

# ‘Trans-forming’ the Workplace to Be Transgender Inclusive

Transgender and gender-nonconforming people often run into unnecessary barriers that make their jobs harder than they need to be. Here are 10 actions that social sector organizations can take to help.

By Nico Calvo Rosenstone Mar. 29, 2019

Imagine spending your workday stressed out about which restroom facility to use and when, either because you fear harassment or because you just don’t feel comfortable in a bathroom that doesn’t match your gender identity or expression. This is the day-to-day reality for many transgender and gender-nonconforming people, who often run into unnecessary barriers that make their jobs harder than they need to be.

According to the [Williams Institute](#), an estimated 1.4 million adults identify as transgender in the United States. Thanks to the dedicated work of LGBTQ trailblazers and advocates, employers across the United States have grown increasingly aware of the importance of creating welcoming organizations for LGBTQ people and their families. At the same time, the social sector has begun to understand it can no longer claim that it’s committed to LGBTQ diversity and inclusion without implementing equitable policies that support and protect the trans population.

When it comes to trans employees or any other marginalized group, true inclusion is not just about creating a more diverse workplace; it’s also about making sure organizations are treating all employees equitably when it comes to opportunities, benefits, and people’s everyday experiences when they go to work. Here are 10 actions organizations can take to create more equitable and welcoming work environments for trans and gender-nonconforming employees.

## 1. Get Proactive on Pronouns

Introducing yourself using gender pronouns may seem unnecessary to many people, but we can’t always assume someone’s gender pronouns just by appearance. Supporting and standing in solidarity with transgender and gender-nonconforming people means using—and respecting—their [correct gender pronouns](#). Create a culture where everyone feels comfortable introducing themselves with pronouns. Another proactive step many people are taking is to include gender pronouns in their email signatures or wear pins.

## 2. Do a Policy Check

Many organizations have non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and other policies that list protected categories of people. Check that your guidelines include the words “gender identity or expression.” We may think no one reads or cares about these policies, but they are an important signal to employees and the outside world about what our organizations value. Beyond simply editing or updating them, it’s important to make sure all current employees understand what they mean through staff education, new employee orientation, and ongoing communications. Updated policies should also be embedded in employee manuals and job postings. The Transgender Law Center has [a step-by-step guide](#) on implementing transgender-inclusive employment policies in your organization.

### **3. Plan for Transitions Before They Happen**

When an employee transitions on the job, organizations can make life easier for everyone by having policies and procedures in place. Work with your organization's leaders, managers, and human resources (HR) staff to plot out how to ensure successful workplace transitions. This includes developing [clear guidelines](#) for supporting an employee going through a transition, communicating to staff and other constituencies about the transition, and making necessary changes to employment records.

### **4. Educate All Staff**

It's not enough for organizational leaders and HR staff to understand the importance of trans inclusiveness. Educate everyone at the organization on how to make transgender inclusion an everyday priority. A good way to do this is to add a trans-specific lens to anti-harassment, management, and diversity trainings. The Human Rights Campaign has [a helpful guide](#) on changing culture through trainings and education on LGBTQ inclusion. The guide also addresses some of the everyday realities of the discrimination that trans people in particular face in the workplace.

### **5. Advocate for a Gender-Neutral Bathroom**

The core principle put forth by the US federal government's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) [couldn't be clearer](#): All employees, including transgender and gender-nonconforming employees, should have access to restrooms that correspond to their gender identity. Unnecessary bathroom restrictions can result in people avoiding restrooms entirely at work, which is unhealthy and even dangerous. A [recent study](#) found that more than 60 percent of transgender Americans have avoided using public restrooms for fear of confrontation, saying they have been harassed and assaulted while doing so. No one should have to worry about their safety in a bathroom, even less so at work.

### **6. Make Health-Care Benefits More Inclusive**

Review your organization's medical coverage and policies related to transition-related care and reproduction. The reality is that LGBTQ people are still subject to workplace policies primarily geared toward heterosexual, cisgender people. Health care benefits and policies should reflect the needs of trans employees throughout their lives, and have broad and inclusive coverage for transition-related surgery and treatments, family planning, and fertility. If a plan covers these essential procedures, make sure there aren't exclusions that prevent trans people from accessing them due to their gender marker. For example, a transgender man should not be denied a routine pelvic exam because insurance will only cover the procedure for female patients. Additionally, an LGBTQ couple that can't biologically reproduce shouldn't be denied access to reproductive benefits because neither of them is infertile.

While large companies like Google and Salesforce have comprehensive plans that cover [reproduction for LGBTQ people](#), those plans come with a high price tag. For smaller organizations, there are supplemental reproduction plans such as [Arc Fertility](#) that employers can add to basic health care plans. Employers can also set up a health savings account (HSA) for employees whose health care needs are not covered in the current health care plan. The University of California San Francisco has published helpful articles on [health insurance coverage](#) and [fertility options](#) for transgender people.

## **7. Rethink Recruitment and Hiring**

Unemployment among the transgender community is [three times higher](#) than the unemployment rate for the US population as a whole, and the rate is even higher among transgender employers of color. To open organizations to a more diverse staff that includes trans and gender-nonconforming people, as well as other marginalized groups, take steps to reduce the implicit bias that prevails in hiring and recruitment practices. Many organizations add unnecessary qualifications to job listings, such as degrees, years of experience, and skills that go beyond the requirements needed for someone to effectively do the job. In addition, employers often keep tapping the same sources and networks for hiring. The Urban Sustainability Directors Network has [a helpful toolkit](#) for creating a recruitment process that focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion. It includes a bias checklist, sample interview questions, and recommendations for modifying current organizational recruitment strategies.

## **8. Invest in Trans Leadership**

Of course, being trans-inclusive is not just about hiring trans employees; it's also about supporting them to become effective leaders. Consider what your organization can do to support trans and gender-nonconforming employees to find focused and tailored support, professional development, fellowships, and training so they can continue to grow in their careers.

## **9. Support Trans-Led Organizations**

Organizations can signal their solidarity with trans employees and trans communities by investing in groups that are working to advance transgender equality. But before you invest, make sure the organizations are led and staffed by transgender people. As with other social issues, the people closest to the problems are closest to the solutions, and trans leaders are likely addressing issues that are of real, day-to-day importance to trans people.

## **10. Educate Yourself**

All too often, organizations look to transgender employees for all the answers about how they can and should be more trans-inclusive. It's a natural inclination, but it places added responsibilities and stress on these employees. The better solution is for leaders, HR staff, employees, and allies to take the initiative. Learn more about trans communities and the unique challenges they face, and make a commitment to creating a culture of learning across the organization.

The work of creating truly inclusive organizations takes time, along with a wholesale commitment to changing culture. This is not about convening a committee, or implementing one or two changes in hiring or operations. Rather, it's about taking serious steps to understand the everyday experiences of all people in our organizations and making real changes so that everyone can be their best. When we can make our organizations more trans-inclusive, we make them more relevant, more attractive to current and prospective employees, and ultimately more effective.