# Inclusive Visualizations Guideline

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# Content

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# Introduction

For various reasons, including time and cost pressures, visualizations may be populated by quickly lifting from existing vector libraries, placing people without too much thought. This can sometimes result in stereotypical stories that may lack diversity or not provide an accurate representation relevant to the project location.

For this reason, we began thinking about how we can make our graphics tell more inclusive stories so that we can create diverse and inclusive visualizations.

This short guidance document for populating visuals explores the idea of considering the specific social context and context of place, bringing awareness to the impact of small details within images that can ultimately help portray a sense of appropriate diversity and inclusion.

The aim of this document is to prompt creators to consider how to populate visualizations carefully, illustrating a true representation of society and being thoughtful of the stories we choose to tell through our visual communication with clients and interested parties.

Most of our decision-making when creating will come from the message we want to send, and it's a lot easier to make these decisions if we as a practice truly believe in and focus on inclusivity. That way, these important values can be included in the production process as "critical" and not just a "nice to have."

Charlie, the Inclusive Visualizations Guidelines Ambassador, is here to take you through this short guidance document, exploring a few simple guidelines and prompts for creating inclusive imagery.

**Hi, I'm Charlie!**

# Inclusive Storytelling

Each opportunity to use imagery to create a more inclusive and welcoming experience for the end users we are designing for should be valued.

We are all limited to our own experiences, and it's not uncommon to naturally fall into the trap of representing things that are familiar to us. For example, a cis-gender, white, straight and young person is possibly more likely to represent the same type of person and experience in their work. Although improving, it's an unfortunate recurring sequence we see often and repeatedly in films, TV, advertising and more.

However, as designers, our work should represent the diversity in our communities and client groups. By drawing and presenting diversity, we can challenge socially ingrained biases about diversity.

It requires a conscious effort and rewiring of biases, often some that we may not recognize we have. We have pledged to commit to critically examining how we tell stories within visualizations, illustrations and graphics, and asks that all external collaborators involved in the visualization production process do so as well.

# What's The Story?

The people we choose to use in illustrations have an important role in communicating a narrative or story. We can break the below visualization down to show how even simple outlines of figures portray a message.



Let's take a look at this visualization...

# What's The Story?

**A** This figure could be male or female. They appear as if they are relaxing. If someone assumes this to be a heterosexual family unit, then this figure is possibly the dad and is having a break.

**B** This figure appears typically female: longer hair and slightly softer curves. They are holding a child. This person may be assumed to be a mother playing with a toddler.

