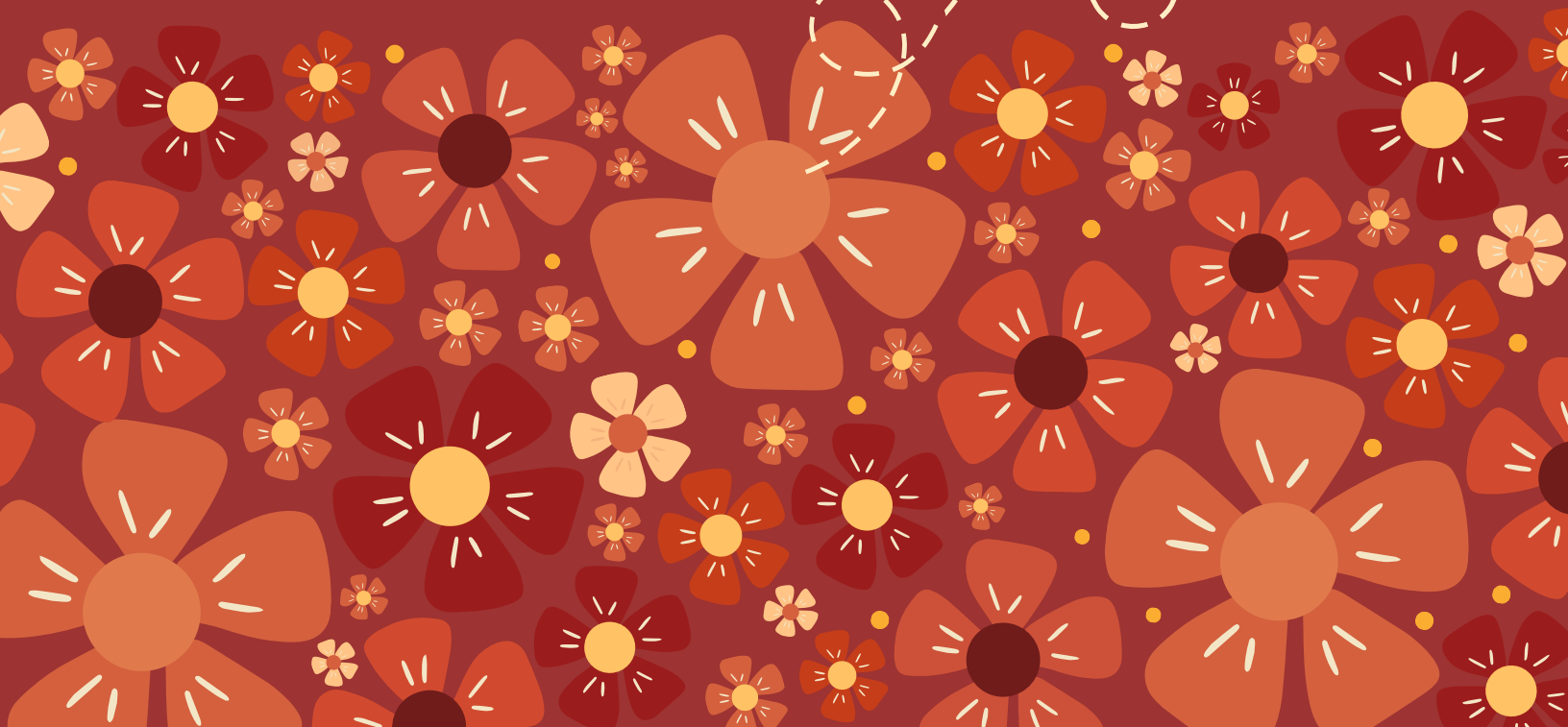# Table of Contents:

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CRLA
Rural Roots, Justice for All

This guide hopes to provide CRLA staff, volunteers, and community partners with a resource to understand and begin using inclusive language in Spanish.

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What exactly is inclusive Spanish?

The Spanish language is gendered: the masculine form is the default for mixed groups.

- **1970s:** Feminists, scholars, and activists began challenging gender norms.
- **1990s–2000s:** "-@" (tod@s) and "-x" (todxs), which proved to be hard to pronounce.
- **Mid-2010s:** "-e" (todes) emerges, pronounceable, and is widely adopted by LGBTQ+ and community groups.
- **Presently:** Common in media, outreach, mutual aid, and among Latinx youth.

Although it is not yet officially recognized by the Real Academia Española, inclusive language is <u>constantly</u> evolving!

When do you use the "e"?

