

A Model for Supporting LGBTQ+ Employees: Providing Safety, Equity, and Community

Corporate initiatives to support the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) communities have been steadily gaining momentum over the past several years. Early efforts primarily focused on antidiscrimination policies and workplace protections and have, over time, expanded to include equitable benefits offerings and an emphasis on cultivating an inclusive and supportive work environment. In the last few years, corporate activism has also been on the rise, with an increasing number of organizations taking a public stance on a variety of issues in support of their LGBTQ+ employees and the communities they serve.

Rapidly Evolving Legal and Social Landscape

Until recently, non-discrimination and equal rights protections for the LGBTQ+ communities in the U.S. were mostly based on a patchwork of state and local laws. That is, until two landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings secured great wins at the federal level - with *Obergefell v. Hodges* affirming equal marriage rights in 2015 and *Bostock v. Clayton County* [barring workplace discrimination](#) in 2020. The Equality Act - currently pending full Congress approval - would be an additional significant piece of legislation that has the potential to codify even [broader civil rights protections](#) for LGBTQ+ individuals.

However, uncertainty has begun to loom over these gains. Just in the first half of 2022, a [record number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills](#) have surfaced across several state legislatures. Thirteen states have already signed some of these into law, most of which are targeted at transgender and non-binary individuals.

At the same time, we have been witnessing an alarming rise in [anti-transgender sentiment and violence](#) across the U.S., as [opinions on gender identity](#) among Americans remain quite complex and varied. Additionally, members of the LGBTQ+ communities have reported experiencing [increased discrimination](#) over the past two years (GLAAD, 2022). Such reports have gone up 24 percentage points compared to 2020, an experience that has been even more marked for LGBTQ+ people of color and younger individuals.

79% of Americans are in favor of protective legislation for the LGBTQ+ communities.

Source: 2021 PRRI American Values Atlas

IN THIS ISSUE

- ▶ Rapidly Evolving Legal and Social Landscape
- ▶ LGBTQ+ Population at a Glance
- ▶ LGBTQ+ Workforce: Understanding their Experience
- ▶ **Safety, Equity, and Community Model: A Practical Guide to Create a Better Workplace for LGBTQ+ Employees**
- ▶ Corporate Best Practices
- ▶ Glossary of Terms
- ▶ Conclusion and Key Recommendations

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The Covid-19 pandemic has also adversely affected the LGBTQ+ communities in a number of ways. These groups have experienced higher rates of job loss overall, resulting in financial, housing, and health instability. They have also reported higher rates of mental health challenges - about twice as much as non-LGBTQ+ adults (HPS, 2022).

On the bright side, we are nonetheless witnessing an increase in individuals who feel comfortable openly identifying as LGBTQ+. This has been accompanied by greater social awareness and collective action around issues affecting these communities. There also continues to be a growing demand for accountability and transparency on behalf of brands and employers when it comes to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. As the composition of the workforce grows increasingly civic-minded and diverse, this push for action and transparency will likely continue to trend upward.

The LGBTQ+ Population at a Glance

Increasing numbers. Obtaining an accurate picture of the LGBTQ+ population in the U.S. has proven challenging over the years - partly due to fear of negative repercussions that could stem from self-identifying as LGBTQ+, but also as a result of inadequate data-gathering methods. As large population surveys have begun to collect demographic identifiers beyond the gender binary and that include sexual orientation, a clearer picture is starting to emerge.

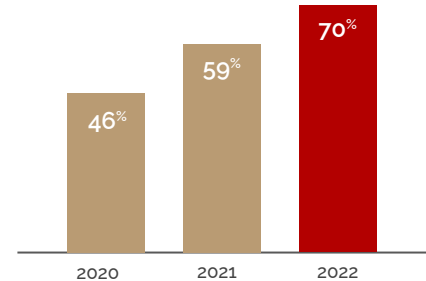
- According to [Gallup](#) (2022), the percentage of U.S. adults who identify as LGBTQ+ stands at 7.1%, up from 5.6% in 2020. The [HPS](#) (2021) estimate was about one percentage point higher.
- Among LGBTQ+ Americans, **57% identify as bisexual, 21% as gay, 14% as lesbian, 10% as transgender, and 4% are of a different identity** (respondents could choose more than one category).
- Recent data reported by the [Pew Research Center](#) (2022) and the [HPS](#) (2021) reveal that between 1 to 1.7% of U.S. adults identify as nonbinary.

Impact of Gen Z. Gen Zers (born between 1997 and 2012), in particular, are much more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ than previous generations. They are also the most racially and ethnically diverse generation to date and, like Millennials, place a high value on issues of social justice and wellbeing. Employers should take note, as both generations are estimated to make up the majority of the workforce by 2025 ([Forbes](#), 2022).

- According to [Gallup](#) (2022), 20.8% of adult Gen Zers and 10.5% of Millennials identify as LGBTQ+, compared to 4.2% of Gen Xers, 2.6% of Baby Boomers, and .8% of Traditionalists.
- U.S. adults ages 18 through 29 are much more likely to identify as either transgender (2%) or non-binary (3%) compared to older adults ([Pew Research](#), 2022).