**C** This figure appears like a child patient. They are on their own in their bed.

**D** This figure appears typically male: short hair, flat shoes, and possibly a doctor's coat or jacket. This person may be assumed to be the doctor entering the patient's room.
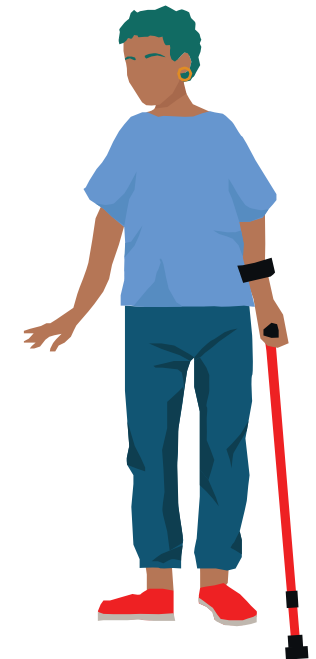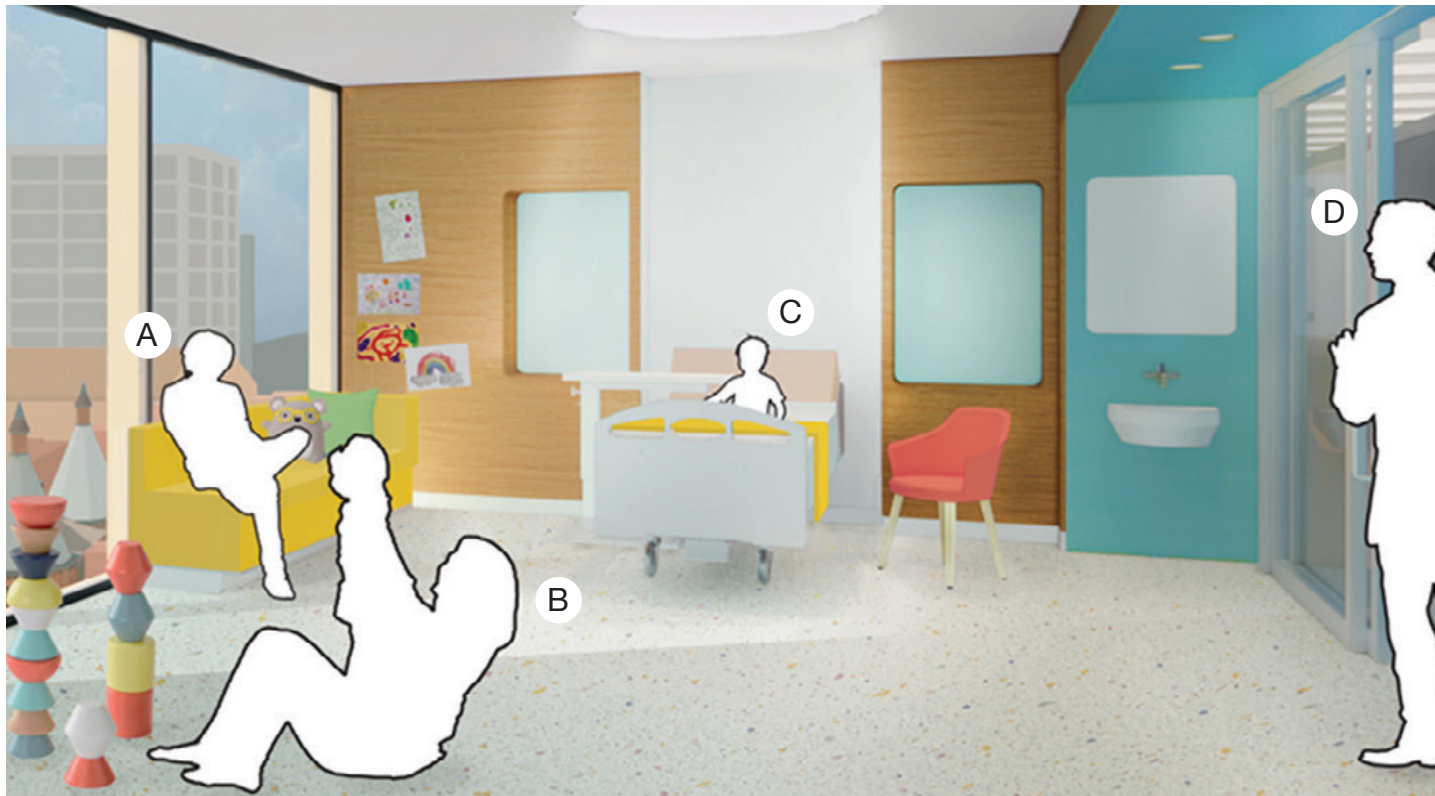
# Telling A Story...

As designers and creative thinkers, we can challenge which stories we choose to tell. This visualization challenges the previous one, which arguably presented existing stereotypes.

Let's review this visualization...

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# Telling A Story...

**A** This figure appears typically male. They have a beard. They are taking care of a child with short hair who could be male or female. They are reading a book with a pink cover.

**B** This figure appears to be a child patient. The patient is not on their own.

**C** This figure appears either male or female, the viewer may decide for themselves. The viewer can decide what type of family unit this represents to them, as the visual does not make strong suggestions.

