Moving Beyond the Binary:

A Guide on How to Make Your Organization Meaningfully Inclusive of Two-Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary, and Gender Diverse People

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ACKNOWLEDGING THE LAND

Before we begin, it is vital to recognize that this guide was written in Mi'kmaw'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People who have lived on, cared for, and protected this land for over 13,500 years.

We all have the privilege to live and work on this land and we are all treaty people. This territory is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, which Mi'kmaq, Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet), and Passamaquoddy Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1726. The treaties did not include surrender of lands and resources, but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations. To learn more about the important and urgent work of reconciliation on Turtle Island (North America), read the **94 calls to action** as outlined by the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**.

This page and the next feature artwork by **Mi'kmaw artist Whitney Gould**, as a way to honour and acknowledge this land, Mi'kmaw'ki. We urge you, the reader, to take a few moments to look at, take in, and appreciate her art as you consider your relationship to reconciliation today.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Moving Beyond the Binary: a Guide on How to Make Your Organization Meaningfully Inclusive of Two-Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary, and Gender Diverse People*.

This guide is intended for any employer, service provider, business, or other organization in Nova Scotia. The purpose of the guide is to help you understand the needs and experiences of gender diverse populations, what the law says about gender identity and expression, and the importance and value of fostering meaningful and authentic inclusion of two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people across our province.

Our communities, our institutions, and our lives are all made better when everyone can feel safe, respected, and included in the spaces we share. This includes spaces such as our workplaces, schools, businesses, coffee shops, restaurants, shopping centres, government agencies, and many other organizations that are essential parts of life in Nova Scotia.

The aim of our guide is to equip you with concrete tools to make your organizations safer spaces for gender diverse people. We'll cover important topics such as pronouns and names, gender inclusive washrooms, ways to think outside the gender binary, and inclusive language tips.

We'll also cover important pieces of legislation that provide protections to two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people – notably the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for any person or organization in Nova Scotia that wants to foster safer spaces for people of all diverse genders. This includes business owners, employers, human resource professionals, service providers, government agencies, the retail sector, educational institutions, and any organization which provides services to the public.

After you read through this guide, you will have the basic knowledge and tools to create safer, more inclusive spaces for two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse individuals and communities.

Please note that this guide provides general legal information and not legal advice. If you require advice or guidance on a particular situation, you can find a lawyer through Legal Info Nova Scotia's **Lawyer Referral Service**.

MAGIA

Gender identity: trans nonbinary genderfluid
Pronouns: they/them
Works in: Arts and Culture, not-for-profit

We are always changing; embrace the fluidity and do not fear the Water's flow.

Is there a free policy template for supporting gender diverse people that organizations can use?

Yes! We are proud to offer a **free policy template** that supports gender diverse employees at work. Any organization can simply copy and paste this policy and amend it as needed in their own context. This policy covers both employer and gender diverse employee responsibilities. It also outlines important commitments that Human Resources employees and units can make in any organization.

What other supports exist in connection to this guide?

We are proud to offer additional supports and content pieces in connection to this guide, including:

- A dedicated space on the **Legal Information Society website** for this guide, related portraits, resources, and social media content that you are welcome to use in your workplace or share with your networks and community.

- Three **lovely animated videos** with helpful information which directs people to the guide. We encourage you to share these as well.

Why is this guide important?

Our institutions, laws, and systems in Canada have often relied on the rigid idea of the gender binary. This idea suggests that everyone can be placed in a neat and simple gender box depending on how they were identified by doctors and family when they were born.

This understanding of gender is outdated and does not reflect the diversity of genders that exists here in Canada and across the globe. The truth is that our world and its people are much more complex and interesting than the gender binary suggests.

Two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people are a significant and important part of our world and always will be. In fact, including these folks in your organization can be of huge benefit to any environment - members of diverse groups bring fresh and valuable perspectives that support innovative and creative spaces.

No matter what our own gender or lived experience may be, we **all** play a role in making Nova Scotia better and safer for our gender diverse friends, neighbours, family, colleagues, clients, and community members.

Our guide cannot claim to represent the unique experiences and needs of all gender diverse individuals. But we are hopeful that its content will contribute to a culture shift which helps all Nova Scotians to feel safer to be themselves at work, in the places they visit, in their communities, and in all of their day-to-day interactions.

We acknowledge the important and invaluable work that many 2SLGBTQIA+ activists, advocates, and support organizations have done over the past several decades to make Nova Scotia a safer and welcoming place for everyone. We hope that our guide can honour and build on this past work.

A note on language

Language is always evolving, which means that some of the terms used in this guide may change over time and become outdated. This is because gender identity and gender expression are complex, and so words that we use at any given time to name particular identities may change as our understanding of those identities deepens and evolves.

Throughout this guide, we use the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ to refer to the following identities: two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and + for the many other identities that exist within the queer spectrum.

Who is this guide about?

This guide uses terms like "two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people" to refer to a community of people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth. You can refer to the glossary at the end of this guide if any of these terms are unfamiliar.

There are many identities that fall under the gender diverse umbrella, including genderqueer people, agender people, two-spirit people, non-binary people, people who identify with more than one gender, and numerous others.

Sometimes people who are gender diverse also use the word "queer" to refer to themselves. "Queer" is a broad term, and can apply to people whose sexual orientation is anything other than straight/heterosexual and people whose gender identity is anything other than cisgender.

We wanted to center the word "queer" in this guide, because it is an important aspect of identity for many people who are part of the gender diverse community. We use the phrase "two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse" (or simply "gender diverse") throughout the guide, however, to make it clear that we're referring to people with marginalized gender identities and gender expressions rather than people who are marginalized because of their sexual orientation.

