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# Supporting and Affirming LGBTQIA+ Employees



A Guide to Workplace Inclusion



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# A Guide to Workplace Inclusion



As a Black, Asian, LGBTQIA+, and women owned consulting firm, Different is deeply committed to assisting our clients in creating inclusive, supportive, and affirming workplace environments for all employees, including their LGBTQIA+ team members. In light of the recent increase in discriminatory practices and anti-LGBTQIA+ and, specifically, anti-trans laws being passed across the country, it is more crucial than ever to protect and support LGBTQIA+ individuals in the workplace. This comprehensive guide offers practical best practices to promote LGBTQIA+ inclusion, not only during Pride Month, but throughout the year.





# Where To Focus

## **1** Build Awareness + Empathy

This section of our guide offers practical strategies to help you and your organization develop the awareness and empathy necessary to create a workplace that celebrates and supports LGBTQIA+ identities.

## **2** Promoting an LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Culture

This section highlights actionable steps to promote an LGBTQIA+ inclusive workplace, ensuring that policies, practices, and language reflect this commitment.

## **3** Implement Inclusive Policies + Procedures

This section focuses on implementing inclusive policies and procedures that foster a supportive environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

## **4** Expand Your Impact

This section focuses on actionable steps you can take to expand your impact and support the trans community beyond the workplace.

# Build Awareness + Empathy

Awareness and empathy play a vital role in fostering a truly LGBTQIA+ inclusive workplace. By building a foundation of understanding and promoting respectful communication, we can create workplace environments where every individual feels seen, heard, and valued. This section of our guide offers practical strategies to help you and your organization develop the awareness and empathy necessary to create a workplace that celebrates and supports LGBTQIA+ identities.

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## ✓ Develop a DEI glossary

To facilitate open and inclusive communication, we recommend developing a comprehensive DEI glossary that includes common terms related to LGBTQIA+ identities. This glossary serves as a valuable resource for employees to familiarize themselves with the appropriate terminology and promotes respectful conversations around gender identity and sexual orientation. By creating a shared language, we can eliminate misunderstandings and foster a more inclusive workplace environment.

## ✓ Recognize gender as a spectrum

In the journey towards trans inclusivity, it's crucial to emphasize that gender is a spectrum and extends beyond the traditional binary understanding. By embracing the diversity of gender identities and acknowledging the experiences of individuals under the trans umbrella, we can challenge societal norms and create a workplace that celebrates the richness of gender expression. Encourage open discussions and provide educational materials to help employees expand their understanding of diverse gender identities.





## ✓ **Conduct training sessions + immersive workshops**

Education is a powerful tool for promoting awareness and empathy. We recommend organizing training sessions and immersive workshops that provide employees with a deeper understanding of LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences. These sessions should go beyond theory and provide concrete actions that participants can take to generate greater inclusion for their LGBTQIA+ colleagues. By engaging employees in interactive discussions and practical exercises, we can foster a culture of empathy and create immediate impact within the organization.

## ✓ **Share external resources**

Expanding awareness and empathy requires ongoing learning and access to diverse perspectives. Share external resources such as websites, books, documentaries, and articles that further employees' knowledge and understanding of LGBTQIA+ identities. By providing these resources, we encourage continuous education and promote a culture of lifelong learning within your organization.

## ✓ **Roll-out specialized training for managers + HR**

Managers play a pivotal role in creating an inclusive environment for their team members. It is essential to provide specialized training to equip managers with the knowledge and skills to support and affirm LGBTQIA+ and, specifically, trans employees. This training should cover topics such as best practices for addressing gender-related challenges, fostering open communication, and creating an inclusive team culture. Additionally, HR team members who directly engage with employees and candidates should undergo mandatory LGBTQIA+ inclusion training to ensure consistency and sensitivity in their interactions.