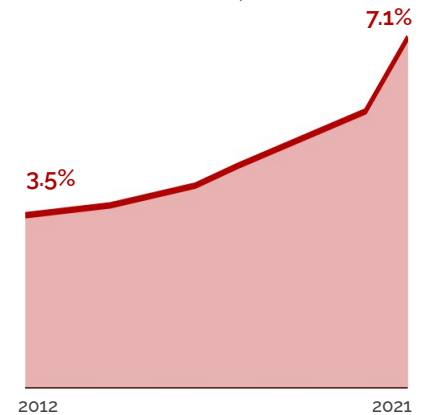
Percentage LGBTQ+ reporting discrimination due to sexual orientation and/or gender identity

Source: [GLAAD, 2022](#)



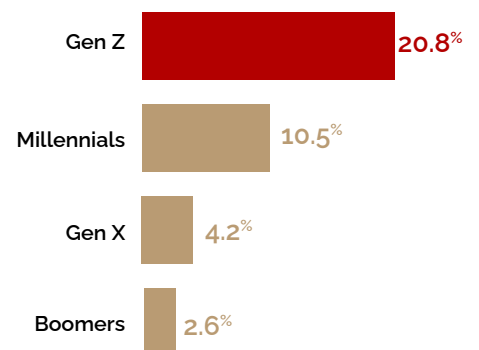
The number of of adults who identify as LGBTQ+ is increasing

Source: [Gallup 2022](#)



Self-identification as LGBTQ+ by generation*

Source: [Gallup, 2022](#)



*not all participants responded

GLOSSARY OF TERMS: A QUICK GUIDE TO PROPER TERMINOLOGY

A proper understanding of the varying identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella and associated terminology is a crucial first step in creating a respectful work environment for LGBTQ+ employees. The list below, while not all-inclusive, is a good starting point for educating your employees and creating a common understanding.

- **Sexual orientation:** A person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. (e.g. heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual). Some may describe their romantic orientation discretely from their sexual orientation (e.g. heteroromantic, homoromantic, biromantic, panromantic, and aromantic).
- **Sex assigned at birth:** The sex assigned to a child at birth based on their external anatomy.
- **Gender identity:** A person's internal understanding of their gender. While sexual orientation and gender identity are both intrinsic, one does not imply the other.
 - **Cisgender:** Describes people whose gender identity corresponds with their sex assigned at birth.
 - **Transgender/trans:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth.
 - **Non-binary:** Describes people whose gender identity does not align with being a man or a woman. They may identify as both, somewhere in between, or with a gender that falls entirely outside of these categories. Examples include **agender** and **genderfluid**.

Some people who identify as transgender may also identify as nonbinary and vice versa. However, these terms are not interchangeable.

Certain racial and ethnic groups might have other, more culturally-specific terms that they prefer to describe their LGBTQ+ identity.
- **Gender expression:** A person's external expression of their gender (e.g. names, pronouns, clothing, hairstyles, voice, etc).
- **Questioning:** Describes people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Outing:** Exposing another person's LGBTQ+ identity to others without their permission.
- **Coming out:** Process in which an individual acknowledges and accepts their LGBTQ+ identity and shares that with others. The opposite of this is referred to as **covering**, when an individual actively conceals their their LGBTQ+ identity.
- **Queer:** An umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. While historically used as a slur, this word has been reclaimed by many LGBTQ+ people.
- **Gender dysphoria:** Distress stemming from the disconnect between an individual's gender identity and their sex assigned at birth. Experiences of discrimination (e.g. being forced to use facilities that do not correspond with one's gender identity) can further compound distress.
- **Transitioning:** A series of processes that some people may undergo in order to live in alignment with their gender identity. These may differ person to person, but can include **social transition** (e.g. changing pronouns), **medical transition** (e.g. reconstructive surgery), and **legal transition** (e.g. changing legal name). Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all, or none of these processes.
- **Gender-affirming care:** Refers to any services or procedures that empower an individual to better align themselves with their gender identity and relieve gender dysphoria. It can be **medical** (e.g. hormone replacement therapy), **surgical** (e.g. plastic surgery), **behavioral** (e.g. speech therapy), or **psychosocial** (e.g. mental health counseling).
- **Misgendering:** Occurs when someone deliberately or accidentally refers to a transgender or non-binary person with language that does not align with their affirmed gender. Neglecting to use someone's preferred pronouns, referring to them by the wrong title, or **deadnaming** (calling them by a name they no longer use, like their birth name) are all common examples of misgendering. Regardless of intent, the act of the act of invalidating another person's gender identity with inaccurate or outdated language is harmful.

Adapted from: HRC; Alphabet Soup: The Essential Guide to LGBTQ+ Inclusion at Work (Bach 2022); Americas Trans and Gender Diversity Toolkit; GLAAD

The LGBTQ+ Workforce: Understanding their Experience

An understudied population. It is estimated that less than 20% of LGBTQ+ adults can be accounted for in the Current Population Survey - the basis for U.S. labor statistics - as it does not gather data related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Stigma, the fact that not all employees are out at work, and systems that are not set up to capture this information can also compromise the accuracy of data gathered by individual organizations.

A recent study by [BCG](#) in conjunction with NYC’s LGBT Community Center found that among U.S. LGBTQ+ employees aged 45 and above, the largest share of the population identifies as gay, and among those younger than 44, the vast majority identifies as bisexual.

Coming out and feeling safe at work. The [BCG](#) (2020) report also revealed key findings related to the process of coming out at work. Most remarkably:

- 40% of LGBTQ+ employees are not out at work.
- Of those who are, 54% remain closeted to their customers and clients.
- 75% indicated having experienced at least one negative workplace interaction due to their LGBTQ+ identity, with 41% reporting that this has happened more than ten times in the past year.

It is important to note that the act of coming out is a lifelong process for LGBTQ+ individuals. It involves a constant assessment of safety in day-to-day interactions that many might consider inconsequential - e.g. answering questions about a significant other or spouse, the basic act of introducing oneself, or even choosing what to wear. Every interaction with a new colleague or client is a decision point for these employees.

