



BEST PRACTICES FOR NON-BINARY INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE.

AN OUT & EQUAL GUIDE

Many companies now implement strategies to ensure policies, benefits, and overall workplace culture are inclusive of LGBTQ employees.

However, fewer businesses are familiar with how to incorporate the full spectrum of gender diversity, particularly those with non-binary gender identities, into their LGBTQ diversity and inclusion initiatives.



Non-binary individuals often experience significant rates¹ of discrimination in the workplace (almost a third experienced discrimination in the hiring process alone.)

A contributing factor in gender-specific policies and practices combined with a lack of understanding regarding non-binary identity are significant contributing factors to the negative experiences faced by non-binary employees.

For these reasons and many others, a majority of non-binary employees remain **closeted at work¹ and take great precautions to avoid further discrimination.**

Instances like these highlight the importance of exercising non-binary inclusion.



The following guide details a variety of specific best practices for creating welcoming workplace environments for non-binary employees.

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Gender 101

When approaching the topic of non-binary identity, it is important to understand the differences between sex and gender. Typically, the terms “sex” and “gender” are incorrectly used interchangeably, though the definitions are quite different.

Sex

A social, legal, medical designation assigned at birth based on a medical assessment of the body.

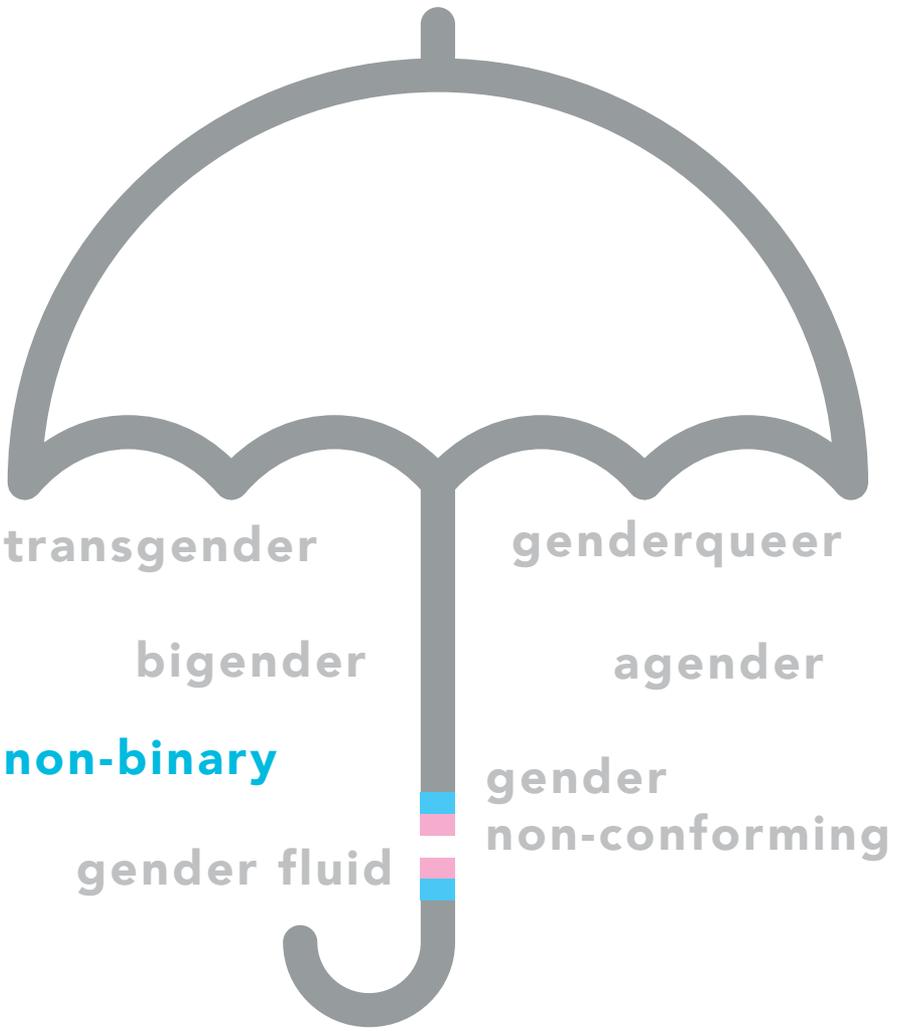
Gender

The cultural meanings (such as masculinity or femininity) assigned to biological sexes within a specific historical and geographic ways of being.

In today’s society, medical professionals make designations regarding a newborn’s sex—male, female, and in some cases, intersex. From those designations, people make assumptions about a newborn’s gender identity.

For example, if an individual’s sex was assigned female at birth (AFAB), people might assume that the corresponding gender identity would be female.