1. Use it to **avoid assuming** the **gender** of a person.
2. Use it when referring to a **non-binary person.**
3. Use it when describing **mixed-gender groups.**
4. Use it only when talking about people—**not objects or animals.**

INCLUSIVE "–E"

Quick Grammar Changes for Inclusive "e"

Pronouns

Standard Spanish		Inclusive Spanish
él/ella	→	elle
nosotros/nosotras	→	nosotres
ellos/ellas	→	elles

Spanish Grammar Changes for words ending in...

Standard Spanish		Inclusive Spanish
-co / -ca	→	-que
-cos / cas	→	-ques
-go / -ga	→	-gue
-gos / -gas	→	-gues

Articles

Standard Spanish		Inclusive Spanish
el/la	→	le
los/las	→	les
un/una	→	une
unos/unas	→	unes

Adjective & Noun Examples

Standard Spanish		Inclusive Spanish
Hermano/a	→	Hermane
Bonito/a	→	Bonite

Inclusive Word Choice Strategies

Practical Uses

Community/Outreach

Be consistent! Consistent use of "-e" models' inclusion and helps normalize the form.

Formal/Legal

Match the setting. In context, consider neutral terms (personas, equipo) if "-e" may cause confusion.

Casual

Practice informally. Use it in greetings and daily speech (e.g., *Buenos días a todes*), so it feels natural!

1 **Use persona(s) to avoid gendered nouns.**
Replace traditionally gendered nouns with persona(s) to promote inclusivity.

2 **Use collective/neutral nouns.**
Avoid gendered group terms and choose terms that refer to groups without a gender. These terms are typically feminine or neutral in form but do not reference gendered individuals.

3 **Avoid and deconstruct gendered terms.**
Historically feminized roles can be described with gender-neutral language to avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

4 **Focus on the action when the subject is clear.**
When the subject is clear through context, you can shift the focus entirely to the action.

5 **Use *quien(es), nadie,* and *cada* to replace gendered terms. Avoid using todos/algunos.**
Words like todos and algunos default to the masculine form and unintentionally exclude others.

> **Inclusive language is most effective when it's intentional, flexible, and audience-aware!**

Warnings, Tips, and Contextual Awareness

Prioritize clarity & Be flexible.

Adapt to audience and region.

Be consistent, not mechanical.

Use "elle" and "-e" mindfully.

For questions or additional support, please contact us at languagessupport@crla.org.

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Inclusive "-e" Spanish Guide

Purpose

This guide sets out to provide CRLA staff, volunteers, and community partners with a practical resource to aid in understanding and using inclusive language in Spanish. The guide will pay particular attention to the **inclusive and gender-neutral use of the letter "-e"** while offering background, real-world use cases, tips, and strategies to ensure respectful communication that affirms all gender identities. This resource seeks to build and empower individuals in contexts where language shapes access, dignity, and trust.

Audience

The intended audience for this guide includes anyone at CRLA engaged in direct service, outreach, legal services, education, or community support. This may include community workers, attorneys, organizers, interpreters, and others. Additionally, this may serve as a helpful resource for any of CRLA's partner organizations and collaborators seeking to build inclusion and language equity.

What is Inclusive Spanish?

Inclusive Spanish emerged as a response to the inherently gendered nature of the Spanish language. For referring to mixed-gender or general groups, the masculine form of a word is oftentimes the default. Starting since the 1970s, feminists, scholars, and activists have pushed to challenge the norm, promoting equity for all individuals free from gender coding in both spoken and written forms.[1]

The rise of the digital age in the 1990s and early 2000s led to the initial use of symbols like "-@" (tod@s) and "-x" (todxs) for gender neutrality; however, these forms were simply difficult to pronounce and posed current issues for accessibility. This led to the development of the inclusive "-e" (todes) as a gender-neutral replacement, which proved to be more practical and pronounceable. Embraced by LGBTQ+ groups, community-based organizations across Latin America, and the U.S., the use of the inclusive "e" has gained significant traction since the mid-2010s.[2]

Currently, the inclusive "-e" is increasingly used in media, bilingual outreach, mutual aid networks, and social justice advocacy.[3] In particular, it has gained popularity among Latinx youth. While the use of the inclusive "-e" has not been formally recognized by the *Real Academia Española*, inclusive language continues to evolve in practice.[4] It is constantly shaped by real-world usage and by the work of advocates who promote greater accessibility and equity.