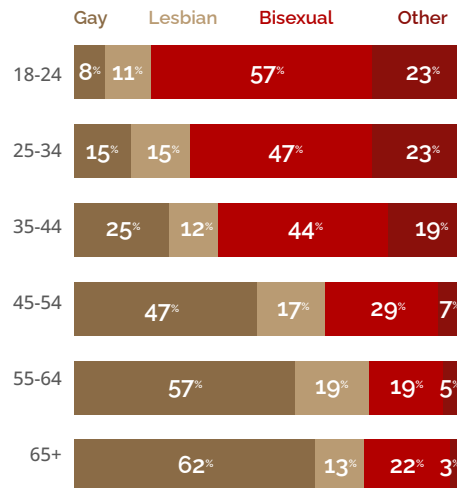
- According to data gathered by [McKinsey](#) (2020), 48% of LGBTQ+ employees have to come out at work on a daily or weekly basis.
- **Women and junior-level employees are the least likely groups to be out at work.**

All too often LGBTQ+ individuals face a work environment that can feel unwelcoming of their identity. These experiences can range from subtle microaggressions, to overt derogatory comments and harassment, as well as a lack of LGBTQ+-inclusive policies and benefits.

- In a survey by the [Williams Institute](#) (2021), roughly **7 out of 10 LGBTQ+ employees reported hearing negative comments, slurs, or jokes about LGBTQ+ people while at work.**
- The emotional tax of being constantly on guard and hyper-aware of how one’s identity might result in discrimination, or even aggression at work, can undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on LGBTQ+ employee’s engagement and productivity.

Categories of self-identification of LGBTQ+ adults by age

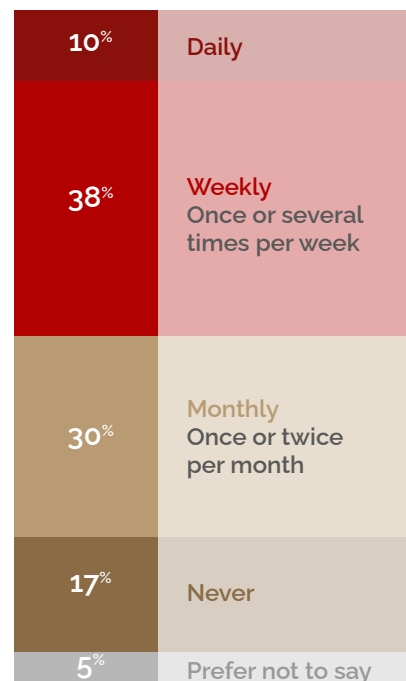
Source: [BCG, 2022](#)



*reported data was not broken down by gender identity

How often LGBTQ+ employees have to come out at work

Source: [McKinsey, 2020](#)



Intersectionality and the experience of "onlyness." Often, LGBTQ+ employees face the experience of being an "only" in the room, a feeling that is even more commonplace for those whose identities are further underrepresented in their places of work (McKinsey, 2020). Not only can this lack of representation feel isolating and stressful, but it can make these employees more susceptible to disparate career outcomes. LGBTQ+ individuals are already at a higher risk of unfair treatment at work, compared to straight and cisgender colleagues, and their workplace experience can vary considerably depending on their intersectional identities.

- Only 4 CEO's (0.8%) of Fortune 500 companies identify as LGBTQ+.
- LGBTQ+ employees of color are more likely to experience employment discrimination as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity than their white LGBTQ+ peers - 33.2% vs 26.3% - and are more likely to report experiencing verbal harassment at work - 35% vs. 25.9% (Williams Institute, 2021).
- Similarly, transgender employees report experiencing employment discrimination and verbal harassment at work at significantly higher rates than LGBTQ+ cisgender employees - 48.8% vs. 27.8% and 43.8% vs. 29.3%, respectively. They were also found to be much more likely to engage in "covering" at work (Williams Institute, 2021).
- LGBTQ+ women are twice as likely as cisgender and straight women to report being an "only" and 1.4 times more likely to experience workplace sexual harassment.
- LGBTQ+ women of color are eight times more likely than straight white men to report "onlyness" (McKinsey, 2020).
- Full-time LGBTQ+ workers overall make about \$0.90 for every dollar a typical worker earns. LGBTQ+ people of color and transgender and non-binary individuals earn considerably less (HRC, 2021).

Among LGBTQ+ individuals working in an environment that is unwelcoming of their identity:

25%

feel **distracted** from work

20%

avoid **special events** at work (e.g. lunches, holiday parties, happy hours)

20%

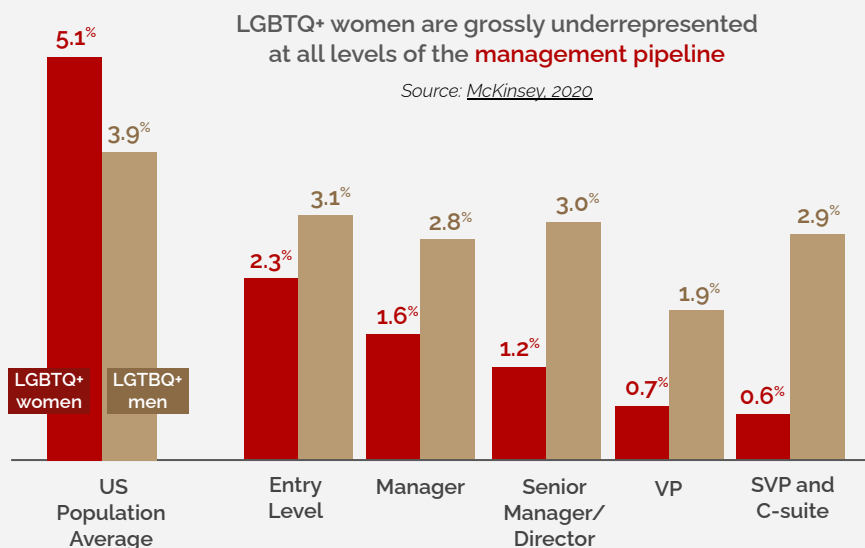
have been **absent** due to the unwelcoming environment

31%

feel **unhappy or depressed** at work

Source: HRC, 2018

WAGE GAPS AND DISCRIMINATION ARE WORSE FOR LGBTQ+ WOMEN AND SUBGROUPS



For every \$1 earned by a typical worker...