**D** This figure appears typically female. They have darker skin and hair tied back. They look like they are a doctor, wearing scrubs and a stethoscope.
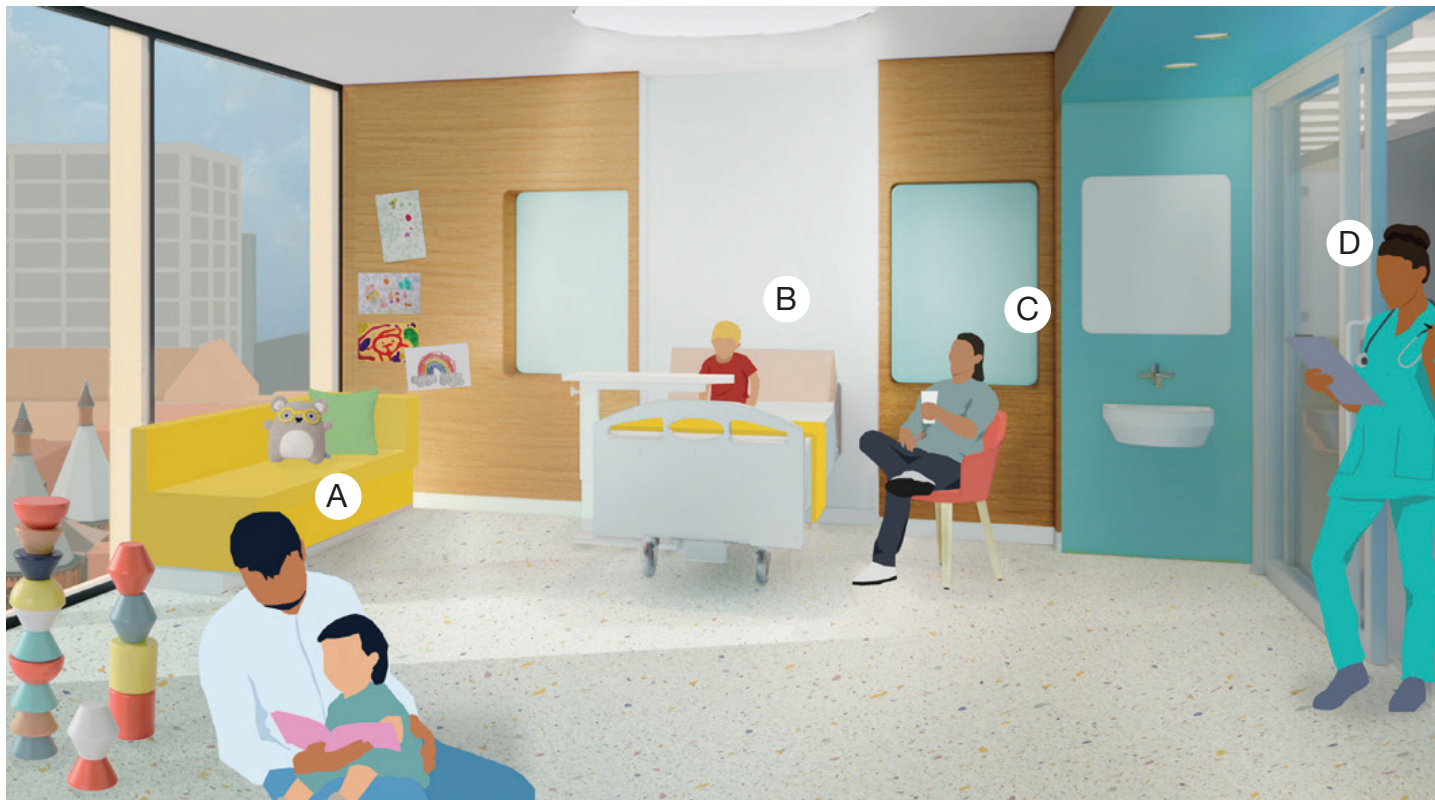
# Telling A Story...

This visual has a good mix of skin tones and suggested ethnicity. There are five characters, all with differing skin tones, but there is no representation of people with a disability. Therefore, this visualization could be improved even further.