This guide provides information about the law, but also aims to foster understanding about who two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people are and what is most important to this community. Of course not all gender diverse people are the same or have the same experience. But a common reality shared by most gender diverse people is that they have grown up in a world that sees them as different and they have had to carve their own paths in their own unique and beautiful ways.

Along with this guide, we have created a series of portraits of gender diverse people. You will see these portraits throughout the guide, along with thoughts from each person about their gender identity.

NAT

Pronouns: they/he/she
Gender identity: trans non-binary
Works in: health education

Embracing my queer and trans identity has opened up how I exist and behave in the health care profession. Not only am I more aware of the systems of oppression responsible for health disparities but I feel empowered to critically analyze the discourses they promote and work with others to actively dismantle them. More specifically, my perspective as a non-binary dietitian has helped me to view nutrition, food, health, and the body in a way that does not force binaries (especially those of good vs. bad) and I believe this has made me a more compassionate and caring practitioner.

INTERSECTIONALITY: A GUIDING FRAMEWORK

Before we get into the main content of this guide, there is one more important concept that we wanted to center as a foundational framework for all of the tips, information, and other content that this guide provides. This concept is **intersectionality**.

Whenever we talk about the experiences of two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people, it's important to apply an intersectional framework. This means acknowledging the reality that people have identities that are made up of many different parts, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability.

None of us are defined only by a single aspect of who we are. We are all impacted by the ways that various aspects of our identities intersect or work together.

As the great Black feminist writer Audre Lorde once said, "There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."

"Intersectionality" is an important term coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, an internationally renowned law professor and critical race theorist. **Intersectionality refers to the complex way in which different aspects of identity intersect and shape a person's overall experience of the world and how they are treated by others.**

For some people, aspects of their identity (such as being white, cisgender, and able-bodied) may give them more power and privilege than others. For other people, the combination of different aspects of their identity means that they have less power and privilege in society than others have. For example, if someone is both Black and transgender, this person will likely experience discrimination in more complex ways than someone who is white and transgender or someone who is Black and cisgender.

Intersectionality is a way of recognizing how if someone is marginalized in multiple ways, this increases and complicates the ways in which they experience discrimination.

Many two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people also regularly experience racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination. These experiences can impact their ability to access services, find and keep employment, feel at ease in public spaces, and many other daily activities that people with more power and privilege get to take for granted.

It is beyond the scope of this guide to give a thorough overview of intersectionality. But it is still important to center intersectionality as an overarching principle that should be applied whenever possible.

As you read through this guide, bear in mind that people who are two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse are also other things as well. Their lives are also shaped and impacted by other characteristics such as their race, their social and cultural background, their ability, their class and social status, and numerous other factors.

RHIANNON

Gender identity: trans woman
Pronouns: she/her
Works in: queer non-profit

When a workplace supports and affirms me as a trans woman, I am able to bring my whole self to work. This allows me to thrive, which benefits both myself and the organization!

THE GENDER BINARY AND ITS COLONIAL HISTORY

As we mentioned at the beginning of this guide, it is important to acknowledge that Nova Scotia is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded (never surrendered) territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

As you read through the information in this guide, it is important to remember that Canada has a colonial history and that this history has shaped the way that we think and experience life in this country.

The harms of colonization include the traumatic legacy and ongoing impact of of residential schools, the "60s scoop" (in which numerous Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their homes), the ongoing crisis of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people, and many other examples of past and current racism against our Indigenous people and communities.

Colonialism has also shaped the way that our country, laws, and institutions understand gender.

Prior to European settlers colonizing North America, many Indigenous cultures in Canada acknowledged and celebrated gender diverse people. These cultures did not reduce gender to a simple binary. In fact, before colonization, in many Indigenous cultures two-spirit people were respected and honoured for their unique wisdom and spiritual importance.

This appreciation and reverence for two-spirit people was lost when European settlers imposed their values, languages, and ways of life on Indigenous people. However, in recent decades, there has been a significant movement to reclaim and honour the concept of what it means to be two-spirit.

When we acknowledge that we live in Mi'kma'ki, we can also acknowledge that we live in a place where gender diversity was historically valued and honoured. As we learn more about our history, we can see that the gender binary is not universal but is instead part of a value system and way of thinking that does not work for everyone and in fact may cause harm.

We all play a role in building a better Nova Scotia and a better Canada for everyone who lives here. This means reaching back into the lessons of history and also listening to the truths of two-spirit people, as well as trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people from all cultures. We all play a role in ensuring that people of all genders are respected, valued, and celebrated in their diversity.

Click here to learn more about two-spirit people in Canada.

MISHA

Gender: non-binary woman
Pronouns: she/her, they/them
Works in: acting

*Labels are not for other people to attach to me. My labels are how I chose to define my own identity to the wider world. I'm both a woman **and** non-binary.*

GENDER IDENTITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAW IN CANADA: AN OVERVIEW

TIMELINE:

- **2012** – Gender identity and gender expression are added as protected characteristics in the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act*

- **2017** – Gender identity and gender expression are added as protected characteristics in the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and added to the hate crime provisions within the Criminal Code

- **2017** – Nunavut, the Yukon, and New Brunswick become the final three provinces/territories in Canada to add gender identity to their human rights statutes. Gender identity is now a protected characteristic in every jurisdiction in Canada.

Gender identity and gender expression are protected characteristics under both the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act* and the *Canadian Human Rights Ac*t. **This means that in all areas covered by these statutes, it is illegal to discriminate against two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse people.**

The *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act* covers organizations that fall under the provincial jurisdiction, like shops, schools, most workplaces, many service providers, and numerous other examples.

The *Canadian Human Rights Act* covers organizations that fall under the federal jurisdiction, like banks and telecommunications agencies.

For more information about the division of powers and how human rights law operates in Canada, please visit **here**.