Using the Inclusive "-e"

This section explains when to use the inclusive "e," with a breakdown of changes to **pronouns**, **articles**, and overall **grammar**, followed by specific guidance for updating **nouns** and **adjectives**. Consider the following when you decide to use the inclusive "-e":

- Use it to avoid assuming the person's gender.
- Use it when referring to a non-binary person.
- Use it when describing mixed-gender groups.
- Use it only when referring to **people**, not objects or animals.[5]

Pronouns, Articles, and Grammar Changes:
The following table outlines the changes in **singular** and **plural** pronouns, articles, and grammar. Keep the following in mind:

- Some pronouns (*yo, tú, usted, ustedes*) are already gender-neutral and **do not require changes.**
- In most cases, the traditional **-o** and **-a** endings can be replaced with **-e**.
- Pay attention to exceptions and irregular words**, not every word changes the same way.**

Standard Spanish	Inclusive Spanish
Pronouns in Inclusive Spanish	
él/ella	*elle*
nosotros/nosotras	*nosotres*
ellos/ellas	*elles*
Articles in Inclusive Spanish	
el/la	*le*
los/las	*les*
un/una	*une*
unos/unas	*unes*
Spanish Grammar Changes	
-co / -ca	*-que*
-cos / -cas	*-ques*
-go / -ga	*-gue*
-gos / -gas	*-gues*

Adjectives and Nouns:
Similarly, nouns and adjectives follow the same change, replacing the **–o** and **–a** ending with **–e**.

Standard Spanish	Inclusive Spanish
Noun Examples	
hermano/hermana	*hermane*
amigo/amiga	*amigue*
Adjective Examples	
bonito / bonita	*bonite*
cansado / cansada	*cansade*

Inclusive Word Choice Strategies

Other strategies to promote inclusivity include addressing the use of the "generic masculine" through linguistic and grammatical alternatives. The generic masculine refers to the default use of masculine forms to describe any group—regardless of the presence of women or non-binary people.[6] While this section focuses on language used to describe groups, please feel free to adapt these concepts in your everyday communication.

1. Use *persona* (singular) or *personas* (plural) to avoid gendered nouns.

Replace traditionally gendered nouns (e.g., *hombre, alumno*) with ***persona(s)*** to promote inclusivity.

✘ *Los ciudadanos estadounidenses pueden votar.* → ☑ ***Las personas*** *con ciudadanía estadounidense pueden votar.*

2. Use collective/neutral nouns.

Avoid gendered group terms (e.g., *los doctores, los trabajadores)* and choose terms that refer to the group in a gender-neutral way. These terms are often feminine or neutral in form but do not reference gendered individuals.

✘ Los trabajadores exigen cambios. → ☑ La fuerza laboral exige cambios.	
Other Examples:	
✘ Los fiscales → ☑ La fiscalía	✘ Los abogados → ☑ La abogacía
✘ Los jueces → ☑ La judicatura	✘ Los doctores → ☑ El personal médico

3. Avoid and deconstruct gendered terms.

Many professions and roles associated with caretaking, cleaning, and teaching have been historically feminized and linked to women. Address this by using gender-neutral language that acknowledges the value of these roles without reinforcing gendered expectations.

✘ Las cocineras → ☑ El equipo de cocina	✘ Las maestras → ☑ El personal docente
✘ La enfermera → ☑ El personal de enfermería	✘ La niñera → ☑ Persona cuidadora infantil

4. Focus on the action when the subject is clear.

When the subject is clear from context, you can shift the focus to the action itself.

✘ Los estudiantes entregaron los paquetes de tarea. → ☑ Se entregaron los paquetes de tarea.

5. Use *quien(es)*, *nadie*, and *cada* to replace gendered terms—avoid using *todos* and *algunos.*

Words like *todos* and *algunos* default to the masculine form which can unintentionally exclude others. Instead, use gender-neutral words as *quien(es), nadie,* and *cada.*

✘ Todos aprobaron el examen. → ☑ Cada persona aprobó el examen.
✘ ¿Hay algunos que se oponen a la proposición? → ☑ ¿Hay quienes se opongan a la proposición?

Real World Use and Practical Applications.

Using the inclusive "-e" is most effective when it becomes part of your everyday speech. Start by incorporating it into simple greetings or group references, such as «Buenos días a *todes* » or *«querides colegas»*. Pair it with the inclusive word choice strategies above to reinforce equity in your communications. Consistency and clarity are key.

Setting is important to consider:

- **Community/outreach**: Consistent use of "-e" demonstrates inclusion and helps normalize the "-e."
- **Formal/legal**: Neutral terms (e.g., *quienes, personas, equipo*) may be more effective where the "-e" could cause confusion or is not officially recognized.
- **Casual**: Start practicing slowly in everyday conversations—e.g., with friends, at restaurants, cafés, or in the workplace— until it feels natural and second nature.

The following paragraph highlights CRLA's use of ==inclusive language==:

> *«El Cortito» era una azada de mango corto, o azadón como se le conoce comúnmente, que durante décadas obligó a ==les== trabajadores agrícolas a permanecer ==agachades== durante toda la jornada laboral en el Valle de Salinas. Esta posición ==les== ocasionaba lesiones debilitantes y permanentes en la espalda. Al mantener a ==les== trabajadores agrícolas agachades, «El Cortito» reafirmaba el dominio de ==les== empleadores sobre ==elles== y reforzaba el desprecio sistémico hacia su salud, ganándose así el apodo de «el brazo del diablo», como le llamaban ==les== trabajadores agrícolas.*

Tips, Cautions, and Contextual Awareness.

