

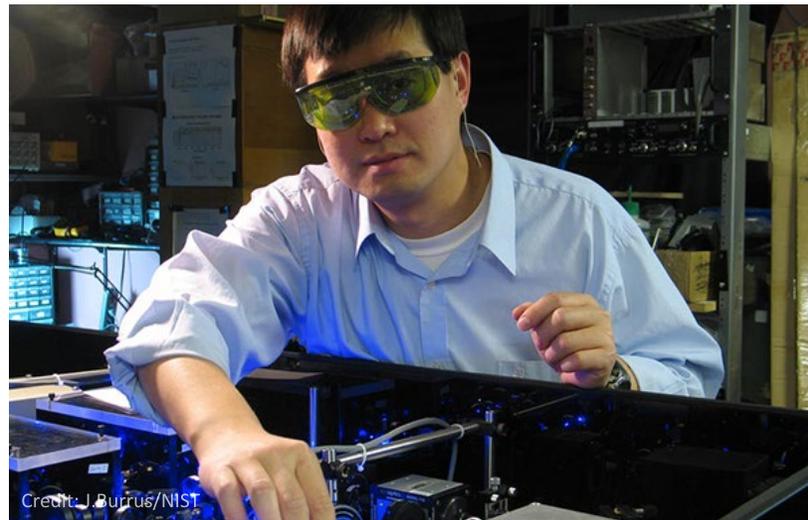
Inclusive Language in NIST Technical Series Publications

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Where it started

There is language in technology and standards publications that is exclusionary, biased, and harmful.

Loaded terms: Technology professionals have long used “whitelist” and “blacklist” for certain software rules, along with “master” and “slave” to describe the control relationship between hardware components. The ISPAB plans to formally urge agencies to abandon these and other terms that evoke the legacy of oppression that the Black community has experienced.

In June, against the backdrop of the [Black Lives Matter protests](#), engineers at social media platforms, coding groups and international standards bodies re-examined their code and asked themselves: Was it racist? Some of their databases were called “masters” and were surrounded by “slaves,” which received information from the masters and answered queries on their behalf, preventing them from being overwhelmed. Others used “whitelists” and “blacklists” to filter content.

Microsoft’s [GitHub](#), a popular software-development platform with 50 million users, will replace the word *master* as the default branch name for new repositories, a spokesperson says. GitHub is also making it easy for users to choose their own default branch name when creating a new repository and is releasing guidance to rename existing ones, the spokesperson says. There’s never been a complementary use of *slave* in GitHub’s repository architecture.

Agency to end use of technology terms such as 'master' and 'slave' over racist associations

Technology professionals have long used “whitelist” and “blacklist” for software, and “master” and “slave” for hardware.