# Suggested Guidelines

We have designed a set of suggested guidelines to follow and consider throughout the visualization creation process, which has been broken down into five key headings:

**1**   **Do your research**

**2**   **Represent all: be conscious of avoiding tokenism**

**3**   **Challenge stereotypes**

**4**   **Power in placement**

**5**   **Check and challenge**



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# Suggested Guidelines

**(1) Do your research: citywide demographics**

Look up the city/town-wide demographic data for your project location. This will allow for a more accurate representation of characters/types of people for the illustration. Try to proportionally represent the correct mix of demographics.

Using demographic-specific information such as age, gender, and marital status will help improve the inclusivity of your visualizations.

The websites listed on the right can be used to search for demographic-specific information across Canada and the United States.

**Canada:**
**statcan.gc.ca**

**United States:**
**data.census.gov**
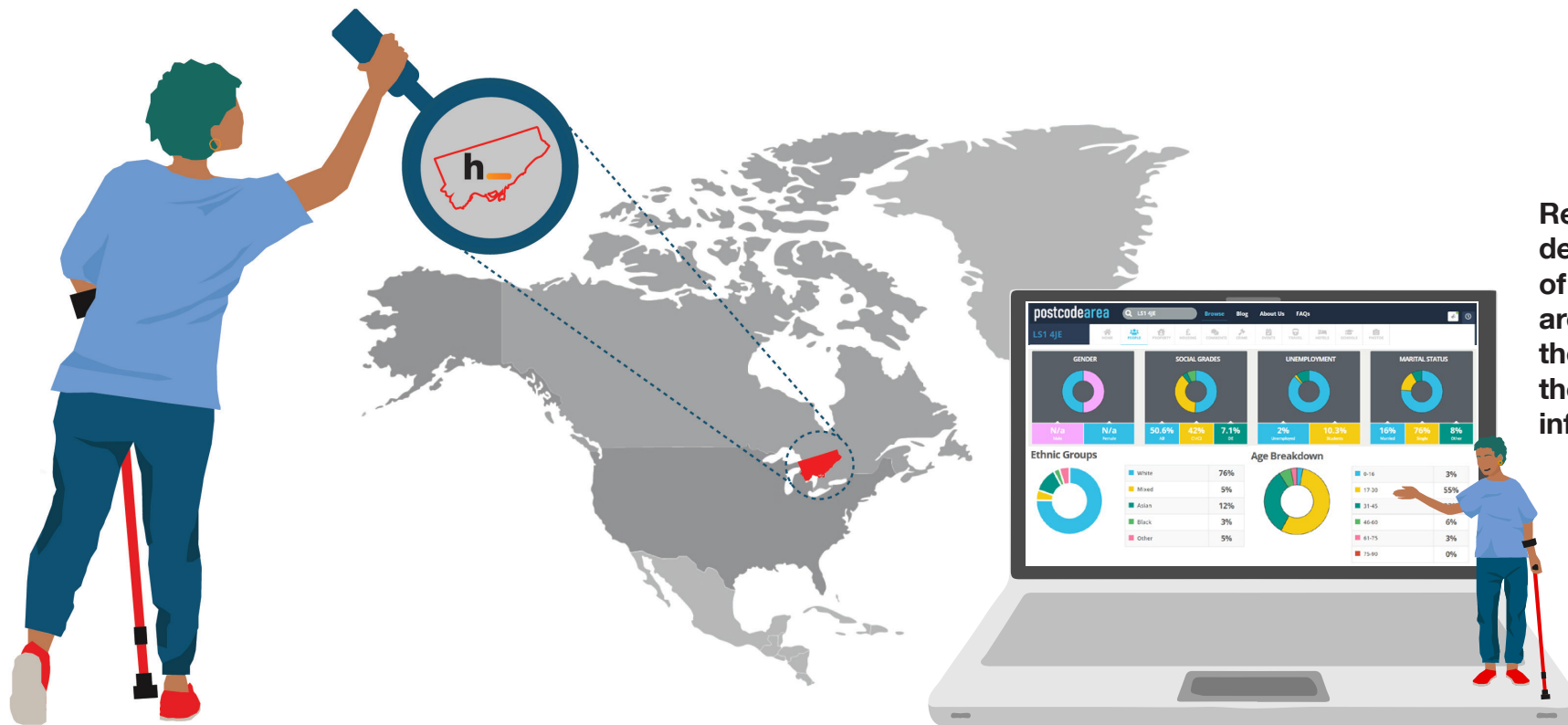
**Researching the demographics of the project area will inform the accuracy of the drawn information.**