Gender identity and gender expression were added to our human rights statutes relatively recently. Gender identity and expression were added to the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act* in 2012 and to the *Canadian Human Rights Act* in 2017.

The inclusion of gender identity and expression as protected characteristics on both the provincial and federal level came about as the result of tireless work of many activists and advocates who saw the importance of recognizing and protecting some of our most vulnerable communities under the law.

The inclusion of gender identity and gender expression in our human rights statutes means that two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people have the right to be who they are and express their gender as they chose to. This means gender diverse people have the right to:

- have their pronouns and names respected in school, the workplace, and other areas covered by our human rights statutes;
- access washrooms that correspond with their gender identity; and
- many other protections such as the right not to be harassed based on their gender identity or asked intrusive questions about their bodies.

DID YOU KNOW?

The addition of gender identity and expression to our human rights legislation has resulted in many significant advancements and protections for gender diverse people in Nova Scotia. Over the last few years, this has included changes to gender options on ID documents, and updates to the kinds of gender affirming surgeries that are funded through MSI coverage (for example, see here).

What is the difference between gender identity and gender expression?

The addition of both gender identity **and** gender expression to our human rights statutes is important.

While these terms are in some ways related, they are not the same thing.

Sometimes people experience discrimination because of **both** their gender identity and gender expression, but sometimes the discrimination is targeted at **either** gender identity or gender expression.

"Gender identity" refers to someone's internal sense of their gender, how they see and understand themselves. "Gender expression" is how someone outwardly expresses their gender through various means, such as the name that they use, their pronouns, their clothing, hair, tattoos, cosmetics, and numerous other examples of how people express who they are as a person.

The inclusion of both gender identity and gender expression in our provincial and federal human rights statutes means that in all areas covered by human rights statutes, it is illegal to discriminate against two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse people for:

- how they **identify** and understand their own gender (for example, if they identify as a man, a woman, two-spirit, agender, genderqueer, more than one gender, or many other options within the gender spectrum — if any of these terms are unfamiliar, please refer to our glossary)

- how they **express** their gender (for example, whether they wear clothing or hair styles that are traditionally read as masculine or feminine; what pronouns they use; how they speak; the name they use).

While "gender identity" and "gender expression" are different, they are also related concepts. This means that in many situations when someone experiences discrimination based on one of these characteristics, they are also experiencing discrimination on the other as well. But this is not always the case.

Let's look at some examples to help unpack the differences between gender identity and gender expression.

An example of someone being discriminated against on the basis of their **gender identity** might look like this example:

> *Marco is a trans man. He told his employer recently that he is trans and asked his manager to update his information in his employee file. Marco's manager made a comment about how he "does not believe that people can be a different gender than how they were born" and refused to update Marco's record. Marco is clearly facing discrimination, as his employer refuses to respect his gender identity.*

Remember: Everyone has the right to have their gender recognized and respected by their employer and anyone else in a position of power or authority.

An example of someone being discriminated against on the basis of their gender expression might look like this example:

> *Angus is a cisgender man (i.e. he is not transgender). Angus is very comfortable in his male identity, but loves wearing clothing and cosmetics that are usually seen as being feminine. As a child, Angus was teased for wearing nail polish to school. As an adult, Angus loves who he is and regularly wears bold, beautiful eyeshadow and fitted blazers to his job at a law office. One day, his supervisor pulls him aside and asks him if he could "tone down" his makeup and outfits because the firm was worried that it would lose business from some of its older, more traditional clients. Angus was shocked and hurt.*

In this example, Angus is clearly facing discrimination based on his gender expression, because the fact that he enjoys expressing his gender in unconventional ways was seen as a problem by his employer.

Remember: Everyone has the right to express their gender in a way that makes them feel comfortable and happy. This includes at the workplace, schools, and anywhere covered by our provincial and federal human rights statutes. The only exception to this rule would be if there are dress code rules that are applied fairly and equitably to everyone and that have a rational basis. For example, it would be reasonable to require someone not to wear high heel shoes on a work site where everyone is expected to have steel toed boots for safety reasons.

An example of someone being discriminated against on the basis of **both their gender identity and gender expression** might look like this example:

Agnes is a non-binary person who uses they/them pronouns. They are a second-year university student, studying physics. On the first day of a new school year, Agnes excitedly raised their hand in class to answer a professor's question. The professor applauded them on the right answer but used the wrong pronoun to refer to them in front of the class. Agnes went to the professor's office hours later that day to have a private discussion about their gender identity and pronouns. After Agnes corrected the professor, the professor sighed and made a dismissive comment about how "trendy" it has become to "invent genders." In class the following week, the professor again used the wrong pronoun to refer to Agnes.

In this example, Agnes is clearly facing discrimination based on both their gender identity and gender expression. Their professor refused to recognize their gender identity (non-binary) and their gender expression (the fact that they express their gender by using gender neutral pronouns).

Remember: Everyone has the right to identify as any gender that feels right to them. This includes identifying outside of the traditional gender binary of male and female. Everyone also has the right to express their gender however they choose (for example, through their name and pronouns) without being afraid of ridicule, harassment, or discrimination.

What legal obligations do employers and other organizations have regarding gender diverse people?

As we have discussed, gender identity and gender expression are included as protected characteristics in both the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act* and *Canadian Human Rights Act*. This means that anywhere where these statutes apply, two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

Two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people have the right to be treated equally and have access to the same benefits, services, and spaces that cisgender people are granted.

This means that gender diverse people have the right to use washrooms that best align with their gender identity, to have their names and pronouns respected, to have identification documents that match their gender, and to expect the same degree of respect and fair treatment as cisgender people.

The following sections of the guide will provide an overview of important considerations for all employers, service providers, and other organizations so that you can meet your obligations under the law and demonstrate meaningful inclusion of people of all genders.