# Promoting an LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Culture

It is important to foster an LGBTQIA+ inclusive culture where every individual feels respected, valued, and supported. This section highlights actionable steps to promote an LGBTQIA+ inclusive workplace, ensuring that policies, practices, and language reflect this commitment.

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## ✔ Develop a comprehensive anti-discrimination policy

To create a safe and inclusive environment, it is crucial to develop and communicate a comprehensive zero-tolerance, anti-discrimination policy explicitly, including sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. This policy should outline the organization's commitment to preventing discrimination and harassment and provide clear guidelines on reporting procedures.

## ✔ Promptly address any discrimination reports

Implementing effective procedures to address complaints and reports of discrimination is essential. Ensure that all reports are treated with the utmost seriousness, investigated promptly, and resolved in a fair and unbiased manner. Communicate transparently with the parties involved, providing support and necessary resources throughout the process.

## ✔ Respect pronouns

Promote the use of correct pronouns by providing education and guidance on pronoun usage to all employees. Encourage employees to use the pronouns individuals have shared and normalize pronoun sharing during introductions. However, always emphasize that pronoun sharing should be optional, respecting the safety and privacy of LGBTQIA+ individuals who may choose not to disclose their pronouns in certain settings.





### ✓ **Avoid gendered assumptions + language**

Foster a culture of inclusion by encouraging your team to avoid making assumptions about employees' gender identities and refraining from using unnecessary gendered terms. By promoting gender-neutral language and practices, such as using "they/them" when gender is unknown, we create a more inclusive environment where everyone can feel seen and valued.

### ✓ **Ensure inclusivity in women's initiatives**

When organizing women's initiatives, it is crucial to ensure inclusivity for LGBTQIA+ and specifically trans women and acknowledge the unique marginalization and challenges they face. Provide space for LGBTQIA+ and trans-specific centric discussions, consider the specific needs and experiences of these women, and actively work to dismantle any barriers that may exist.

### ✓ **Prioritize trans-centric discussions + programming**

As part of your LGBTQIA+ employee resource group (ERG) initiatives, prioritize trans-centric discussions, events, and programming. By highlighting and centering the experiences and perspectives of trans individuals, your organization can foster a supportive and inclusive environment for all team members.

### ✓ **Refine DEI statements**

To signal your organization's commitment to trans inclusion, specifically call out sexual orientation, gender identity and expression in your diversity statement and/or DEI mission statement. This sends a clear message to external stakeholders and potential job candidates that your organization values and prioritizes creating an inclusive culture for all.



## ✔ **Institute inclusive hiring practices**

During the hiring process, allow job candidates to comfortably share their gender identity and pronouns. Respect their privacy and only ask for sex assigned at birth if absolutely necessary, clearly stating the reason for this request. Encourage interviewers to share their pronouns as well, if they feel safe doing so, to create and model a welcoming and inclusive environment.

## ✔ **Ensure employee feedback + forms are inclusive**

Ensure that your organization's feedback surveys, event sign-ups, and any formal or informal forms allow employees to comfortably share their sexual orientation, gender identity and pronouns beyond the binary. This practice creates an inclusive space for individuals to express their identities and ensures that organizational processes respect and honor diversity.



# Implement Inclusive Policies + Procedures

Creating an LGBTQIA+ inclusive workplace goes beyond mere words. It requires tangible actions and policies that support and affirm the identities of LGBTQIA+ employees. This section focuses on implementing inclusive policies and procedures that foster a supportive environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

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## ✓ Integrate trans-inclusive HR policies

Ensure that your HR policies, such as dress code and bathroom usage, are LGBTQIA+ and, specifically, trans-inclusive. If possible, provide gender-neutral restroom options in any on-site office locations to accommodate the diverse needs of employees. By creating inclusive policies, you send a clear message that all employees are respected and their identities are valued.