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# Suggested Guidelines

**2**  **Represent All: be conscious of avoiding tokenism**

The point of diverse drawing and representation is to lift up marginalized communities by showing them and others the possibilities that exist for all types of people. When visualizations or drawings play into stereotypes only, even if the intent for diversity is there, they can have a counterproductive result. When drawings contradict stereotypes, they can empower those people who are hurt most by those particular stereotypes.
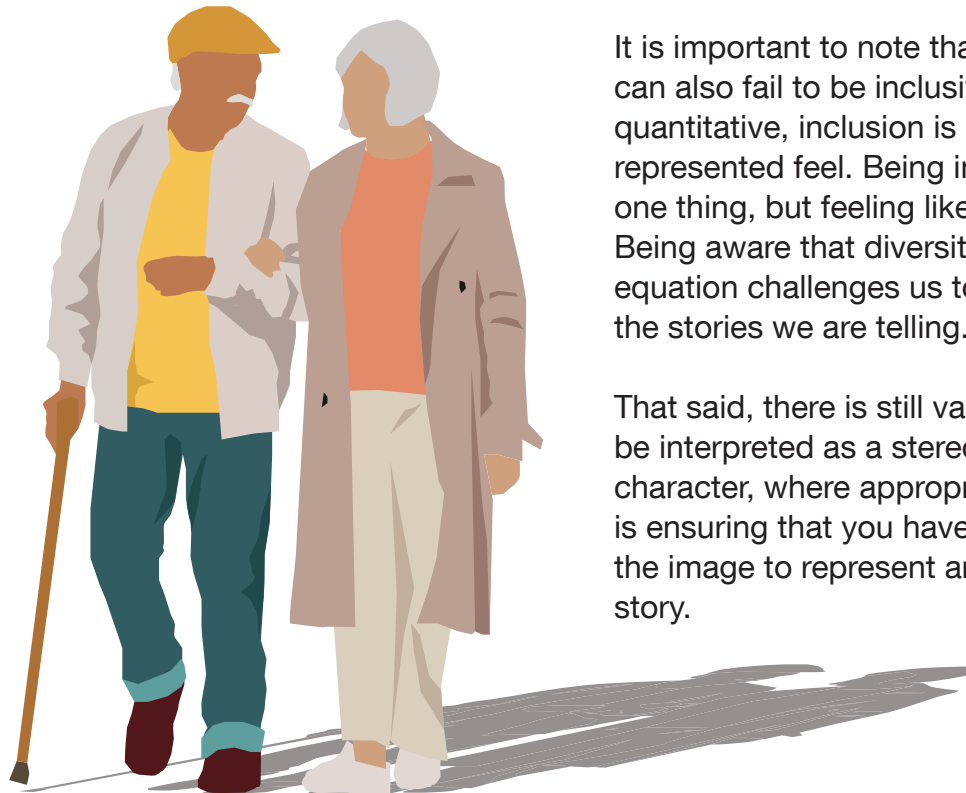
It is important to note that a diverse illustration can also fail to be inclusive. While diversity is quantitative, inclusion is more about how those represented feel. Being included in something is one thing, but feeling like you belong is another. Being aware that diversity is only one part of the equation challenges us to think more deeply about the stories we are telling.

That said, there is still value in illustrating what can be interpreted as a stereotypical situation or character, where appropriate. What is important is ensuring that you have challenged yourself and the image to represent an inclusive community or story.

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# Suggested Guidelines

③ **Challenge Stereotypes**

We believe that designers have a responsibility to question preconceived ideas when it comes to representing communities and populated environments. We must actively address our own biases and recognize what the common depiction of a certain role might be.

