Use of Language in our Projects and Inclusive Technology Terminology

We are moving to inclusive terminologies whenever possible. The terms "blacklist" and "whitelist" reinforce the incorrect notion that "white" is good and "black" is bad – That Word Black, and the terms "master" and "slave" not only have racist connotations, but are often imprecise.

We're making these changes because words make a difference. We avoid using words in our projects that are imprecise, glorify violence, or are reminiscent of concepts that evoke disrespect. Moreover, certain terms don't translate well when used in other contexts. We find that thinking about the words we use helps us communicate with more clarity and with more people.

The table below lists the technical terminology changes we will make (**bold** for terms we've reached consensus on). It is most important to **stop** using the old term, and pick the most specific new term that applies to your system.

[PLEASE ADD NEW TERMS TO SECOND TABLE AT THE END OF THE DOCUMENT]

Old term	Replacement
whitelist	**allowlist** [also used: include list]
blacklist	**denylist** [also used: blocklist]
master [git]	**main** (this will be the default branch name for new repositories) [also used: mainline]
master [elsewhere]	**primary** [also used: leader | principal | base | parent | global | source]
master [database]	**source** | **relay** [also used: primary]
slave [elsewhere]	**replica** | **agent** | **follower** | **secondary** | **worker**
slave [database]	**terminus** [also used: **replica**]
whitehat	**ethical hacker**
blackhat	**malicious hacker**
whitebox	**open box** | transparent

blackbox	**closed box** | opaque
man hours	**hours of labor** | person hours | work hours | time committed | labor hours
brownbag	lunch and learn | meet-up | knowledge share | info session
blackout [like blackout dates]	**moratorium** | restricted dates | blockout
scrum master	**scrum leader**

Explanation of database terminology to avoid confusion:
https://confluence.vzbuilders.com/display/MYSQL/Terms+for+Database+Server+Identification

Words make a difference, and we'd rather get the words right so that our engineering teams can make awesome technology together. We care about people and creating great code. By using precise labels and words, we can avoid confusion and insensitivities while also improving our professionalism.

FAQ (in progress, please suggest)

Where can I discuss these changes?

Please comment on this document. The discussion here has been very useful to help everyone's understanding. We also have a slack channel: #inclusive-terminology-core

How were these terms defined/decided upon?

The ERG Tech Council (ETC), which is made up of individuals across the nine employee resource groups who hold technical roles at Verizon Media. We walked through the terms outlined in the document as a group and decided whether or not they could prove problematic either across the population or for individual groups based on historical context, either via direct implication (master/slave) or association (brown bag). Additionally, approached the leads of NAPV, Verizon's ERG for Native American and Indigenous Peoples, on topics such as "native" and "chief".

When do we want to make this change?

For **new projects and systems**, please immediately move away from the non-inclusive terminology (there may be exceptions due to software dependencies). For existing software, we should aim to complete the effort in the earliest possible time frame.

If changing terminology will have significant downstream impact or greatly impact roadmaps, do your best. We understand some systems will take longer to update. At the very least, try to update your system's documentation.

How will we track progress?

We will canvass teams for changes they plan to make and track progress weekly.

How do we make changes in Software we didn't write?

Update documentation and any wrapper scripts to use inclusive terms. For example, while we can't change MySQL's term for slave today, we can eliminate the use of "slave" in our own documentation and scripts that manage MySQL deployments. When talking about the concept, use "replica". If you have a contact within an organization that has the ability to initiate change, open a discussion with them.

Sample update:
Note: Verizon Media is making an effort to use inclusive terminology, and has submitted a request to [vendor] to do the same. In the meantime, this documentation will use "new term" instead of "old term," though you may see "old term" in screenshots until the tool is updated.

The term "master" in adjective form means "being or relating to an original from which duplicates are made". Is that problematic? Is a gold master record or to re-master a movie equally problematic?

There is almost always a more precise term than "master". For example, with YCB, there is a "master" configuration section. It's unclear what that section means. Using the term "base" would convey that this configuration serves as the *foundation*, which environment specific configuration override. The clearest, most precise and descriptive, least ambiguous term should always take precedence,

Similarly for concepts like <u>Master Data Management (MDM)</u>, Scrum Master (when it refers to the certification) and other industry recognized terms, it won't be possible to change them in the short term. Terms like "slave" are never okay, where Master is used more broadly and will take longer to be removed from our lexicon.

Why is "Scrum Master" a non-inclusive term?

Because the Agile Alliance has a copyright on this word, we are not going to make an attempt to change language around the certification itself, meaning that any job reqs or other formal references would remain unchanged. However, the way that the term is used within the corporation is around a mastery not of the scrum process, but of the scrum group, meaning that it falls into the same pitfalls that the generic term master does.

Because many who take the scrum master role are engineers running feature teams, using the term **scrum leader** is more reflective of their actual duties.

How are other companies addressing this?

Google has put together a [style guide](#) for terminology, and is [updating](#) Chrome to match.

Buffer has put together an excellent document: [An Incomplete Guide to Inclusive Language for Startups and Tech](#).

As well as the IETF: [Terminology, Power and Oppressive Language](#)

And Twitter: https://twitter.com/TwitterEng/status/1278733305190342656

And Linux: https://www.theregister.com/2020/07/13/linux_adopts_inclusive_language/

And Apple: https://www.cnet.com/news/apple-banishes-blacklist-and-master-branch-in-push-for-inclusive-language/

Changing Terminology in my system will have significant downstream impact or greatly impact roadmaps?

Do your best. While we want the vast majority of changes complete by July 10th, we understand some systems will take longer to update. At the very least, update your system's documentation.

What should we do for code bases that aren't actively maintained?