LGBTQ+ workers overall earn 90¢

Trans men earn 70¢

Non-binary workers earn 70¢

Trans women earn 60¢

LGBTQ+ American Indian/Alaska Native women earn 60¢

Source: HRC (2021)

Safety, Equity & Community Model

A Practical Guide to Create a Better Workplace for LGBTQ+ Employees

The following model outlines **four essential pillars** through which employers can provide safety, equity, and community for LGBTQ+ employees. Initiatives will range from the more local, organization-based efforts to those that have a more broad, societal impact. This framework takes into account the crucial role of LGBTQ+ advocacy and education groups and the benefits of a synergistic relationship between these groups and employers. Community partners are not only subject-matter experts on topics of relevance to the LGBTQ+ communities, but also an important source of community for LGBTQ+ individuals - something that may not be wholly possible for them to find at work.



POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND BENEFITS

Ensuring Safety, Equity & Wellbeing

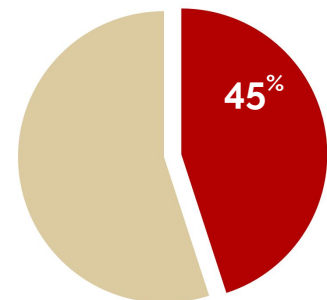
Protective policies. Non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies are a non-negotiable component for fostering a psychologically and physically safe work environment for LGBTQ+ employees.

- The vast majority of Fortune 500 companies have a formal non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity (HRC, 2022).
- In a survey of LGBTQ+ workers, close to half (45%) agree that the enforcement of protective policies is contingent on their supervisor's own feelings towards LGBTQ+ individuals (HRC). Policies alone cannot prevent microaggressions and other more subtle forms of discrimination from taking place. Their effectiveness depends on how well these are enforced.
- Policies should be accessible to all in the organization and roll-out efforts be accompanied by a proper education strategy.

Inclusive and equitable benefits. Benefits that take into account the particular needs of LGBTQ+ employees and their families will ensure equitable access to important services and policies that support wellbeing.

LGBTQ+ workers who agree that enforcement of policies is contingent on supervisor's feelings towards LGBTQ+ individuals

Source: HRC



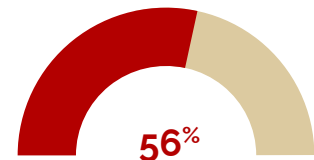
- Family planning benefits and parental leave policies that are equitable for all genders and types of parents will become increasingly crucial for attracting and retaining LGBTQ+ talent. A Family Equality (2019) study found that the number of LGBTQ+ families seeking to have children is expected to significantly increase, with 63% of those surveyed looking to grow their families through adoption, assisted reproductive technology, and foster care. Employers should conduct a thorough audit of their benefits language to identify potential gaps in coverage (this includes definitions of infertility to qualify for services).
- Research shows that fear of stigma and discrimination can curtail LGBTQ+ individuals from seeking necessary healthcare services, with transgender individuals being most at risk (CAP, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary for employers to ensure that their selected health insurance carriers have a robust network of providers who are attuned to the particular needs of the LGBTQ+ communities.
- When considering benefits coverage, organizations must also think about the needs of parents of children who identify as LGBTQ+. This may include (but is not limited to) partnering with organizations, such as Gender Spectrum, that offer specialized counseling and support group services for this population.
- Among Fortune 500 companies, 56% have domestic partner benefits and 67% have transgender-inclusive benefits (HRC, 2022).. According to Mercer (2021) 61% of large employers cover some form of fertility benefits, but insurance restrictions may disqualify LGBTQ+ adults in certain cases.

63%

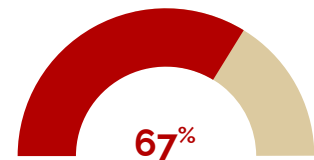
of LGBTQ+ adults are looking to grow their families

Source: Family Equality (2019)

Among Fortune 500 companies



have domestic partner benefits



have transgender-inclusive benefits

Source: HRC, 2022

ARE YOUR POLICIES, BENEFITS, AND PRACTICES TRANS AND NON-BINARY INCLUSIVE?

Transgender and non-binary employees face distinct challenges when it comes to achieving a feeling of safety at work and having equitable access to important benefits. Consider the following as you think about how to best support them:

- **Does your insurance carrier provide coverage for transgender individuals?** Proactively examine your policy contract to identify discriminatory exclusions for all types of care, including gender-affirming.
- **Does your benefits administration platform offer identification options beyond the gender binary?** Make sure all employees can opt-in and use gender-neutral language in your forms (e.g. "spouse/domestic partner" versus "husband/wife" or "parent/guardian" versus "mother/father").
- **Do you proactively provide information about inclusive benefits and coverage upfront to potential and new employees?** Doing so lifts off the burden from LGBTQ+ employees, eliminating unnecessary stress.
- **Do your medical leave and time-off policies apply to transitioning individuals?** Having formal gender transition guidelines will ensure that managers are well educated on how to adequately manage the procedural and social aspects of the employee's transition.
- **Do all employees have access to bathroom facilities that are consistent with their gender identity?** Evaluate bathroom usage policies and designate non-gender-specific, single-person-use bathrooms throughout the premises.
- **Are you using gender neutral language across the board?** This includes employee handbooks, company dress codes, and other forms of employee communications materials.