Illustrations and visualizations that consciously challenge stereotypes might not always reflect our reality today, but they assert and manifest that the future can be better.

If you need to illustrate a certain type of person, i.e. an elderly person, use the opportunity to challenge how they might be typically represented, if appropriate to the context of the image.

Possible stereotype of
an elderly person

Challenging the
stereotype

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# Suggested Guidelines

**③ Challenge Stereotypes**

Both of these images illustrate the suggestion of parenting/childcare, but the image on the left conveys a stereotypical role of a mother, caring for a child unaccompanied. The image on the right challenges the typical assumption of parents, suggesting a male couple with their family.

Possible stereotype of a
parenting/childcare role

Challenging the
stereotype

# Suggested Guidelines

**(4) Power in Placement: who has the power?**

When we create an illustration or visualization with multiple people, we are also creating the power dynamics between them. This responsibility we have as designers or creatives should not be taken faintly, and we should consciously ask ourselves questions.

We often see minority groups being side-lined when it comes to representation, and certain stereotypes being made the focus of drawings. Asking ourselves what types of people these may be, and keeping a critical lens on our own work will help us evolve and grow into more inclusive visualizers.

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# Suggested Guidelines

**4** **Power in Placement: who has the power?**

This visual has a good mix of skin tones and suggested ethnicity. That said, there is power in where people are positioned.



**Let's review this visualization...**

# Suggested Guidelines

**④ Power in Placement: who has the power?**

**A** There are many pairings of people of different ethnicities having positive interactions of play and chatting.

**B** These three characters are the most dominant in the visualization and they are all white, young and have no perceivable disabilities.

**C** There is an older couple doing something active.



Although this visualization illustrates a diverse community in terms of demographics and circumstance, emphasis is placed on the least diverse and inclusive part of the visualization.

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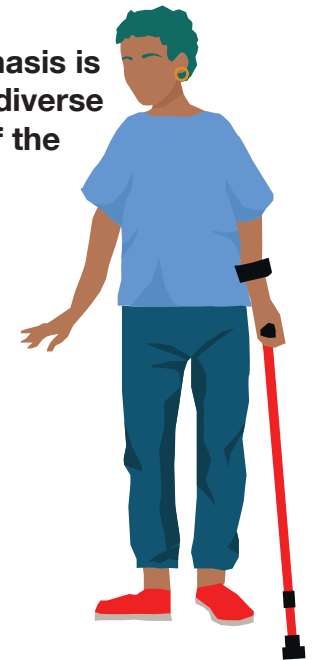
**4** **Power in Role: who has the power?**

If a level of hierarchy is necessary to communicate a concept or situation within a visualization, use the opportunity to represent diversity in social structures.

Both the illustrations here show a balance of diversity, but the image at the top conveys an unbalanced power dynamic where an implied white male businessman presents information to a passive implied woman of colour.

In the bottom image, the narrative is flipped, and the person of colour is in the position of higher authority.
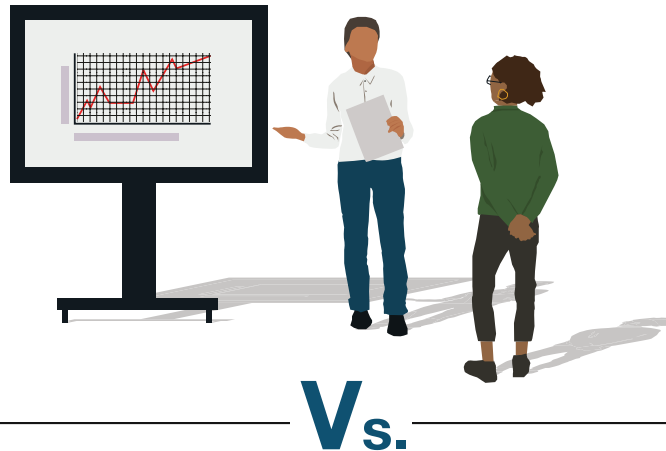