STEPHANIE

Gender identity: genderfluid non-binary
Pronouns: they/them
Works in: theatre, patient simulations, visual art

I have always struggled with labels. Looking back I think it's partly because I grew up with boxes that I didn't fit into, no examples of people I could relate to, no representation to help me go : "oh hey, that's me!" It took me a long time to really get a handle on who I was because of that. As I've come into my own as a genderfluid non-binary individual, the affirmation when my pronouns are used (they/them)... there is no other feeling like it.

RESPECTING PRONOUNS AND NAMES

What are pronouns and why are they so important?

Respecting someone's pronouns is a simple and important way to show that person that you accept them for who they are and that you value diversity.

In many languages such as English, we frequently refer to people by pronouns instead of using their name repeatedly.

Common pronouns that we all know include she/her and he/him. Most times, when we speak about someone in the third person, the pronouns we use have a built-in assumption about gender – i.e. using "he" to refer to someone we see as a man and "she" to refer to someone we see as a woman.

Many of us make these assumptions based on what someone looks like or their personal qualities, such as the way they dress, the length of their hair, their name, their body type, and many other characteristics that have traditionally been seen as either masculine or feminine.

These assumptions about gender are not always accurate and sometimes can be harmful. We can't always make an accurate guess about someone's gender or what their pronouns are based on how that person looks or acts.

> **A good approach to take if you don't know someone's pronouns is to use gender neutral pronouns, such as they/them.**

For example, imagine you're a café owner and a customer has forgotten their umbrella at one of the tables. You ask one of your wait staff to pick it up on their way by, so that you can put it in the lost and found. Rather than assuming the gender of the customer, you can use gender neutral pronouns and language.

So, instead of saying something like, "A lady left her umbrella at table two," try something like, "A customer left their umbrella at table two. Would you mind grabbing it on your way by?"

Simple shifts in language (such as using gender neutral pronouns when unsure of someone's gender) can have a significant impact in creating safer, more inclusive spaces for everyone. This helps to ensure that **all** the people that your organization serves feel welcome and valued.

When you demonstrate that you care about inclusion in this way, it makes others feel safer to be themselves around you. This includes not only your customers and clients, but also your fellow employees and the community generally.

Most people who speak English have grown up with an understanding that there are two third person singular pronouns that we can use to refer to other people. These pronouns are "she/her" for girls and women and "he/him" for boys and men.

These pronouns are great, but it's important to remember not to assume that someone uses one or the other based on how they look.

For example, someone with qualities that are outwardly seen as feminine might actually use "he/him" or another non-feminine pronoun. Similarly, someone with qualities that are outwardly seen as masculine might actually use "she/her" or another non-masculine pronoun.

The only way to accurately know someone's pronouns is to ask them and listen to what they say.

We can always trust in the fact that people know their own gender identity better than we do, because we are not that person. In fact, we may know nothing about that person and who they are. For this reason, it's important to either use gender neutral pronouns or try to find out what someone's pronouns are before you refer to them in a conversation.

HERE ARE A COUPLE OF GOLDEN RULES TO FOLLOW:

1. **If you're referring to someone who you don't know and are not likely to get to know (such as a customer who comes into your store), it's best to use gender neutral pronouns (they/them) to refer to them. (For example, "A person came in to the shop this morning and complimented our window display. They were so nice!")**

2. **If you have an existing relationship with someone or are likely to (such as a new coworker), it's best practice to respectfully ask them about their pronouns and make sure you use them. (For example, "Welcome to our office! I'm Sarah, and my pronouns are she/her. Can I ask your pronouns?")**

What are some common pronouns I should know about?

She/her and he/him are the most commonly used third person singular pronouns, but there are other third person singular pronouns that we need to be aware of as well. These pronouns may not be quite as common, but they are still very important.

For example, "they/them" is widely accepted as a singular pronoun.

They/them pronouns are frequently used by people who identify outside of the gender binary, such as non-binary and genderqueer people. That said, not everyone who is non-binary or genderqueer wants to be referred to by they/them pronouns, so **it's always best to check in with someone about how you should refer to them rather than making assumptions.**

Some people think that they/them is grammatically incorrect when used a singular pronoun. This is absolutely not true! **In fact, they/them has been used as a singular third person pronoun for many centuries and is accepted by linguists and others who study language rules as grammatically correct.**

In recent years, many important, well-regarded dictionaries (notably the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the

Merriam-Webster dictionary) have included they/them as a singular pronoun and tracked its usage, confirming that they/them has been commonly used in its singular form for many centuries. For example, there are numerous examples of notable famous writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and even Jane Austen using they/them to refer to a single individual.

Remember: They/them is a valid singular third person gender neutral pronoun. You should use they/them to refer to people in two different situations: 1. If you don't know someone's gender and, out of respect, don't want to guess (for instance, the example above of a customer who forgot their umbrella in your café and you refer to this person as "they" rather than assuming their gender); or 2. If someone chooses themselves to use they/them pronouns. As mentioned above, many non-binary and genderqueer people use they/them pronouns, and this should always be respected as an important and valid part of identity and self-expression.

Some gender diverse people also use other, newer pronouns which are sometimes called "neopronouns" because they are a relatively new part of our shared language. Some examples of neopronouns include xe/xem/xyr, ze/hir/hirs, and ey/em/eir.

If someone uses unfamiliar pronouns, it may be hard at first to remember them and get them right. But it's important to try and practice until you have the person's pronouns memorized and feel comfortable using them regularly. **Remember that pronouns are an important part of someone's identity and that using the correct pronouns is an important and essential way to make that person feel recognized and welcome.**

We have included the following pronoun chart to help you understand some examples of different pronouns and how they are conjugated. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of all the different personal pronouns that gender diverse people may use.

SUBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	POSSESSIVE	REFLEXIVE	EXAMPLES:
she	her	hers	herself	She is walking. It belongs to her. That coat is hers. She got herself a cookie.
he	him	his	himself	He is walking. It belongs to him. That coat is his. He got himself a cookie.
they	them	theirs	themselves	They are walking. It belongs to them. That coat is theirs. They got themselves a cookie.
ze	zir	zirs	zirself	Ze is walking. It belongs to zir. That coat is zirs. Ze got zirself a cookie.

Why do some people use multiple pronouns?

Some people use multiple pronouns instead of just one set of pronouns. For example, some people use both she and they or both he and they. You will often see these options written as "she/they" or "he/they" in email signatures, name tags, and other places where pronouns are displayed.

If someone tells you that their pronouns are she/they or he/they, this means that the person is comfortable with either pronoun option. This means that you can use one or the other of these pronouns when referring to the person. That said, people who use multiple pronouns do so for a reason.

If someone uses two different pronouns, this means that both of these pronouns are an important part of their identity.

If you have a relationship with a person who uses multiple pronouns, you can check in with that person about whether or not they have a preference for a certain pronoun. **If this person doesn't have a preference, it's important to use all of their different pronouns on a regular, rotating basis.** This shows that you honor the fullness of this person's gender. For example, someone might indicate that they use they/she pronouns but have a preference for they/them pronouns. In this case, it's best to default to that person's preferred pronoun when you refer to them. As another example, if someone uses they/she pronouns and doesn't have a preference, you can use 'they' sometimes, and 'she' sometimes when you refer to this person.

What about names?

Names are also an important part of identity and should always be respected.

Many two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people adopt names for themselves that are different from the name they were given at birth. Since many names are considered either masculine or feminine, it makes sense that someone would want to adopt a name that better aligns with their gender identity.

That said, some two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people keep their original name, and this is a valid choice too.

You should always respect and use the name that someone has chosen for themselves. A name is very personal and can be an important part of who someone is. This can be especially true for people who have had to live for many years being called a name that makes them feel invalidated or uncomfortable.

Many two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people refer to their old name (the name given at birth) as their "deadname." This means that this name is no longer used.

For some people, hearing their deadname can be upsetting, because it is sometimes associated with a painful history or a life that has been left behind. It is important to respect these feelings and avoid ever using someone's deadname if you know it or asking what it was out of curiosity. In this context, respecting someone's privacy is much more important than having your curiosity satisfied.

RILEY

Gender identity: non-binary
Pronouns: they/them
Works in: law

Queerness is a celebration of love and solidarity.

What do I do if someone's legal name is different from the name they use?

Sometimes we may have access to records that show that someone's legal name is different from the name they use on a day-to-day basis. This can be particularly common if we are an employer, government office, or service provider.

A person's legal name may also be their deadname (i.e. the name they were given at birth), so it is important to be cautious and sensitive when navigating this issue.

If someone's legal name makes them uncomfortable, you might find yourself questioning why they haven't formally changed it through a legal name change process. The answer to this question is that for many people it's not so simple.

It is important to recognize that for many two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people, it can be difficult to go through the process of formally and legally changing their name from the name given at birth to the name they have chosen for themselves.

This can be for many reasons, including costs associated with the name change process or fears about going to a government organization and filling out paperwork to begin the name change process. For many two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people, these fears exist because they have had previous negative experiences at government agencies or other organizations where employees may have been disrespectful, discriminatory, or lacking in understanding about gender diversity.

One bad experience can turn someone off for life. It can make them worry about being outed as a gender diverse person in a relatively public setting. It can also make them afraid that they will be asked intrusive and inappropriate questions about their bodies and their lives.

The important thing to remember is that if you have access to or know someone's deadname, you can be compassionate in how you handle this situation and respect the person's right to privacy.

On a day-to-day basis, you should always use the name that someone has chosen for themselves rather than their legal name (if their legal name is different).

If you are an employer, for example, who needs to have a record of someone's legal name for valid reasons, that is okay. But, if that legal name is different from the name the person uses, you should do your best to keep their legal name confidential and not share it with anyone who does not need to know.

If your employee needs a name tag, business cards, or signage with their name on it, these items should always be updated to reflect the name that the person has chosen for themselves and not their legal name (if it is different).

Whenever someone tells you their new name and pronouns, the best thing to do is to thank them for sharing this information. If you are in a position of authority (such as a manager or supervisor), you can then take prompt steps to update any of your systems and records to reflect this information.

If someone tells you they have a new name and/or new pronouns, this is an important act of trust and should be respected. Calling someone by the name they have adopted is an important and essential way to validate that person and demonstrate that they are valued and welcome in your space.

Why is respecting pronouns and names so important?

When we use a person's correct pronouns and name, we're showing that we respect that person and want to create an inclusive and safe environment for people of all genders.

It can be hurtful and damaging to guess someone's pronouns and refer to them using these pronouns if that is not how the person wants to be identified.

Using incorrect pronouns to refer to someone is similar to making up a hurtful nickname for someone without their consent or input. Not using someone's correct pronouns can make them feel uncomfortable, judged, and disrespected. We all know that it can be hurtful or can even be considered harassment to make up a nickname for someone and call them this against their wishes. Similarly, it can be painful and discriminatory to call someone by pronouns or a name that are different from how that person wants to be known.

Remember that people always know themselves best. If someone shares a new name and pronouns with you, believe and accept them as they are. Pronouns and names may seem like simple things, but they have a huge impact. Using pronouns and names correctly and respectfully is an important and concrete way of building a better, safer world for everyone.

How can I respectfully ask for someone's pronouns?

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where it's easy and tempting to assume someone's gender. You should avoid doing this whenever possible.

As we've discussed, if you don't know someone's gender, it's always possible to use gender neutral pronouns to refer to them (for example, "I met a new student in one of my classes today. I don't know much about them, but they seem super nice!").