However, for some, this is not the case.



People whose gender identity is different than their sex assigned at birth fall under the umbrella of **transgender identity**².

Some individuals identify with a gender identity that is opposite of their sex assigned at birth. Others identify as neither, both, or somewhere in between female or male. Many use the word "non-binary" to describe this identity.

Defining “Non-Binary”

Understanding the term “non-binary” is a critical first step in implementing best practices.

Non-binary: a gender identity which falls outside of the gender binary, meaning an individual does not identify as strictly female or male.

A non-binary person can identify as both or neither male and female, or sometimes one or the other. There are several other terms used to describe gender identities outside of the male and female binary such as genderqueer, gender non-conforming, agender, and bigender. Though these terms have slightly different meanings, they refer to an experience of gender outside of the binary.

While, the term “non-binary” falls under the umbrella of transgender identity, it is important to note that identifying as transgender does not mean that particular individual is non-binary. Though transgender individuals can be non-binary, **most transgender**³ individuals identify as strictly male or female.¹

1. Understanding Global Context: Employees may also identify with terms outside of the typical Western transgender and non-binary discourse. There are a variety of cultures that recognize third genders. It is important that companies are also inclusive of these (ex: Indian Hijra, Samoan Fa’afafine, Native American Two-Spirit, etc.) and recognize the global diversity of gender exceeds Western conceptions of the binary, as well.



Many non-binary individuals use a name different from their given name, while some people may undergo surgery to more closely align their bodies with their gender identity. Furthermore, many (but not all) non-binary individuals use gender-neutral pronouns.



Gender Neutral Language

The use of gender-specific language is common in everyday life and conversation. Individuals regularly utilize gendered language when referring to others, even if the gender does not align with the subject. For example, **the term "man" or terms ending in "-man"⁴** have been used since the early development of the English language to refer to human beings in general (e.i., mankind, "all men are created equal").

Y'all Means All!

Greetings that include gender neutral language such as "friends, folks, y'all, you all, and everyone" ensure that you include all employees when saying hello or opening a meeting.

While many use these terms without the intention to exclude others, gendered language does not acknowledge or validate the existence of those who identify outside of the gender binary. Thus, it is important to rethink common gendered phrases and adjust by using more inclusive, gender-neutral language.

Utilizing Gender Inclusive Language

Replace gendered language with gender-inclusive language wherever possible in every day conversation. When appropriate, use they/them instead of he/she.

SAY

- ✓ "Hello, everyone!" or "all of you"
- ✓ "Job responsibilities include..." or "Their job responsibilities include..."
- ✓ "Employees should approach Human Resources with any questions regarding their paycheck."

AVOID

- ✗ "Ladies and gentlemen" or "you guys"
- ✗ "His or her job responsibilities include..."
- ✗ "Employees should approach Human Resources with any questions regarding his/her paycheck."

Pronouns

Using an individual's correct name and pronouns is an important way to demonstrate respect and courtesy towards non-binary employees in the workplace.



Here are a few ways companies can demonstrate pronoun inclusivity:

- Include pronouns in email signatures.
- Introduce pronouns early. When introducing new employees, include your names and pronouns:

“Hi, I’m Karen! My pronouns are she/hers. Welcome to the team!”

Know that it’s okay if the employee does not respond by stating their own pronouns. The point in including pronouns in introductions is to create a space for individuals to voluntarily provide their pronouns.

- Practice using gender-neutral pronouns on your own time. Feeling comfortable with these terms does not happen immediately and can require concerted effort.
- Be open and willing to being corrected should you make a mistake when addressing someone.