Inclusive language works best when it is intentional, flexible, and mindful of the audience. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Prioritize clarity and understanding**: Ask yourself: will my word choice affect someone's ability to understand me, or could it cause confusion? In settings where the "-e" may not be familiar, use clear gender-neutral terms like *personas, quienes*, or *equipo*.
- **Adapt to audience and region**: Reactions to the "-e" will vary. Some groups will embrace it, while others may resist. Listen, adjust, and aim for respectful, smooth communication.
- **Be consistent, not mechanical**: Inconsistent or performative use of the "-e" can feel insincere. Inclusive forms should be used intentionally but avoid forcing them into contexts where clarity may suffer.
- **Be flexible**: Depending on who you are talking to, the urgency, or the clarity of your message, you may need to switch between inclusive and standard usage.
- **Use "elle" and "-e" thoughtfully:** Use these forms for non-binary people and/or people who use *they/them* in English unless the individual instructs otherwise due to context (e.g., with people not previously aware of their gender identity) or for their safety.

The goal is not to apply "-e" in every possible instance, but to communicate in a way that respects and affirms all identities while maintaining clarity and integrity.

Further Reading:

If you are interested in learning more about the inclusive "-e" or inclusive language in general, the following articles and resources highlight how it has been received across the Spanish-speaking world. Spanish is a constantly evolving language, and as people continue to use it, contemporary trends and patterns will continue to emerge. Exploring how different countries approach language equity builds contextual awareness and helps create shared understanding.

- *Tú, yo, elle y el lenguaje no binario by Artemis López*
- *"Latinx" is growing in popularity. I made a comic to help you understand why. by Terry Blas*
- *A Brief History of Gender-Inclusive Spanish*
- *Proyecto Gender in Language*

Responses from the Spanish-speaking world:
- Mexico:
  - *¿Todos, todas, todes? Expertas responden sobre el lenguaje incluyente - UNAM Global*
    (Todos, todas, todes? Experts Respond on Inclusive Language - UNAM Global)
  - *¿Cómo es el nuevo formato único del acta de nacimiento certificada?*
    (¿What is the new standardized format of the certified birth certificate?)
- Chile:
  - *Guía de Lenguaje Inclusivo No Sexista*
    (Guide to Non-Sexist Inclusive Language)

Mini Glossary

Español estándar	Español inclusivo	Español estándar	Español inclusivo
Sustantivos:		**Adjetivos:**	
Abogado(a)	Abogade	Amparado(a)	Amparede
Acusado(a)	Acusade	Cansado(a)	Cansade
Administrador(a)	Administradore	Condenado(a)	Condenade
Asistente ejecutivo(a)	Asistente ejecutive	Conocido(a)	Conocide
Asociada(o)	Asociade	Detenido(a)	Detenide
Contador(a)	Contadore	Educado(a)	Educade
Coordinador(a)	Coordinadore	Entusiasmado(a)	Entusiasmade
Cuidador(a)	Cuidadore	Enfermo(a)	Enferme
Demandado(a)	Demandade	Informado(a)	Informade
Director(a)	Directore	Herido(a)	Heride
Dueño(a)	Dueñe	Hipoacúsicos	Hipoacúsiques
Ejecutivo(a)	Ejecutive	Justo(a)	Juste
Empleado(a)	Empleade	Juzgado(a)	Juzgade
Empleador(a)	Empleadore	Liberado(a)	Liberade
Jefe(a)	Jefe	Ocupado(a)	Ocupade
Legislador(a)	Legisladore	Orgulloso(a)	Orgullose
Licenciado(a)	Licenciade	Pequeño(a)	Pequeñe
Niño/a	Niñe	Protegido(a)	Protegide
No-binario(a)	No-binarie	Sordo	Sorde
Patrón(a)	Patrone	**Adjetivos neutros de género**	
Presidente(a)	Presidente	Culpable	
Reclutador(a)	Reclutadore	Fuerte	
Secretaria(o)	Secretarie	Inocente	
Supervisor(a)	Supervisore	Inteligente	
Técnico(a)	Técnique	Neutral	
Trabajador(a) comunitario(a)	Trabajadore comunitarie	Pobre	
Vicepresidente(a)	Vicepresidente	Responsable	
Sustantivos de género neutro:		Valiente	
Acusante	Analista		
Denunciante	Especialista		
Fiscal	Gerente		
Indígena	Litigante		
Migrante	Participante		
Personal	Representante		
Residente	Solicitante		
Testigo	Miembro		

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