



Deep Center Guide for Person-First Reporting

Deep Center is proud to have good relationships with our media partners and always seek out opportunities to highlight the work our community is doing. However, over the years, we've seen our young people and larger community get reduced down to a simple soundbite. Here's ways we think we can be better.

Connect with our people: Create relationships with us in a meaningful way. Talk to our people about the work they've been doing in their community. Deep is made up of a tightly woven tapestry of people, families, organizations, and histories. We don't seek to show our organization as a single powerful entity, or to portray Deep's successes as solely the result of internal effort, but rather seeks to highlight the efforts and importance of the community at large, and Deep's vital place within it.

Be curious and don't come with a story pre-written: Learn about what young people and the village around them are facing, including who is disproportionately affected and how. Their lived experiences make them experts of that.

Root-Cause Analysis: We believe that the people are not the problem, the problem is the problem. In an inequitable ecosystem that is the product of an unjust history, putting the burden of change only on young people and vulnerable populations ignores their day-to-day realities, sets them up to fail, and misses the root causes of their challenges. A clear-eyed approach focuses on strengthening not simply young people, but the village around them and the unjust structures at odds with their well-being.

Don't rely on old tropes: Images of police line tape, images that denote "broken neighborhoods," mugshots, etc. Images are powerful and tell as much of a story as words. There is a pernicious history in the South and we won't pretend that the harmful narratives we've seen do not still exist in how people are portrayed.

No simple stories and no tokenizing. We often see our people whittled down to the worst thing that's ever happened to them; the worst thing they have ever done; or their charge. We believe in assets-based framing, meaning, our people live nuanced lives. Our community possesses unique funds of knowledge and inherent strengths. We insist on lifting up these assets in external and internal messaging, even when there is immense struggle or entrenched systemic barriers. We strongly encourage journalists to not reduce people down to their charges or their experience as a directly impacted person, and instead, look at the conditions surrounding them and whether or not those systems are fair and just. No one is just one thing.

No Saviors allowed: Young people are not broken. They come to us full of life and history. We aren't saving our youth. They save themselves. We simply give them space and resources to tell their stories and be empowered to be engaged in civic change.

Be mindful of justice-impacted youth and adults: Our young people and adults who have been through the justice system face a myriad of barriers due to their involvement in the justice system. When it is publicly revealed they have been arrested for a certain offense, it puts their future at-risk with a simple internet search. We recommend using first names only, initials, and not asking about their record if they are under the age of 18. If they do volunteer their record or it is agreed upon to share their record in an interview, it is mandatory that they are only identified by first name or initial. For adults, we defer to how they prefer to identify, whether anonymously, by initial, or fully and proudly.

Don't assume what a young person's gender, racial or ethnic identity is: We believe that young people have the right and should be provided the opportunity to self-describe their identities. Unless a young person has directly communicated to you what pronouns or terms they use to describe themselves or such descriptors were provided to you directly by a Deep staff member or Deep Center publication, we recommend using gender-neutral language and being thoughtful of how other categorizations are ascribed to our young people. If you feel stuck about using gender-neutral language, there are many free resources for journalists online or feel free to ask us.

Use Person First Language: Language is important and words have tremendous power. Both Deep and our fellow journalists know this in our bones. People first language emphasizes just that—putting the person first. So an example would be 'people who are undocumented' or 'people who are historically underserved'. We do this to underscore our common humanity, even among different groups. That's why it's important for us to use language that doesn't define a person down to one label, and instead describes one facet of their identity. Some examples include:

Instead of:	Try:
Kid Child Student	Youth, young people, or young person Young artist or youth artist Young writer or author
Teacher	Educator Note: <i>There may be times where we want to be more specific than 'educator.'</i> If that is the case, be as specific and comprehensive as possible, thinking about all the adults who may be part of the context of what you are writing about. For example, name general and special education teachers and consider the presence/inclusion of paraprofessionals, reading/math coaches, ESOL teachers, and other support staff (e.g. social workers, school psychologists and school counselors - which are <u>not</u> called guidance counselors in GA)
Offender Convict or ex-convict Felon or Criminal	Justice-impacted or justice-involved Formerly incarcerated Returning citizen
At-risk Underprivileged Inner-city Urban youth Gang member	Placed at risk Historically underserved Disenfranchised Low-wealth, low-income, <u>X</u> at heightened risk for <u>y</u>

Homeless	Marginalized Gang-involved Unhoused
Illegal immigrant, alien	Undocumented, A person who's off paper