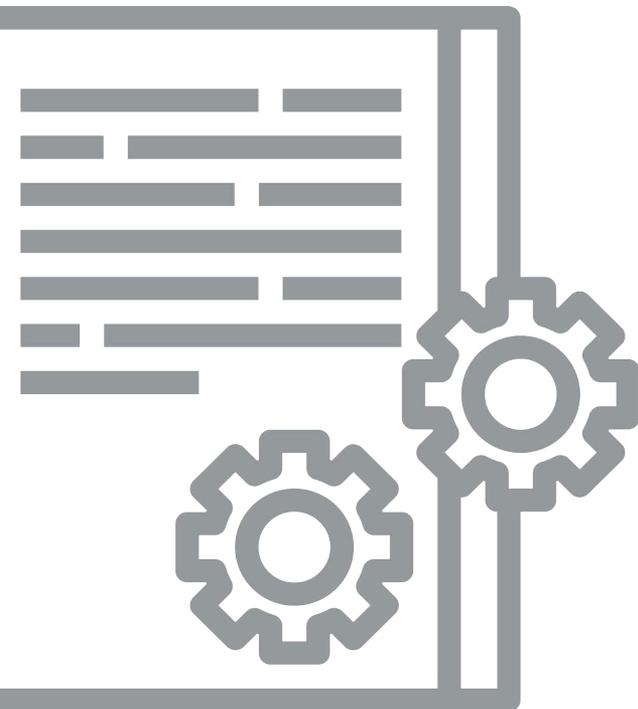
GENDER PRONOUNS

Pronouns	Subject	Object	Possessive	Reflexive
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
He/ Him/ His	He asked	I told him	This is his office	He reminds himself
She/ Her/ Hers	She asked	I told her	This is her office	She reminds herself
They/ Them/ Theirs	They asked	I told them	This is their office	They remind themselves
Ze (or Zie)/ Hir/Hirs	Ze asked	I told hir	This is hirs office	Hir reminds hirsself
Ze (or Zie)/ Zir/Zirs	Ze asked	I told zir	This is zirs office	Zir reminds zirsself

Records and Policies

Non-binary individuals regularly encounter circumstances which invalidate the very existence of their gender identity.

For example, an ordinary task, such as filling out an onboarding document for human resources, can present challenging experiences for non-binary employees. If only male and female options are included in a question regarding gender, which box do they check?



Companies should examine and update existing documents, policies, and procedures to remove gender-specific language or include options beyond male and female.

Records and Policies

■ Include options beyond male and female on employee surveys (refer to Out & Equal's Self-ID Best Practices for more details regarding the wording of SOGI data collection questions)

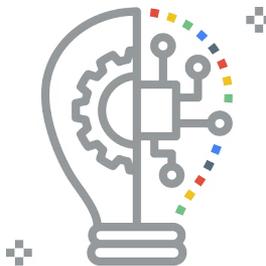
■ Provide opportunities for employees to voluntarily list pronouns on onboarding documentation and nametags



■ Remove gendered language from policies - For example, instead of "he/she," use "they"

■ If collecting data on prefixes and titles in HR documentation, include the gender-neutral option, Mx. (pronounced miks or muks)

■ If your current **benefit and coverage offerings**⁵ do not provide options for listing gender identities outside of male and female, migrate to platforms and offerings that do

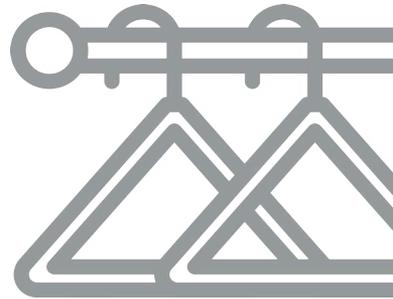


Dress Codes

Company dress codes commonly include gendered language. Appropriate attire is frequently listed in categories of male and female, which leaves non-binary individuals wondering how and where they fit into the picture. The purpose of company dress codes is not to enforce gendered attire for employees, but rather to ensure that they are dressed in professional and functional wear.

Millennials and Generation Z identify as non-binary and gender fluid at higher rates than previous generations.

As more Millennials and Generation Z - who identify as non-binary and gender fluid at higher rates than previous generations - enter the workforce, Out & Equal expects the future of professional dress to be **gender fluid**.



Simple changes in a **dress code policy**⁶ can ensure that certain attire is appropriate without using gendered language. To ensure your company's dress code is inclusive of non-binary identity, contact **university@outandequal.org**. Out & Equal will review your company's current handbook and can provide recommendations for promoting non-binary inclusivity.

Facilities

Gendered facilities, such as restrooms or locker rooms, create difficult circumstances for non-binary employees. Deciding which facility to use—male or female—forces non-binary individuals to make decisions about gender identity that don't reflect their own internal sense of self. This can also put them at further risk of experiencing discrimination.

Restrooms

- Office management should determine if there are opportunities to include gender-neutral restrooms in your building.
- If companies have single staff restrooms, consider converting them to all-gender facilities.
- Utilize the ADA-compliant signage that doesn't reinforce gender binaries, such as an image of a toilet in lieu of gendered pictograms.



The Equal Restroom Access Act, which required all California businesses to convert single-stall restrooms to all-gender facilities, provides a useful example of how companies can be more inclusive of all genders by updating facilities. For more information on this policy, read Out & Equal's compliance brief on [California AB 1732](#).

Facilities

Locker Rooms

Depending on the company, employees may need access to a locker room in order to prepare for the day. These spaces tend to be separated by gender, and, again, can present obstacles to non-binary workers who may be denied access due to appearance.

To alleviate this issue, The University of California Berkeley implemented an **all-gender locker room** in 2017. The space provides an area for individuals of different genders, who might otherwise refrain from accessing the facility, to change and shower.