In many situations, if you don't know someone's gender and pronouns, you can and should ask them. This may feel unnatural at first, but it gets more comfortable the more often you do it.

A good way to approach this conversation is to lead with your own pronouns if you feel comfortable doing so. For example, "Hi! My name is Janet and my pronouns are she/her. Would you tell me your name and pronouns?" or "Hey, I'm Al and my pronouns are they/them. You're welcome to tell me yours too, if you want to."

Everyone has pronouns, no matter if they are cisgender or transgender.

If you are cisgender, sometimes it is even more important to share your pronouns because it shows that pronouns are just an everyday part of life. This helps create a safe environment for two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people to share their pronouns and feel included.

It's becoming more and more common practice to see pronouns displayed in email signatures, name tags on uniform shirts or office doors, on business cards, and on other items that typically show someone's name and job title or role. This is an effective and meaningful way for organizations to demonstrate that they care about gender inclusivity.

When workplaces and other organizations make it common practice to share pronouns in this way, it shows that these organizations are committed to fostering safe and welcoming spaces for people of all genders.

What should I do if I make a mistake with someone's pronouns or name?

Mistakes are a normal part of human experience. Mistakes are part of what makes us human. Mistakes mean that you are learning and growing.

This doesn't mean that it's okay to use the wrong names or pronouns for someone, but it does mean that **the best thing to do if you make a mistake is to apologize briefly, move on, and do your best to get it right the next time.**

If you make a mistake about someone's name or pronouns, remember to **not make it about you**.

You might be tempted to put on a big show about how badly you feel, or you might be tempted to tell the person that you have a good friend who is also trans and so of course you understand how important pronouns are! Please, don't do this.

These kinds of reactions focus the conversation on you and your needs rather than the experience and feelings of the person whose name or pronouns were disregarded. You may have made an honest mistake, but it's better to trust that the person knows this. You can show the person that you respect their name and pronouns by getting them right the next time.

Making a big show of apologizing when you make a mistake can make the other person feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Remember that two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse people often face repeated incidents of casual misgendering and discrimination, sometimes on a daily basis. This can be emotionally exhausting, and the last thing a person likely wants in that moment is a lot of attention focused on an error that may have caused them hurt or discomfort.

If you're struggling to adjust to a new or changed pronoun, see our section on **Circles of Support**.

Let's look at a scenario so we can see how this might play out in the real world:

> *Rebecca is a high school teacher in rural Nova Scotia. A new student, Toby, has just joined her class. Toby has just moved from London, England. He is trans but has just started taking testosterone and still gets read as the wrong gender. Rebecca doesn't know much about Toby other than where he's from. She thinks that maybe Toby feels homesick and that it would be nice to introduce him to the school librarian, Edgar, who is also from London. Let's look at two ways this conversation could play out:*

An example of what NOT to do:

Rebecca: "Hi Edgar. This is Toby, a new student. She's just off the plane from London, so I'm showing her around our school."

Toby: "Um, actually, I use he/him pronouns. Just so you know."

Rebecca [looking shocked]: "Oh goodness, Toby! I can't believe I did that. My sister-in-law is trans, so I should have known to ask. I'm really sorry. I usually get this stuff right. I'm the staff liaison for our Gender Sexuality Alliance, and I believe that trans people are really brave. Can you forgive me?"

An example of how to be supportive and affirming:

Rebecca: "Hi Edgar. This is Toby, a new student. She's just off the plane from London, so I'm showing her around our school."

Toby: "Um, actually, I use he/him pronouns. Just so you know."

Rebecca [smiling to acknowledge Toby]: "Got it. I'm sorry Toby. Thanks so much for letting me know."

Version 2 is the better, more respectful version of this conversation. It involves a quick apology and an expression of gratitude toward the person for sharing their correct pronouns.

The same example could apply also if you used the incorrect name to refer to someone instead of the incorrect pronouns. If you use the incorrect name or pronouns for someone, it's best to apologize briefly, thank them for sharing the correct information with you, and move on. This is especially true if this happens in front of someone else or in a group setting.

If a person wants to have a more in-depth conversation with you about their name and pronouns, they will let you know.

There's one other important point to make about the scenario we used above. If Rebecca wants to be a good ally and let Toby know that the school has an active Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA), this is great! But a better way to do this would be to pull Toby aside at some point and give him a pamphlet with information about the group. It's best not to make a big scene out of someone being trans or gender diverse, particularly in front of other people. You don't always know if someone is out publicly or wants others to know that their gender is different from how they were assigned at birth.

Getting new names and pronouns right: some tips

Sometimes people have trouble at first getting someone's name and pronouns correct. This is often because they have known that person by another name or by other pronouns for a long time. An adjustment period is normal.

Using someone's old name and pronouns might feel like a habit that is hard to break. But remember that habits can be broken through practice and by setting an intention to get it right.

If you are having trouble using someone's correct name and pronouns consistently, practice! For example, when you're by yourself try using that person's correct name and pronouns in a sentence five times every day until you feel confident that you're going to get it right.

Here is a simple list of do's and don't if you make a mistake about someone's pronouns or name:

DO	DON'T
Apologize briefly and respectfully	Apologize profusely and at length
Thank them for the correct information	Brag to them about trans people you know
Move on without making a big deal about it	Tell them that you are actually a great ally
Practice using their correct pronouns and name	Embarrass the person by drawing needless attention to your mistake

Putting pronouns in your email signature

These days, it is becoming more and more common to see workplaces and other organizations encouraging employees to put their pronouns in their email signatures.

This is a great way to show that your organization is committed to supporting your gender diverse employees and clients.

Everyone who feels comfortable including their pronouns in their email signature should be supported in doing so. This includes all people, not just two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people. It's important for cisgender people to include their pronouns as well.