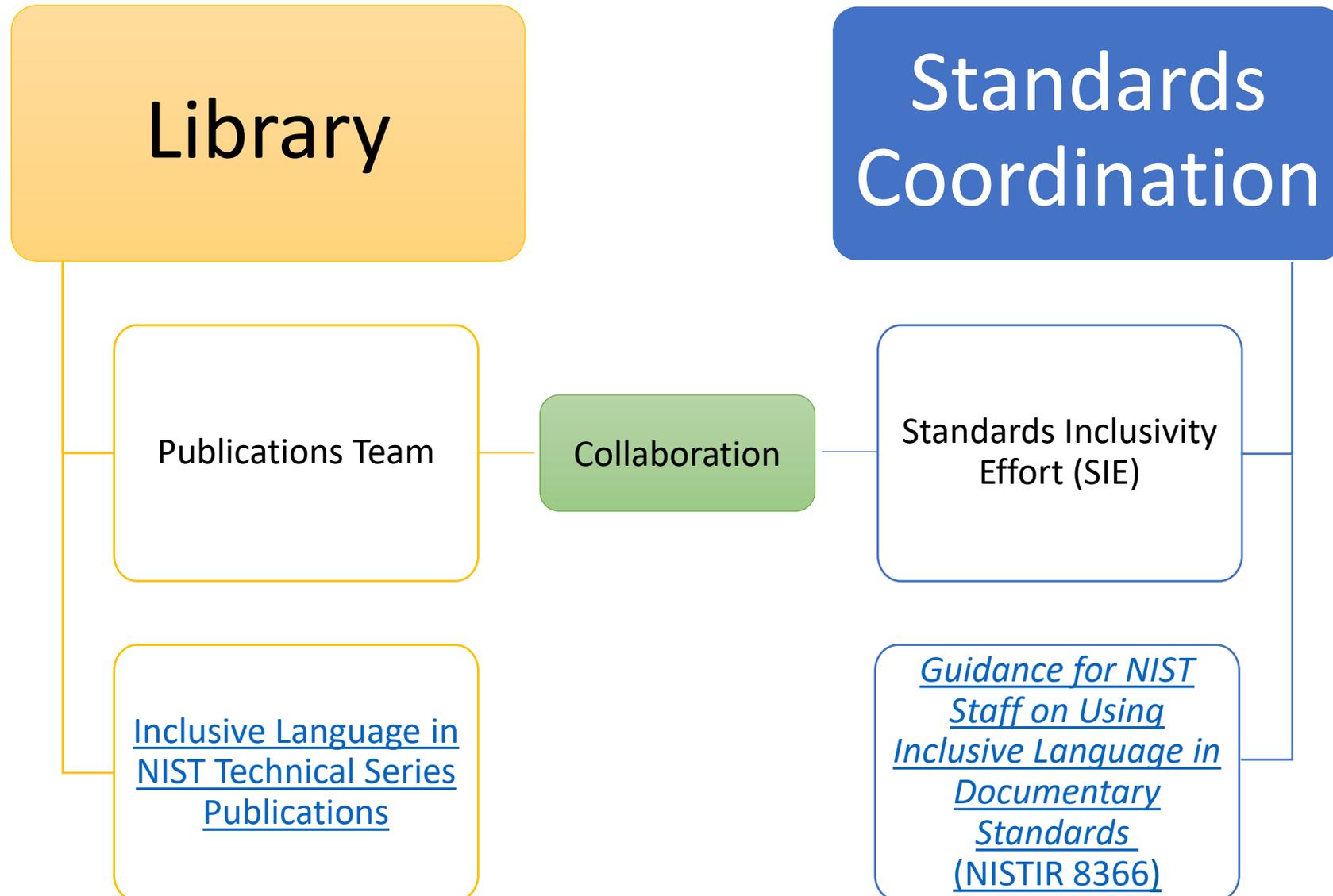


The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology building. | Dana Romanoff/Getty Images