**Vs.**

# Suggested Guidelines

**5** **Check and Challenge**

Drawing and creating a truly diverse and inclusive image is not a one-time process, but an ongoing process that requires creatives to constantly reflect and improve. Sharing work with others helps to recognize patterns in your work that you may otherwise miss. When reviewing a drawing or visualization, start by asking:

**?** Does this embrace a range of ethnicities, cultures and perspectives?

**?** Do the visualizations feel genuine and trustworthy?

**?** Are the visualizations or graphics biased to my own experience and background?

**?** Will this exclude or offend someone?

**?** Does this promote existing stereotypes or challenge them?

**?** Am I encouraging a better, more inclusive vision of the future?

**Take a step back and check the visualization.**

# In Practice

This is quite a simple street scene. Consideration for demographics in the neighbourhood have been reviewed and people from a range of ethnicities, gender and age groups have been represented.

However, there are a few opportunities that have some potential to be challenged.



**Let's put the guidelines into practice by making minimal changes to an existing visualization...**

# In Practice

There is a woman walking alone pushing a pushchair or stroller - a similar circumstance to the one presented earlier. The elderly man on a mobility scooter is another typical stereotype aimed towards older generations. He is also in a position of power in the visualization, being very much in the foreground.



SHOP    CAFE

# In Practice

The woman pushing the stroller has been swapped out for a male caring for a child. A white man sitting at the table has been swapped out for what could be interpreted as a woman breastfeeding in a wheelchair. The elderly man in a mobility scooter has been swapped out for a pair of active older adults.

**Small alterations can make a big difference in making a visualization feel more inclusive and move away from stereotypical assumptions.**

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# In Practice

This visualization may present opportunities to further improve the inclusivity it is illustrating. However, this example aims to demonstrate how just a few simple alterations can make a big difference to the story being told.



**Vs.**

**Through these simple steps, we can create more diverse and inclusive imagery.**
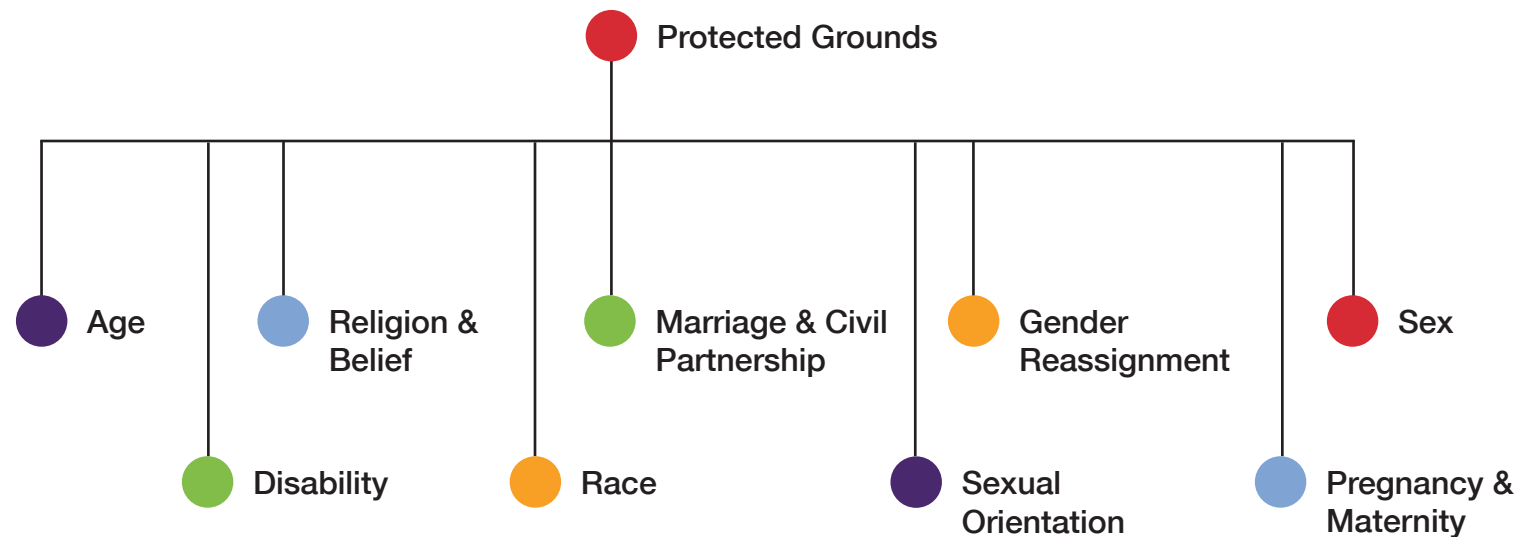
# Considering the Protected Grounds