In many ways, it is **even more important** for cisgender people to include their pronouns in their email signatures. The reason for this is that it normalizes sharing pronouns, so that everyone can feel comfortable sharing their pronouns and being respected in their gender identity. Sharing your pronouns in this way helps to create a safer environment where everyone can feel safe expressing their authentic selves.

That said, no one should be pressured to share their pronouns in this way if they do not feel comfortable doing so.

There are many reasons why people may not wish to broadcast their pronouns in this way, and that is okay. For example, new employees who are gender diverse may want to better understand the workplace culture (and whether they are likely to be accepted) before sharing their pronouns broadly. Or someone who is newly out as trans may not want everyone to know just yet.

It's important to give people space to share their pronouns, but never pressure them to do so if this would feel uncomfortable.

Sharing your pronouns in your email signature can look simply like the following made-up examples:

Jane James (she/her)
Assistant Manager
Atlantic Industries
902-123-4567

Ravi Jacobs (they/them)
Chief Financial Officer
Nova Scotia Media Consultation Services
902-765-4321

Leaders can also signal to their team that allyship is important by noting in a team email not only that pronouns in email signatures are allowed, but that they are encouraged as a way to demonstrate a commitment to inclusion.

Moving Beyond the Binary: A Guide on How to Make Your Organization Meaningfully Inclusive of Two-Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary, and Gender Diverse People

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RESPECTFUL ACTIONS AND RESPONSES WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT

This section will cover some basics on how to respond in a respectful manner if someone comes out to you as gender diverse, or if you find out this information by another means.

Many of the tips and tools that we lay out in this section will apply either if the person is open about their gender identity, or if they keep this information to themselves. In either scenario, it is always best to respect that person's right to confidentiality and let them reveal details about themselves **only if and when they choose to.**

Two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse people have a right to privacy and dignity. This means that you should always show them the respect that you would show anyone else. This means never asking intrusive questions, always respecting names and pronouns when this information is shared with you, and making sure that you treat the person as a fellow human, not as an object of fascination or curiosity.

Let's start with some basics.

Never out people: the importance of letting people come out on their own terms

As we've shared, it's important to avoid any assumptions about someone's gender identity.

"Outing" someone means letting others know that that person is a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. "Outing" has a negative connotation, because it usually involves disclosing someone's identity without their permission or input.

"Outing" is different from "coming out," which is when a person themselves identifies that they are part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. The full phrase is "coming out of the closet," and it comes from the era where most 2SLGBTQIA+ people felt that they needed to keep their identity secret for fear of violence and discrimination. These fears still exist today for many 2SLGBTQIA+ people, but there is more acceptance in our mainstream culture than in previous decades.

Coming out to others is a great act of trust, and always deserves a compassionate and caring response.

Coming out can be a positive experience, depending on the situation and context. Coming out can be liberating. It can mark the point in time where someone feels comfortable being themselves to their friends, family, coworkers, and community.

Some people in the queer community prefer to use the language of "letting in" versus "coming out" since the act of sharing identity information can be intimate and connecting. Some people in the queer community find that they come out, or let others in, many times throughout their lifetime - in a new job, making new friends, dating, and in other interactions and relationships.

Everyone deserves a positive experience when coming out, but this does not always happen. For example, a

COLLEEN

Gender identity: non-binary
Pronouns: they/she
Works in: multidisciplinary art

Queerness is joy, it is being able to relax into yourself and find something transformative, it is community and collaboration and a continual art of becoming.

person might come out to their family and discover that their family is not supportive and understanding. This is one of the many reasons why people should always have the right to come out on their own terms, if and when they are ready.

"Outing" someone takes away a person's right to come out themselves in a way that feels comfortable and safe. You should never out someone, because this takes away the person's agency and their privacy.

Outing someone can also put that person at risk of harm. If someone isn't widely out within a certain setting (for example, at their workplace, at home, or at school), they may have good reason for this, such as fears or experiences of others having homophobic or transphobic views. Or, that person may simply prefer not to be out to everyone, and this is okay too.

There are many Canadian statistics that speak to the heightened risk of violence that gender diverse people may experience:

- **Statistics Canada** found that trans people are more likely than cisgender people to experience unwanted behavior in public spaces and online. Trans people are also more likely than cisgender people to experience unwanted behaviors at work.

- **Statistics Canada** also found that trans people are more likely to report negative self-rated mental health, and, worryingly, trans Canadians are more likely to have a diagnosed mood or anxiety disorder, and to have seriously contemplated suicide.

- **Trans Pulse** in Ontario conducted surveys with 433 trans Ontarians and found that experiences of transphobia were nearly universal, with 98% of respondents reporting at least one negative experience.

- **A survey by Egale** which included 3700 2SLGBTQIA+ students in Canada found that 74% of trans students experienced verbal harassment, and 37% experienced physical harassment.

- The **Canadian Mental Health Association** notes that 2SLGBTQIA+ youth face 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than heterosexual peers.

- **Recent studies** have shown that approximately 2/3 of trans and gender diverse people have actively avoided public settings including gyms, malls, schools, washrooms, and other public spaces due to fear or harassment, fear of being perceived as trans, or fear of being outed as trans.

There are no clear statistics from a Nova Scotian context.

No one should ever have to live with this kind of fear. No matter what your gender identity may be, we are all entitled to privacy and respect.

A common term that is used in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities is the concept of "**passing**." This is when someone who is trans, for example, "passes" as a cisgender person.

Not all two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people want to, or can, blend in or "pass" as cisgender, but some do. Some two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people want to pass but aren't able to do so.

Some trans people feel that their gender identity fits within the binary, and so passing feels natural and comfortable, if they're able to do so.

