

# How To Support Your Transgender Employees

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Contributor

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Mozilla, the nonprofit maker of the Firefox browser, recently [announced](#) a new transgender policy for employees who are transitioning. The [policy](#) outlines clear guidelines and steps employees can take to foster a more inclusive environment for their coworkers. The guidelines discuss pronoun usage, steps for reporting harassment and offers suggestions for disclosure, among many other things. During the creation of the policy, Mozilla worked closely with [TransFocus Consulting](#), a company that specializes in creating and implementing inclusive transgender policies. [Tara Robertson](#), a diversity and inclusion strategic partner at Mozilla, sat down to discuss the new policy and how companies can create a more inclusive workplace for transgender employees.

**Janice Gassam:** Could you share a little bit about Mozilla and this new policy?

**Tara Robertson:** So...we're a company with just over a thousand employees worldwide. And we're in 10 offices. 46% of our staff are remote and we differ from other tech companies because we're a mission-driven organization. And we're fighting to keep the internet open and accessible...I started [the policy] as a place to try to think about the problem. If someone wants to transition their gender at work, where are all the places that they need to get their name and their gender marker? I started there and then I realized...there were still a lot of people missing. So, not only the person who's transitioning at work but their manager needs to be able to have more information to support them, and their teammates also need to know a little bit more about gender and how to be inclusive. And it's definitely been an issue that's been in the news recently. It seems whether it's from the comments by the President or a few years ago, we had the bathroom debate. So, it's definitely something that has been in headlines.

**Gassam:** Why do you feel like this policy was necessary?

**Robertson:** So, we've been working on our D&I program for the last couple of years and this is something that I'm really personally interested in...transgender inclusion...we want all of our staff to feel really welcome... also thinking about how we can level up everyone's understanding around gender and what inclusion looks like...[for] a couple of managers...there was a lot of anxiety that they had about not wanting to say the wrong things or [hurt] someone's feelings or make a mistake. I know people have a lot of questions about what it means to be transitioning or what exactly transgender is... in my experience, there is a lot of confusion between...being lesbian, gay, or bisexual and then being transgender...people kind of muddle them all into one but they are distinct... I just want them to feel safe at work so they can do really awesome work...

**Gassam:** Do you foresee other companies implementing similar policies in the future?

**Robertson:** [Baker McKenzie](#), a law firm, also has similar policies. I think that a lot of us...openly share the work that we do. So that's kind of one of the motivations behind the policy in publishing it openly so that other people can see it as a model to follow or a template on how their company could do it. We developed our code of conduct, which we call our participation guidelines...we shared that a couple of years ago and we shared an update last year...and it's just also for us to be really transparent about what we value and what our culture is so that other people, other communities, or other open source projects can build on that or use it as a template...instead of everyone kind of reinventing the

wheel...we should all learn from each other and build on what seems to get better...

**Gassam:** Have you had experienced any sort of pushback or do you expect pushback from employees regarding these policies?

**Robertson:** We rolled out in November and ran some webinars along with it and there's been just a huge positive reaction. I think our staff...at Mozilla are really curious. They're people who want to learn more and do better in the world, whether that's around code or around inclusion, any kind of cultural issues. So...we offered a voluntary webinar to support these guidelines...but I was really overwhelmed by just how many people made time to come to that webinar. And then I looked at the stats...the videos of the webinar have been viewed over 300 times, so that's around 35%. Almost half of our company has participated in that training, which is voluntary, which means something really good for our culture. If there were any negative things that happened, someone would have likely heard about it...we get a lot of setting the foundation when we wrote our community participation guidelines...makes it really clear what we stand for and what kind of behavior we want to see more of [and] the kind of behaviors we don't tolerate.

**Gassam:** What are some best practices you can share for companies hoping to implement similar policies into the workplace?

**Robertson:** The conversations along the way with each department...talking to the service desk about people that might be changing their names for different reasons. One of them could be a gender change or talking to the benefits people about what kind of benefits do we have around sex reassignment surgery in the U.S. and Canada...like having those conversations and building those relationships so that it's a policy that everyone will sort of buy into...and all the right stakeholders are at the table, that's really important. Some of the people I talked to were like our facilities team, legal, our H.R. information system team, the I.T. team, the event planner, our travel team...because a lot of them travel for work...and if you present a certain gender and name at work, but your legal I.D. may be your old name and you can't travel under your new name. So, there is a lot of complexities and stuff that I hadn't thought about but those subject matter experts had a lot of details on...so, I think it's identifying the stakeholders, being conscious about the process, and involving people along the way.

It's not just about the people who are transgender but to make an inclusive workplace everyone needs to understand how they can be part of that. So, for me, that meant making sure I defined terms that people might not be aware of, like cisgender and transgender. Introducing concepts like sex assigned at birth versus gender identity or expression, so that everyone could be part of the conversation. I feel like it's my job to meet people where they're at, and bring them along. I don't feel that...my transgender colleagues should have to do that work of educating people...that's my job.