Let's work to recognize our own biases by creating context appropriate visualizations in contradiction to societal norms so that we're intentional about depicting a more inclusive visualization. Considering age, race, height, weight, ability, gender, and religious signifiers should all come into play when we think about who is included in a visualization.

The presented graphic includes initial considerations to be recognized when using provincial or state legislation as guidelines to begin to challenge typical stereotypes and embrace different people and perspectives.

Protected Grounds

Age

Religion & Belief

Marriage & Civil Partnership

Gender Reassignment

Sex

Disability

Race

Sexual Orientation

Pregnancy & Maternity

# Considering the Protected Grounds

## Age

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• All age groups - newborn to older adults
• "Young old and Old old"

**Additional Considerations - How to depict**

• Show being active and relaxed
• Show in groups with not only people of same age
• Remember our intersectionality - difference in race, background and appearance

## Disability

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• Range of visible disabilities
• Persons using mobility devices
• Persons with a service dog and or white cane
• Persons with artificial limbs
• Persons of short stature (consider proportions of head to body)
• Person wearing headphones - subtle reference to person managing sensory environment

**Additional Considerations - How to depict**

• Show being active
• Engaged within a group of people without and without visible disabilities
• Intersectionality

## Religion & Belief

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• Show people wearing headscarves, turbans, kippahs
• Consider clothing outside the Western realm, e.g. turbans, Punjabi kurta pyjama, sarees

**Additional Considerations - How to depict**

• Show an integrated mix of people wearing a range of clothing from different cultures and religions.
• Remember our intersectionality as it relates to ability, disability, age, etc.

# Considering the Protected Grounds

## Race

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• Show a range of race and colour
• See "Religion and Belief" comments

**Additional Considerations - How to depict**

• Remember our intersectionality - consider race and colour are represented through the various equity-deserving groups (i.e. columns 1 and 2).

## Marriage and Civil Partnership

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• Be mindful of stereotypical roles assigned to genders and consider challenging them, i.e., who is offering childcare
• Be mindful of how gender is typically represented - appearance, hairstyle, clothing, body language
• Cis-gender representation and non-binary representation
• i.e. feminine body with masculine features (possible short hair), neutral clothing; neutral features and neutral clothing (non-binary); masculine body, masculine features, and feminine clothing

**Additional Considerations - How to depict**

• Remember our intersectionality
• Mixed-race couples,
• Mixed ability couples,
• A range of body sizes

## Sexual Orientation

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• See "marriage and civil partnership"

# Considering the Protected Grounds

## Gender Reassignment / Gender Expression

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• Be mindful of stereotypical roles assigned to genders and consider challenging them, i.e., who is offering childcare
• Be mindful of how gender is typically represented - appearance, hairstyle, clothing, body language
• Cis-gender representation and non-binary representation
• i.e. feminine body with masculine features (possible short hair), neutral clothing; neutral features and neutral clothing (non-binary); masculine body, masculine features, and feminine clothing

## Pregnancy & Maternity

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• Show pregnant people and people breastfeeding

**Additional Considerations - How to depict**

• Remember our intersectionality
• Parents with disabilities - either breastfeeding or supporting a pregnant parent

## Sex

**Considerations for Populating Imagery (Who)**

• See "Pregnancy and maternity"

# An Ever-growing Resource

This is a "living document" that will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. If you have any questions or feedback regarding this document and our approach to creating inclusive and diverse visualizations, please email:

**info@humanspace.global**

**Thanks for stopping by!**

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