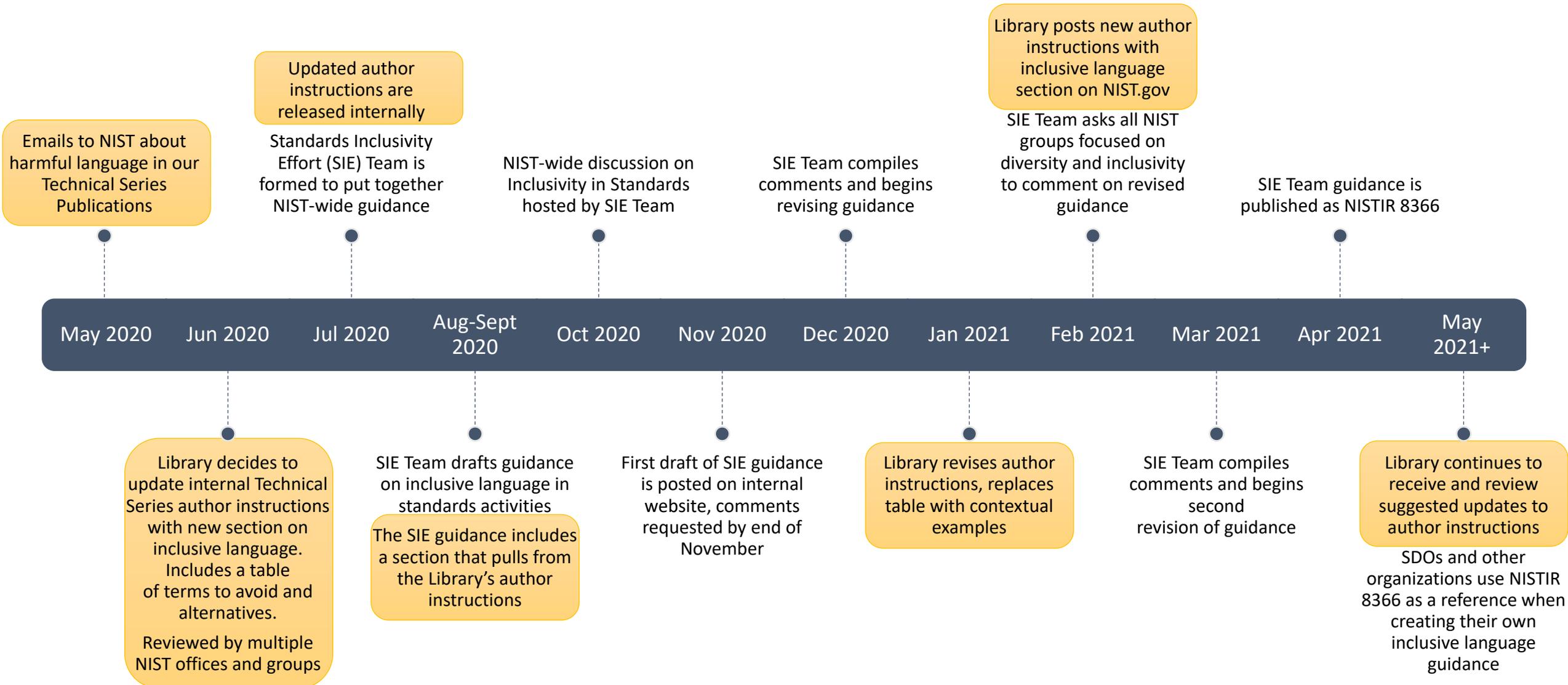
Sources:

[Politico June 2020 article](#)
[Wired July 2020 article](#)
[NY Times April 2021 article](#)

How we responded



The process



Important decisions

- Context, context, context
- Plain language
- Focus on intended meaning
- No definitive list of terms to avoid and alternatives

Original	Suggested Edits
<p>Application whitelisting technologies use whitelists to control which applications are permitted to execute on a host.</p>	<p>Application control technologies use allowlists to control which applications are permitted to execute on a host.</p>
<p>We denote the studied wireless network by the black box because the network specifics are not assumed to be available to the proposed test method.</p>	<p><i>There is no implied negativity or inequity in this sentence.</i> <i>Note: This example may be rewritten using more precise language (e.g., opaque box), as appropriate.</i></p>
<p>And sometimes we complain that measurement standards work cannot get management attention or that it is too low on the priority totem pole.</p>	<p>And sometimes we complain that measurement standards work cannot get management attention or that it is a low priority.</p>
<p>Another regulator would like a grandfather period of ten years and then a conversion to mass units on dispensers and advertising.</p>	<p>Another regulator would like an exemption period of ten years and then a conversion to mass units on dispensers and advertising.</p>

Opportunities

Inclusive language is beneficial to everyone

Listening and learning how your language impacts others will create a welcoming space for everyone

Paying close attention to writing and speaking will help create better communicators

Since language is always evolving, recommendations didn't need to be finite; what we publish only reflects current understanding

Challenges

People focus on what words they're not allowed to say/write anymore

Debate over language can feel personal

We had to become amateur linguists as we debated alternatives for words that had been identified as harmful

Words in science and technology publications can have different connotations than in the general vernacular