BEST PRACTICE

Salesforce: Outforce

PROGRAMS & ALLYSHIP

Salesforce has implemented programs that strengthen support for the LGBTQ+ community and foster a more inclusive work environment.

Commitment. Salesforce committed to 50% of the U.S. workforce being made up of underrepresented groups, including LGBTQ+ employees, by 2023 -- and the company reached that goal one year early.

Community. Outforce, one of the largest Equality Groups, brings together LGBTQ+ employees and their allies. There are 8,700 Outforce members, across 38 chapters - including ones in Japan and India, the latter with a history of anti-gay laws.

Pride. Every year, Outforce leads Salesforce's global participation in Pride marches, parades and events. In 2022, many parades are taking place in person for the first time since the start of the global pandemic, with Outforce events taking place in cities including Barcelona, Denver, Dublin, Mexico City, New York, and more.

Allyship. Salesforce has introduced employee policies and resources that help create a more inclusive work environment, including:

- Gender pronoun badges and gender neutral bathrooms at Salesforce offices and events.
- Gender Transition Guidelines to provide information and guidance designed to support employees and educate teams during a gender transition.
- Internal Transgender Working Group, co-chaired and led by trans employees at Salesforce, which meets monthly to identify and address issues important to the transgender and gender non-conforming community.

BENEFITS

Salesforce is committed to implementing LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, practices and benefits.

Gender Inclusive Benefits: Last year, after listening to its LGBTQ+ community and consulting with Outforce, the company went to work on a set of safe and accessible new benefits to support the unique needs of the global transgender and non-binary community. This included gender affirmation medical reimbursement, gender affirmation leave, wardrobe reimbursement, legal fee reimbursement, counseling services, and more.

Inclusive Health. Salesforce has introduced Included Health, a comprehensive health platform service for the LGBTQ+ community. Included Health is a concierge service that connects employees to high-quality providers who understand the unique needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

The company offers fertility benefits to support all families, including surrogacy reimbursement up to \$10k, and transgender medical coverage that follows WPATH Standards of Care.

Self-Identification. Salesforce offers employee options for voluntary self-identification in its workplace systems, including sexual orientation, gender identity, and pronouns to help build awareness, understanding, and inclusion within the company.

ADVOCACY

Salesforce stands firmly against discrimination and has a proud history of advocating for LGBTQ+ equality. For seven years, Salesforce has been directly advocating for the U.S. Congress to pass the Equality Act, to provide the community with protection under the law, no matter where they live. The company is also a leading corporate member of several coalition groups, including the Human Rights Campaign, Freedom for All Americans, America Competes, and Texas Competes - fighting for LGBTQ+ rights.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING & EDUCATION Fostering Inclusion and Belonging

Listening strategies: surveys, focus groups, and interviews. A good understanding of LGBTQ+ employees' particular needs and challenges must always precede the design of solutions.

- Employers should be wary of making assumptions, being mindful of the many identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella.
- An effective listening strategy begins with knowing the composition of your workforce. This requires an HRIS platform that can capture gender identity and sexual orientation data. While disclosure should be voluntary, including these options also sends a message of acceptance.

Education and training. Fostering employees' cultural competence on LGBTQ+ issues at all levels of the organization is a necessary step towards inclusion.

- This includes educating on the use of proper terminology, gender-inclusive language, challenging biases, what it means to be an ally, as well manager-specific training on policies and procedures.
- Reverse mentoring can be a useful tool for educating leaders.

Allyship. Public and visible displays of support from workplace allies are essential to reinforce psychological safety for LGBTQ+ employees..

- Being an active ally involves speaking out when witnessing microaggressions or overt discriminatory and prejudiced behaviors. It also means advocating on behalf of LGBTQ+ peers when they are not being treated fairly and equitably.
- Encouraging voluntary pronoun-sharing is a simple way to begin fostering allyship among employees. Employers should strive to make it the norm to include them in email signatures, use them during introductions, and have them on display during virtual meetings.

“You don’t need to identify with a community or share the same interests or background [to be an ally]. You don’t need to agree on every single issue. But you can lead with empathy and seek to understand others.”

“How You Can Be an Active Ally”, [Salesforce’s the 360 blog](#)

Words Matter Use proper terminology...

✓ Gay, lesbian, or gay person/people	✗ Homosexual
Relationship, couple, gay/lesbian/ same-sex couple	Homosexual relationship/couple
Sexual orientation	Sexual preference
Transgender or trans person/people	Transgender; transgendered
Transition; Gender-affirming or gender-confirmation surgery (if applicable)	Sex change
Fairness and equality for LGBTQ+ people	Special rights

...and gender-inclusive language

everyone, folks, you all, all	ladies and gentlemen, you guys
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Adapted from: [GLAAD](#) and [Out and Equal](#)

A MODEL FOR ALLYSHIP

1. Take responsibility for your behaviors.

Making mistakes is a normal part of the process. Be open to making amends.

2. Interrupt and disarm

microaggressions. Speak up for your colleagues and challenge out-of-line comments.

3. Make space, don't take space.

Bring in diverse voices during meetings and discussions.

4. Use your platform.

Give visibility to underrepresented colleagues.