Leave these as-is. Once development resumes, use that as an opportunity to update the terminology. Consider updating the documentation if the component is used by others.

What should we do for systems automatically generating words (e.g. Enterprise Password Portal), that can offer triggering words like "noose"?
If the system generates words string coded by Verizon Media, the systems owner should review the list of words (or ask the Inclusive Terminology core team to do so) to ensure potentially triggering, unprofessional, and inappropriate words are removed from the database.

Why is "Brown Bag" a non-inclusive term?

Brown paper bags have been used in the past to judge a person's skin color. From [Brown Paper Bag](#) on Wikipedia:

From 1900 until about 1950, "paper bag parties" are said to have taken place in neighborhoods of major American cities with a high concentration of African Americans. Many churches, fraternities, and nightclubs used the "brown paper bag" principle as a test for entrance. People at these organizations would take a brown paper bag and hold it against a person's skin. If a person was lighter than the bag, they were admitted. People whose skin was not lighter than a brown paper bag were denied entry.

Additionally, this is a colloquial term that doesn't necessarily translate well into other contexts or languages. We feel a more precise term should be used instead.

What about the term "native"?

For the term "native", the meaning of the word is considered acceptable for a couple of reasons. First: there is no negative implication around an ad being a native ad — as compared to terms like black/white list where there is a negative connotation with the use of "black" (we block or deny those requests) and a positive connotation with the use of "white" (we allow or accept those requests). Second, the term "native" as it refers to an advertisement is the actual definition of the word itself — belonging to the content in which it appears.

However, to be clear, the recommendation here is to refer to native advertisements/advertising explicitly as "native ads" (as opposed to just "native").

What's the point? Is anyone actually offended by the terminology we're changing?

The short answer is that it doesn't really matter how many people are offended. When we discover that the words we use are imprecise or could have negative connotations, we should instead choose words that are more precise and avoid those words with bad connotations.

We don't really know whether anyone is actually offended because we wouldn't necessarily receive that information. Even if someone is explicitly offended (as opposed to vague discomfort), they might reasonably decide that raising the issue is unlikely to result in any actual change. We can't afford to lose anyone's contribution, especially over things such as words that are easily changed.

The value of choosing new terminology is that it is proof positive that we are listening, growing, and changing in response. The effort to change is likely a low, one-time expense. No one believes that just changing terminology will itself cure ills; however, tiny amounts of value accumulate!

I'm seeing Slackbot messages about inclusive terminology. How does that work?

In order to help remind folks of the more inclusive terminology that we are asking people to use, Slack auto-responders have been created for the following terms: "redis slave",

"whitelist", "blacklist", "mysql slave", "whitehat", "whitebox", "blackbox", "blackhat hacker", "whitehat" checker.

We haven't created auto-responders for all terms given a term like "slave" or "blackout" can be used in non-technical conversations. If you have suggestions, please add a comment here.

August 1 NOTE: The terms are finalized. Feel free to continue adding to this section if you'd like, but they will not be considered at this point for the first pass of this project.

Scratch area for other areas to consider:

Terms to discuss (the terms we already determined we will not remove have been stricken):

Old term	Replacement
~~owner~~	~~custodian	keeper	steward~~
~~white paper~~	~~in-depth analysis	writeup	thought leadership paper~~
~~Native~~	~~built-in	in-house	organic~~
~~White space~~	~~Space character~~
~~a black and white issue~~	~~this or that issue	simple issue	binary issue~~
~~Black sheep~~	~~Outlier |~~
~~steady drumbeat~~	~~Steady Stream |~~
~~postmaster/webmaster/hostmaster email alias in RFCs 2142 and 5321~~	
~~Fat finger~~	~~Typo~~
~~White label~~	~~Parent company~~
Sanity Check	Confidence Check	Quick Check	Gut Check
Dummy Value	Placeholder Value	Sample Value
~~North Star~~	~~Target	Goal~~
Whiteglove	Concierge (other ideas?)

Some guidelines: [please refer to summary below, our attempt will be to unify this approach across participating organizations]

- **List names:** Please use *denylist / allowlist* or *blocklist / clearlist* instead of *blacklist / whitelist* as they more clearly convey the intent of the list.
- **Idioms:** many phrases don't translate well across cultures. Please use *primary / secondary* instead of *master / slave*. Alternatively, `leader`, `base`, `main`, `parent` better represent a primary instance and `follower`, `secondary`, `replica`, `contingent`, or `reserve` represent a dependent entity.
- **Branch names:** Per the above, we ask engineers to change the wording on Git branches so that the default branch is labeled something other than `master`. Common options are `default`, `main`, `trunk`, `production`, and `release`.
  If you rename the default branch in GitHub Enterprise or on github.com, please be aware that tooling that relies on which branch you are using as the default may also need to be changed. Some examples would be Screwdriver, Jenkins, Jira, etc.
- **Industry terms**: Although `whitehat` and `blackhat` hackers are terms adopted in the industry, we refer to the activity as `ethical hacking` and `malicious hacking`. We will still use `red team` and `blue team` to refer to their common uses in the cybersecurity industry.
- **Casual honorifics:** We avoid calling people `coding ninjas`, `gurus`, or `rockstars` and appreciate their team contributions without using terms that are imprecise.
- **Harsh terms:** unless referring to the actual `kill` command, we'll use terms that refer to the conclusion of the process: e.g. cancel, end, exit, or stop. Similarly we'll avoid terms that evoke violence, weaponry, or hatred unless contextually applicable, e.g. 'mash the off button', 'hit the on button' become 'click OFF', 'select ON'.
- **Inadvertent meaning:** Some words do not translate well to different languages and may even refer to a concept that means something significant to other people, and distracts from the project. Please let <us> know by <doing action> so we can evaluate a correction.