Tips for ERG Engagement

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are key players in the implementation of LGBTQ equality in the workplace. ERGs can go a long way to ensure that LGBTQ workplace equality initiatives elevate and include the voices and address the needs of non-binary employees, as well.

A recent survey (Fernandez et al. 2017) asked non-binary employees to prioritize which inclusive practices were most important to their experience in the workplace. ERGs should use these key priorities to shape their involvement and strategic engagement on non-binary issues.



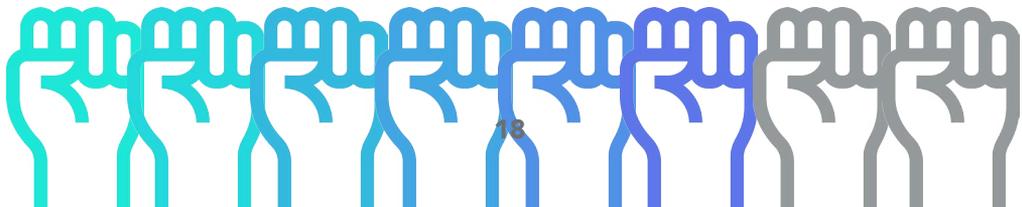
Non-Binary Voices - Top Priorities for Workplace Inclusion⁶

- 1 Inclusive dress codes
- 2 Non-binary genders on records
- 3 Gender neutral titles
- 4 No tolerance policies
- 5 Gender-neutral restrooms

Talent Acquisition: Attracting Millennials and Generation Z

The workforce is ever changing. In order to stay viable and attract talent, businesses must ensure company values attract that of the incoming workforce.

In the year 2025, Millennials, the most diverse generation so far, will **represent 75% of the workforce**⁸. Millennials are more than **two times as likely to identify as LGBTQ and more likely to identify as non-binary or gender fluid than previous generations**⁹.



Talent Acquisition: Attracting Millennials and Generation Z

When looking for a job, 88% of Millennials seek work-life integration¹⁰, or, in other words, “blending their personal and professional lives, in order to make both work better.” A powerful signal of that factor is LGBTQ inclusion.



Values guide where Millennials work⁷, as 56 percent of Millennials have “ruled out ever working for a particular organization because of its values or standard of conduct.”

Talent Acquisition: Attracting Millennials and Generation Z

LGBTQ inclusion is important to allies, as well— **72% of whom say that they are more likely to accept a job at an LGBTQ inclusive company¹¹** than a non-inclusive company.

Moreover, the Center for Talent Innovation finds that 71% of LGBT individuals and 82% of allies are more likely to purchase from companies that support LGBTQ equality¹¹.



Talent Acquisition: Attracting Millennials and Generation Z

Looking further down the line into the future workforce, Generation Z is increasingly defined as having more fluid perceptions of gender identity. In fact, **78% of Generation Z**¹² respondents in a recent study agreed that “gender does not define a person as much as it used to.” In the same study, **56 percent of Generation Z respondents**¹³ know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns—a significant jump from previous generations.



With more fluid perceptions of gender identity combined with a shifting workforce, companies must adapt to ensure their own sustainability in acquiring high-level candidates. Such initiatives are not only vital to the well-being of non-binary employees in the workplace, but also to the company overall and how it maintains viability in the future.

Practicing Allyship

There are a few additional ways companies can ensure they are treating non-binary individuals with the respect they deserve.

- Proactively share your pronouns to foster an environment of respect and awareness.
- Don't make assumptions about gender identity: non-binary experiences are not universal.
- Acknowledge mistakes. Apologize and correct yourself when using the wrong pronoun. Furthermore, ensure that you **do not make a big deal out of the mistake**¹⁴. Make the correction, move forward in the conversation, and perhaps follow up later with the person in private with: "Hey Skylar, I'm sorry I messed up earlier. I will work to do better next time."
- Do not ask about medical status (this includes hormones, surgery, etc.): this should go without saying in the workplace.
- Respect the journey and believe the reality. It is important to respect the fact that understanding one's own gender identity can be a process. For this reason, non-binary/GNC individuals **may come to realize that a different name or set of pronouns**¹⁵ is more in line with their gender identity. Allow for this flexibility and respect their internal process.
- Continue to provide education and training to employees regarding LGBTQ issues that includes information regarding non-binary individuals. Managers should be aware of how to implement gender-inclusive policies and practices. To learn more about this and other educational offerings, contact university@outandequal.org or visit **Out & Equal University**.

Additional Reading

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For more information regarding non-binary best practices and research, contact O&E Research Manager Madelyn Gelpi at **university@outandequal.org**