5. Stay dedicated.

Being an active ally is an ongoing journey

Adapted from [Salesforce](#)

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Having an executive-backed ERG can provide LGBTQ+ employees with an important sense of community and support, as well as a channel through which to voice issues of concern.

- ERGs can facilitate storytelling, a powerful tool for cultivating empathy, creating awareness, and reducing stigma.
- These groups can also help lead changes in company practices and procedures that disadvantage LGBTQ+ employees. Non-LGBTQ+ allies are important part of advancing these groups' agendas.
- Increasingly, employers have been partnering with ERGs to provide a safe-space for employees to discuss sensitive topics - such as mental health challenges - and obtain access to resources. This can be particularly helpful for LGBTQ+ employees, as these groups are much more reluctant than others to discuss such topics at work (McKinsey, 2022).

97%
of ERGs reported
in the HRC's
Corporate Equality
Index have an
executive sponsor

Source: HRC, 2022

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: NAVIGATING DIFFERENT CULTURAL AND LEGAL LANDSCAPES

Research from EY in collaboration with the NYU School of Law's Center for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging revealed three approaches that multinational organizations can take to engage with their LGBTQ+ employees across different cultural and legal landscapes:

"When in Rome"

Company adheres to local norms by creating exceptions to their pro-LGBTQ+ policies and procedures

"Embassy"

Company creates an inclusive environment internally, but does not seek to effect changes in the social and legal landscape

"Advocate"

Company is an active change agent and engages in corporate activism to modify local laws in support of the LGBTQ+ communities

Companies can build their capacity to move from one model to the next. Some key risk assessment questions to consider include:

Legal considerations:

- What are the current laws against LGBTQ+ including advocacy?
- Does LGBTQ+ activity jeopardize our employees' safety?
- Are LGBTQ+ employees protected against discrimination by law?

Social considerations:

- Is the social climate safe for LGBTQ+ professionals?
- Are there visible allies and partnerships for the LGBTQ+ community outside of your organization?
- Are subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community recognized and accepted?

Company considerations:

- Are there visible LGBTQ+ leaders and allies?
- Do employees feel safe, supported and included being out at your organization?
- Do you have visible business and employee resource groups in which employees can engage?

Excerpted from EY's "LGBT+ inclusion: Can you apply a globally consistent policy across an inconsistent world?"



BEST PRACTICE

Pride at Vertex: Celebration, Reflection and Intersectionality

PRIDE is one of Vertex's four global employee resource networks (ERNs) that foster connectivity and collaboration among colleagues. Dedicated to developing and enhancing belonging and career satisfaction for LGBTQ+ and allied Vertexians, the PRIDE ERN has amassed over 300 members across levels, functions and geographies. It serves as an example of how engaged employees and committed leadership ensure that Pride is embedded in the corporate culture throughout the year—not just in June.

Community is an important area of focus for the PRIDE ERN. The network is committed to ensuring their efforts are contributing to Vertex's unique culture — an inclusive environment where everyone feels comfortable bringing their best self to work. The PRIDE ERN aims to be a supportive team that all LGBTQ+ colleagues and allies can rely on for sharing experiences; it also creates a safe space for discussing relevant, sometimes challenging, topics. The PRIDE ERN engages with employees across the company and around the world to recognize and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community, including during Pride Month, International Day of Transgender Visibility, Lesbian Visibility Week, among others.

Advocacy is another critical component of the PRIDE ERN. Their work focuses on how to advocate for its members and allies and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. This includes:

- Partnering with Human Resources, Facilities and other Vertex groups to establish and expand inclusive policies, benefits and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals. Our latest industry-leading U.S. total rewards and benefits package has expanded gender affirming services, fertility coverage and mental health programs.

- Providing visibility and connection to LGBTQ+ organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG, GLAD, and [Fenway Health](#).

Education: Continuous learning is another focus area for the PRIDE ERN. The group has its own budget and regularly invests in hosting external speakers (often in conjunction with other ERNs) in recognition of the intersectionality of individuals' identities. They also host panels with colleagues from different areas of the organization that come together to share their personal experiences and perspectives.

One successful campaign has been around **sharing pronouns**. The PRIDE ERN partnered with the ID&E, People Experience and Data, Technology and Engineering teams to offer self-identification options across tools like HR profiles, Microsoft Office and Zoom. Vertexians have multiple gender identity and pronoun options to choose from. To help promote this initiative and encourage employees to opt in, they also shared information and resources of why pronouns are important, including why they are important at work.

To further enhance corporate culture, Vertex launched **a reverse mentoring program** that provides LGBTQ+ members with a forum to coach, train, and develop their leadership team on sexual orientation and gender diversity issues. This successful program is another example of how Vertex leadership continuously commits to better understanding the lived experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. This Vertex initiative has become a model for other biotech companies that are interested in setting up a similar program.

“ I feel that our inclusive benefits at Vertex are unparalleled, and I personally wonder how different my life might have been if I had such options early in my career? I see these benefits as a strong and consistent affirmation of our community by Vertex leadership. ”
- Morrey Atkinson, SVP Commercial Manufacturing and Supply Chain, PRIDE Executive Sponsor

TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES Creating Equitable Career Opportunities

Talent acquisition strategies. Ensuring adequate representation of LGBTQ+ employees at all levels in the organization requires effective strategies to source, attract, and select talent.