## ✓ Create user-friendly record update processes

Establish a user-friendly process for employees to update their records with their correct name and gender identity (and always ask for this prior to onboarding a new hire). Enable the ability for employees to add and change their pronouns on the platforms currently used within your organization, such as Zoom, Slack, email, and others. This ensures that individuals' identities are accurately represented and acknowledged in all digital communications.

## ✓ Co-create transition plans

If a trans employee decides to undergo a gender transition, it is essential to co-create a transition plan with them. This collaborative approach allows the employee to inform the process and determine how upcoming changes should be communicated to the broader team. By involving the individual in the transition plan, you demonstrate support and respect for their unique and incredibly personal journey.





### ✓ **Maintain confidentiality + privacy**

Establish protocols to maintain confidentiality during a gender transition process. Ensure that only relevant individuals have access to sensitive information, such as an employee's gender identity or medical details. Respecting privacy and confidentiality is crucial in fostering a safe and supportive environment for trans employees.

### ✓ **Use inclusive language in written communications**

Review company communications, including emails, job descriptions, newsletters, and official documents to ensure they use gender-inclusive language. This means using gender-neutral terms whenever possible and avoiding assumptions about an individual's gender identity. By adopting inclusive language practices, you create an environment where everyone feels included and valued.

### ✓ **Offer support for gender-affirming care**

Provide resources and support for employees undergoing gender-affirming procedures or treatments. This includes ensuring that your organization's healthcare benefits cover gender-affirming care and offering assistance in navigating the healthcare system. By providing comprehensive support, you demonstrate your commitment to the holistic well-being of your employees.

### ✓ **Ensure parental leave policies are inclusive**

Update your parental leave policies to account for any families who choose to adopt and ensure that the language used around partners and individuals is inclusive for LGBTQIA+ employees. This ensures that all employees, regardless of their gender identity or family structure, can access the same benefits and support.

# Expand Your Impact

It is important to go beyond the confines of your organization to make a positive impact for LGBTQIA+ rights and inclusion. This section focuses on actionable steps you can take to expand your impact and support the trans community beyond the workplace.

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## ✔ Bring in LGBTQIA+ speakers

When organizing events or speaker series, be intentional about including LGBTQIA+ speakers in your line-up. Across various topics and throughout the year, ensure that trans voices in particular are represented and amplified. This not only provides valuable perspectives but also promotes visibility and awareness of LGBTQIA+ experiences.

## ✔ Collaborate with LGBTQIA+ specialists

To enhance your organization's understanding and support of LGBTQIA+ inclusion, collaborate with local organizations or consultants who specialize in LGBTQIA+ issues, and preferably share those lived experiences. Their expertise and insights can help shape your practices, policies, and training programs, ensuring that you are creating an inclusive environment for all employees.

## ✔ Support LGBTQIA+ rights organizations

Demonstrate your commitment to LGBTQIA+ rights and specifically trans rights by donating to organizations that are dedicated to advancing LGBTQIA+ rights and creating a more inclusive society. These organizations work tirelessly to promote equality and support LGBTQIA+ individuals, and your contribution can make a significant impact in their efforts.



## ✔ **Advocate for inclusion + equal rights**

Take an active role in supporting local and national legislation that promotes inclusion and equal rights for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Stay informed about legislative initiatives and engage in advocacy efforts to ensure that LGBTQIA+ rights are protected and respected. By leveraging your influence, you can contribute to creating a more inclusive society for all.

## ✔ **Leverage your platform to speak up**

Leverage your organization's platform and influence to speak up for LGBTQIA+ rights in your local communities. Share educational resources, raise awareness about the challenges faced by the trans community, and advocate for inclusive policies and practices. By using your voice and platform, you can help foster positive change and encourage others to join in supporting LGBTQIA+ rights.



# Closing Thoughts

At Different, we recognize the urgent need for LGBTQIA+ inclusive workplaces and are committed to helping our clients create environments that respect and uplift their LGBTQIA+ team members. By implementing the best practices outlined in this guide, you can foster a culture of inclusion, support, and empowerment for all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Let us work together to create workplaces that celebrate and protect LGBTQIA+ individuals – not only during Pride Month, but throughout the year.





