AMERICAN INDIAN
A term that refers to the Indigenous peoples of the contiguous United States and usually excludes Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. This term has fallen out of favor with Indigenous people. However, it’s used in academia, as a demographic label, and is a very important legal and political classification used throughout U.S. statutes that govern the nation-to-nation relationship between tribes and the federal government.

ALASKA NATIVE
Alaska Natives are the Indigenous peoples of Alaska. It is also a very distinct legal and political classification under U.S. law.

AMERICAN INDIAN
A term that refers to the Indigenous peoples of the contiguous United States and usually excludes Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. This term has fallen out of favor with Indigenous people. However, it’s used in academia, as a demographic label, and is a very important legal and political classification used throughout U.S. statutes that govern the nation-to-nation relationship between tribes and the federal government.

FIRST NATIONS
A term that refers to the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

INDIAN
Some Natives use “Indian” or “NDN” as a colloquial or slang name for each other and it can be a very common and personal reference among Native people and communities. However, it is almost never acceptable for non-Native people to use this term outside of the following appropriate contexts:
- Organizational names such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Names of federally recognized tribes e.g. Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, etc.
- “Indian Country” is legal reference for tribal lands and is used as a collective name for Native communities in the United States

INDIGENOUS
The original inhabitants of a geographic location. Indigenous is often used as an umbrella term for Native peoples no matter where they originate from. Also, when referring to Indigenous peoples, be sure to capitalize the word.

NATIVE AMERICAN
A term that refers to American Indians and Alaska Natives and usually excludes Native Hawaiians. This term is also often a broader reference to people from tribes that are not federally-recognized.

NATIVE
This term has recently gained popularity as many feel it is a more appropriate and accurate than “Native American” as a descriptor for peoples whose ancestry predates America as a country. Native is also sometimes used as a synonym for Indigenous.

NATIVE HAWAIIAN
Native Hawaiians, or Kanaka Maoli, are the Indigenous peoples of Hawai’i. It is considered inappropriate and inaccurate to address Native Hawaiians as Native Americans since the Kingdom of Hawai’i was overthrown in a coup led by American businessmen with the help of US troops.