- Recruitment processes should be reviewed to mitigate potential biases - e.g. using structured interviews, removing personal details on resumes, pooled evaluation of candidates, etc. Job postings/descriptions should always be worded using gender-neutral language and inclusive and equitable benefits advertised upfront.
- Employers should be mindful of particular challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ communities that have a direct impact on employability and job stability. For example, LGBTQ+ young adults are more at risk than their straight, cisgender peers to experience poverty, housing insecurity, and have less access to higher education (CAP, 2022). Partnering with local career launchpad programs for LGBTQ+ individuals (such as [Breaktime](#)), re-evaluating education requirements, and participating in [recruitment events](#) geared towards the LGBTQ+ communities can provide employers access to a qualified talent pool that could otherwise remain untapped.

Mentoring and sponsorship. As with other underrepresented groups, [sponsorship and mentoring](#) can be powerful tools for enhancing visibility and developing important leadership competencies.

- Having a sponsor has been found to be a top driver of job satisfaction for LGBTQ+ employees. Those who have the backing of a sponsor in their organization feel much more satisfied with their career progression and rate of promotion than those who do not ([Hewlett, HBR, 2013](#)).
- High-potential LGBTQ+ employees should have access to internal, higher-level leaders who can [mentor and sponsor](#) them (who are not necessarily LGBTQ+). It is equally important for employers to facilitate access to external LGBTQ+ networking and professional organizations (such as [Out Professionals](#) or [Pride in Our Workplace](#)) for mentorship in other key areas and a sense of connection.
- Access to mentors and sponsors can vary depending on individuals' intersectional identities. Data from [McKinsey \(2020\)](#) revealed how transgender employees are significantly less likely than their cisgender counterparts to have a sponsor in their organization - 21% versus 32%.

LGBTQ+ individuals **with a sponsor** are more likely to feel **satisfied** with career progress:

Following through the hierarchy of my industry



Satisfied with rate of promotion



Being promoted quickly

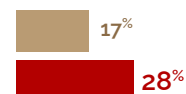


While those **without a sponsor** are more likely to feel **stalled**:

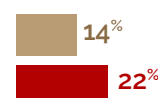
Stalled in my career



Not recognized for my talents

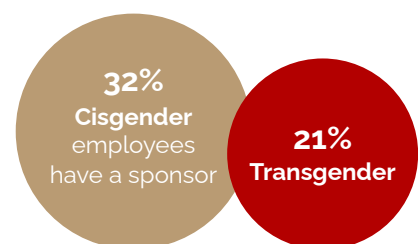


Not given career development opportunities



Source: [Hewlett, HBR, \(2013\)](#)

Access to sponsors varies:



Source: [McKinsey \(2020\)](#)

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND ADVOCACY Leading Change through Authentic Displays of Support

Community partnerships. LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations have long been a source of community and support for LGBTQ+ employees and are a crucial partner to engage with when designing and implementing initiatives.

- Establishing key partnerships with these groups can provide employers with access to a wealth of resources as they design internal efforts and allows them to tap into a variety of services and networks that can have a tremendous impact on the lives of LGBTQ+ employees.
- Employers should engage their ERG in identifying local organizations they can both support and collaborate with.

Advocacy efforts. As the composition of the workforce continues to evolve, employers will face increased pressure to take a stance on a variety of social issues and become catalysts for broader societal change.

- Advocacy efforts can range from engaging in internal or nationally recognized LGBTQ+ awareness/allyship campaigns, to participating in local Pride events, all the way to making public statements of support regarding critical issues facing the LGBTQ+ communities, as well as championing legislative reform.
- 72% of Fortune 500 companies have a public statement of commitment to the LGBTQ+ communities (HRC, 2022). However, when statements of support are not backed by concrete action and are deemed as performative, these could ultimately backfire.

“The professional connection that our people make [through attending national LGBTQ+ conferences and partnerships] gives them a greater sense of community and connection, and therefore the strength, the resources, and the network to then be their full selves at work...Year after year I hear things like “this was the first time I ever met a trans person like me” or “this was the first time I met a lesbian woman who looks like me, and dresses like me, and has a family like mine.”

Jamie Bergeron
Americas DEI Center of Excellence, EY US
[BCCWF Panel Discussion: Supporting LGBTQ+ Employees](#)

LGBTQ+ ADVOCACY AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **Out and Equal** Educational programs and resources for employers. Hosts annual Workplace Summit conference.
- **Pride in Our Workplace** Resources for employers, as well as networking and community building for LGBTQ+ professionals.
- **Human Rights Campaign** Known for their annual Corporate Equality Index and advocacy work. Offers a variety of guides and resources.
- **Family Equality** Community and support for LGBTQ+ families, particularly related to family building. Offers a variety of virtual events.
- **UCLA Williams Institute** Research on LGBTQ+ issues and public policy advocacy.
- **GLAAD** Media monitoring organization that offers a variety of guidelines and resources.
- **PFLAG** Advocacy, support, and educational resources. Hundreds of chapters nationwide.
- **Gender Spectrum** Counseling and educational services, supporting families of LGBTQ+ children. Hosts online support groups.
- **The Trevor Project** Suicide prevention and support for LGBTQ+ youth.

BEST PRACTICE

EY: Leading practices for LGBTQ+ inclusion at work



GRASSROOTS BEGINNINGS

LGBT+ inclusion efforts at Ernst & Young LLP (EY US) began in 2003 when a group of LGBT+ professionals started building the community that would eventually form the “bEYond” Professional Network – or employee resource group (later renamed to “Unity”). The original group enabled LGBT+ professionals to connect and support culture change across the broader firm. It also allowed aspiring allies to learn, get involved, and discover insights that informed progress on inclusive policies and benefits, including domestic partner benefits.

