# Best Practice arts language

The words we use to describe ourselves, our work and our communities can be personal, political, and can change over time. The arts sector is often at the forefront of this change.

A best practice approach respects and uses the terms that a group or individual uses to describe themselves. This is a working document of some of those terms:

- The use of '**First Nations**' or '**First Peoples**' is increasing in Australia, as opposed to the lengthy 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' (which doesn't reflect the sovereignty of Australia's First Peoples), 'Aboriginal' (which doesn't reflect the diversity of Australia's First Peoples, or connect mainland communities to those from the Torres Strait Islands), or 'Indigenous' (which is not used specifically in reference to people). 'First Nations' or 'First Peoples' also connects the Australian experience with that of the First Peoples of other countries.

- According to the Social Model of Disability, the use of '**disabled people/person**' (as opposed to 'people/person with disabilities') refers to being disabled by social and environmental factors (the 'what's wrong with the world?' / stares or stairs model) as opposed to an individual's condition or impairment (the 'what's wrong with you?' / Medical Model). This rights-based language is starting to be seen as the minimum standard for arts and disability practice in Australia (including by funders).

- Similarly, using the term '**learning-disabled people/person**' in its Social Model context refers to the barriers faced in the process of learning, as opposed to 'people with learning disabilities/difficulties' or 'intellectually-disabled people', which focus on the individual or impairment (Medical Model).

- '**Community-engaged practice**' is emerging as a contemporary alternative to 'community arts and cultural development' and other similar terms. It helps to encapsulate non-artistic as well as artistic outcomes (even if those outcomes are achieved using art as a tool), avoids the negative connotations of 'community arts', and provides a distinction from 'community-led practice' for organisations that are not majority-led or governed by the communities they represent.

- Use the words **'us', 'we' and 'our'** to refer to the arts organisations that you're involved with. It helps to reinforce the ownership and obligation of the organisation shared by staff and Board - you do not help the organisation ('them' / 'it'), you *are* the organisation ('us' / 'we' / 'our').

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