# Mini Assessment:

## Assessing LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in People Processes

## Overview

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This toolkit audit questionnaire is designed to help organizations assess their current people processes and identify areas where improvements can be made to enhance LGBTQIA+ inclusion. By completing this questionnaire, you can gain valuable insights into the strengths and gaps in your organization's practices and take targeted actions to create a more inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Please answer each question based on your organization's current practices.



# Policies + Guidelines

## What is currently in place at your organization?



Does your organization have a written anti-discrimination policy that explicitly includes sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression?



Are your HR policies, such as dress code and bathroom usage, LGBTQIA+ and trans-inclusive?



Do you have a policy in place that supports employees in updating their records with their correct name and gender identity?



Are guidelines in place to ensure confidentiality during a gender transition process?





# Communication + Education

## What is currently in place at your organization?



Do you provide training sessions or workshops to educate employees about LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences?



Are concrete actions provided in these training sessions that participants can take to generate greater inclusion for their LGBTQIA+ colleagues?



Are employees educated on correct pronoun usage and encouraged to use the pronouns individuals have shared?



Does your organization's communications, such as emails, job descriptions, and official documents use gender-inclusive language?



# Support + Accommodations

## What is currently in place at your organization?



Does your organization have guides or resources to support employees who are transitioning?



Are employees provided information on medical leave, counseling services, and workplace accommodations related to gender transition?



Do your healthcare benefits include coverage for gender-affirming care?



Are parental leave policies inclusive of LGBTQIA+ employees and their families?



# Hiring + Recruitment

## What is currently in place at your organization?



Do job candidates have the option to share their gender identity and pronouns during the application process?



Are interviewers trained on inclusive practices and encouraged to share their pronouns during interviews?



Are inclusive language and images used in job postings and recruitment materials?



# External Engagement + Community Support

## What is currently in place at your organization?



Does your organization collaborate with local LGBTQIA+ organizations or consultants who specialize in LGBTQIA+ inclusion to provide additional support and expertise?



Do you donate to organizations working to advance LGBTQIA+ rights and inclusion?



Does your organization support local and national legislature that promotes inclusion and equal rights for LGBTQIA+ individuals?



Does your organization use its platform to advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights in your local communities?

# Let's shake things up.



By completing this toolkit audit questionnaire, you have taken an important step in assessing your organization's current people processes around LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Review your responses to identify areas of strength and areas where improvements can be made. Use this assessment as a guide to develop targeted action plans and implement necessary changes to create a more inclusive environment for trans individuals – and remember to include your LGBTQIA+ employees in the co-creation process if they are interested! Remember, the journey toward LGBTQIA+ inclusion is ongoing, and continuous evaluation and improvement are key to creating a workplace where all employees feel affirmed, valued, and supported.



# It's time to do DEI differently.

## Who we are

At Different, we're as custom as they come because we believe in order to drive real, meaningful, and sustainable change through your diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, we must co-create a way forward together that resonates with the unique needs of your business and your team. Your people already know what needs to change – we're just here to help make that happen.

After 50+ combined years in the DEI space, our team knows that solutions that have served us historically, are not the ones that will set us up for a better tomorrow. This work requires a bolder, more holistic, and impact-driven approach with partners who are willing to really go there to get shit done.



# We're a new kind of DEI consulting firm.

Different is a Black, Asian, LGBTQIA+, and women owned DEI consulting firm and we believe in doing DEI differently. We cultivate human connection as a means to propel purpose-driven organizations into a different tomorrow. One where organizations foster diverse, equitable, and inclusive human-centered workplaces that welcome all people to bring their authentic selves to work – to do their best work.

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Contact us at [info@differentdei.co](mailto:info@differentdei.co) to receive a free strategic support session to support your DEI efforts.

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