A FOCUS ON PEOPLE

With these grassroots beginnings, Unity has always been directly tied to achieving the equity goals across the organization and building community among people. Today, its broad global network of 4000+ members (including allies) continue to provide feedback and insights that inform new initiatives before they launch. Unity’s 50+ US chapters activate members locally and work closely through national steering committees and task forces to host centralized programming and events around Pride; Transgender Day of Visibility; International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia; and other important celebrations and observances.

Through Unity, the firm’s inclusive leadership learning initiatives supporting the LGBT+ community were amplified and implemented. With access to resources such as Ally2Advocate (a self-paced learning journey for aspiring allies), the Trans & Gender Diverse Community Toolkit and Education series, the Global Bi+ Guide and more, Unity members work locally, collaboratively with other networks and client teams to foster a culture of allyship and inclusion for all.

FOCUS ON CLIENTS AND COMMUNITY

In developing a robust strategy to support LGBT+ professionals, the firm has worked closely with organizations leading in this space, including the Human Rights Campaign, the Trevor Project, Out &

Equal and more, building a cross-industry community to influence the broader culture. EY has also looked for key places to use its experiences and voice to advocate for equality (such as the Equality Act), in the hope of continuing progress both inside and outside the workplace.

BUILDING EQUITY INTO ALL EY DOES

To build community and foster a sense of belonging among LGBT+ professionals, EY has implemented equitable systems and processes to support an inclusive culture. For example, Self-ID categories allow all EY’s people to denote their gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. Understanding who EY’s people are across these categories and others, including ethnicity, veteran status and ability, enables the firm to better support and track progress in areas such as recruitment, retention and promotion.

To support trans and gender-diverse people, EY created a one-on-one liaison model to work with Talent and business leaders to build trans-inclusion allyship skills, evolve benefits, and provide support to individuals as they make their own transition-related decisions and navigate resources. EY has also streamlined name change efforts across systems and integrated pronoun sharing in firm email signatures and at events to further support a gender-inclusive culture.

Keeping people safe and healthy is an integral part of EY’s firmwide focus on wellbeing. The firm proudly offers 16-week fully paid gender-neutral parental leave policy (inclusive of birth, adoption, foster care, surrogacy, guardianship), along with the Pathways to Parenthood benefit, which provides a reimbursement of up to \$50,000 for fertility treatment or adoption-related expenses. In addition, gender-affirming health care is provided via basic health plan with supplemental support through the firm’s Pathways to Transition program to account for gaps in the healthcare industry. EY has also teamed with Global Security and Risk teams to develop safety guidelines for LGBT+ professionals who travel globally to serve EY clients.

Conclusion and Key Recommendations

To summarize, employers should keep the following in mind as they strive to build a more supportive work environment for LGBTQ+ employees using the Safety, Equity, and Community Model:

Ensure safety through policies and allyship: Communicate your non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies and educate employees at all levels to reinforce zero tolerance of these behaviors. Enlist allies and provide guidance on how to create a respectful and inclusive work environment for LGBTQ+ colleagues.

Listen and act: Create an open feedback loop with your LGBTQ+ employees to build trust, enable people to be heard, identify challenges and provide relevant suggestions that create change. Share back the actions steps and progress that comes from the feedback.

Embed equity: Elevate LGBTQ+ inclusion into the talent management agenda and involve allies in the development and implementation of key culture change initiatives that support the inclusion and advancement of LGBTQ+ professionals.

Collaborate and advocate: Establish strategic partnerships with LGBTQ+ organizations. Connecting into the larger community and sustained advocacy from the private sector is an important part of supporting the LGBTQ+ community for the long-term.

Measure and communicate: Determine clear metrics and key performance indicators to assess progress. Track not just representation of LGBTQ+ employees, but also progress along the pipeline, as well as employee sentiment on topics related to safety, equity, and belonging.

Selected References

- Gallup Survey, 2021
- 2021 Household Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)
- How the LGBTQ+ Community Fares in the Workplace (McKinsey, 2020)
- LGBTQ+ Voices: Learning from Lived Experiences (McKinsey, 2020)
- A New LGBTQ workforce has Arrived - Inclusive Cultures Must Follow (BCG, 2020)
- LGBT People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment (Williams Institute, 2021)
- A Workplace Divided: Understanding the Climate for LGBTQ Workers Nationwide (HRC, 2018)
- Corporate Equality Index 2022 (HRC, 2022)
- Facts about LGBTQ+ Families (Family Equality, 2020)

“This is about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love.”

GLAAD, Talking About LGBT Equality: Overall Approaches

USEFUL RESOURCES

- The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate (Gainsburg, 2020)
- My Pronouns Are She/They. What Are Yours? (HBR)
- Why Many Businesses are Becoming More Vocal in Support of LGBTQ Rights (HBR)
- Creating a Trans-Inclusive Workplace (HBR)
- Best Practices for Nonbinary Inclusion in the Workplace (Out and Equal)
- Workplace Gender Identity and Transition Guidelines (Out and Equal)
- Debunking the Myths: Transgender Health and Well-Being (HRC)
- Making Paid Leave Work for Every Family (CAP)

“ Our efforts and commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion and equity have a long history, and make an impact on our people every day. Staying focused on evolving and consistently improving our approach to support the broadest range of people is part of that commitment — what is relevant today, might be outdated eventually. We listen and learn from our people, readjusting as needed, that’s how we know our efforts have real impact. ”

- Jamie Bergeron, Americas DEI Center of Excellence, EY US

The Boston College Center for Work & Family is the country's leading university-based center focused on helping organizations enhance the employee experience. By bridging the worlds of academic research and corporate practice, the Center helps progressive employers find the most relevant, evidence-based information available in order to craft the best possible workforce management practices.

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