Also, in a world where transphobia is still commonplace, passing can mean having a safer experience in the world. Passing means fitting in with the dominant group and being less likely to experience discrimination on a regular basis.

It's important to note that if someone doesn't pass, this doesn't mean that their gender identity is invalid or less authentic. Passing can have its benefits in some situations, but it does not define a person or their gender.

For some people, it is safer or more comfortable to blend in or fly under the radar. But other people might want to express themselves in a way that is outside of the binary.

All gender identities and expressions are equally valid and deserving of respect.

If someone you know passes as cisgender and you learn that that person is actually trans or gender diverse, you should always keep this information to yourself. What might seem like interesting gossip to you might be information that that person does not want shared with the world around them. And that person may have good reason for wanting their privacy respected.

Two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people are often subjected to unwanted and intrusive questions about their bodies, their transition process, and their personal lives when they are outed by others. This can be a harmful and even traumatizing experience.

Is it ever okay to tell others that someone is two-spirit, trans, non-binary, or gender diverse?

Yes, but **only** if you're doing this with the consent or at the request of the person themselves.

Even if a person is out as two-spirit, trans, non-binary, or gender diverse in any particular setting, this does not mean that you should share this information with others **unless that person has given you their permission to do so.**

Let's think about what that might look like.

A situation where you **do** have permission to disclose this information might look like the following scenario:

You are a manager at a small pharmacy. Sheila (she/her) is a pharmacy technician who has just come to you to let you know that she's a trans woman. She asks that you use the name Sheila on her employee record and have a new name tag ordered so she doesn't have to wear the one with her old name. Sheila has had to come out repeatedly to lots of people in her life recently, so she asks you to please let her coworkers know about her new name and pronouns. You let her know that you're happy to do this. Your staff is a pretty small group, so you have a quick one-on-one conversation with each of them where you let them know that the coworker they formerly knew by another name is now Sheila and uses she/her pronouns. You also use this opportunity to order new name tags for all your staff so that everyone can have their pronouns displayed if they wish to do so.

Let's look at a similar situation where you **should not** disclose that someone is trans:

> *You are a manager at a clothing store. Suki (she/her) is an enthusiastic new employee who seems to be working out really well. She did a great job in her interview, so you hired her right away. As part of standard procedure, you checked her references. Suki's employer from three years ago was at first a bit confused when you called. This person had great things to say, but seemed to know Suki by a masculine name. You realized then that Suki is probably a trans woman and that her old employer knew her before her transition. Suki did not tell you this information herself, so out of respect you should keep it confidential and not tell others in the store. If there is anything that Suki wants you or her coworkers to know about who she is, she can share this information herself if she chooses to.*

How to react when someone comes out to you

When someone comes out to you as two-spirit, trans, non-binary, or gender diverse, it is a huge act of trust and confidence. That person is letting you in on information that might make them feel vulnerable. That may have had others react poorly in the past, so it's important to react with support and care.

Here are three golden rules for when someone comes out to you:

1. Show them the kind of support and validation you would like to have if you were in their position.

2. Thank them for sharing this important info with you.

3. Check in to see if this is information that they're sharing widely, or if they prefer to just keep it between you and them.

You should avoid reacting with surprise, disapproval, by asking invasive questions, or by making the conversation about you. Always avoiding saying things such as the following:

"Oh! I always had my suspicions. You never did seem all that manly to me."

"Oh. Okay then. Are you going to have the surgery?"

"Oh! You pass so well! I never would have known!"

"That's going to make things hard for you. Does your family know?"

"That's so cool! My friend's sister is trans too!"

Instead, it's always best practice to have a simple, caring conversation that shows the person that you value them for who they are and that you appreciate what they've just shared with you.

Here are some simple words you can and should say to the person coming out to you:

"Thanks for sharing this with me. I'm really happy to know."

"I appreciate you trusting me with this information! I'm happy to know you better."

"Great to know. Do you have a new name and pronouns I should know about?" [if the person hasn't already shared this information]

"Cool. Thanks for letting me know. Are you using your new name and pronouns with everyone, or is that just between us for now?"

The last question is especially important. As we've discussed above, you should never out someone without their permission and input. **It's always good to check in with the person to find out if they're out to everyone, just out in a particular setting (such as at your office, school, or other shared space), or only to a select few.**

If you are one of those select few (i.e. the person is not out broadly), you should still thank them for sharing this information with you. But you should also check in with them about how they want to be referred to in front of others.

Let's look at a scenario that might help you better understand this last point:

> *You are an English professor at a small town university. One of your best students comes to you after class one day and lets you know that she is a trans woman and her new name is Edwina. Edwina tells you that she's not yet ready for the other students to know. It's a small community, and she's worried about her parents learning about her gender identity before she is ready to tell them. You ask Edwina how she would best like you to handle this issue. You ask her if for now you should use her new name and pronouns when you're together one-on-one, but in front of the class you should still use her old name and pronouns. Edwina says yes, this is exactly what she was thinking. She lets you know that she might be ready at some point for everyone to know, but she's not ready yet. You thank Edwina for sharing this important information about herself with you, and you assure her that you'll keep it confidential.*

Offering support and sharing resources

When someone comes out to you, it can also be really helpful to check in and see if that person wants any particular kind of support. This depends on the setting you're in and whether it would be appropriate to offer support.

For example, imagine that you're a supervisor in a workplace setting. An employee who has just come out to you as gender diverse might want your help in getting new business cards or a new name tag for their door. This is one simple and proactive way that you can show your support.

Another example of ways that you can show support is to promote safe and inclusive access to washrooms in any shared space. For example, if you have an employee who has just come out non-binary, it can be helpful to let them know where there is a gender neutral washroom in your building in case they don't feel comfortable using either of the traditionally gendered washrooms.

Another example of ways to show support is to promote specific resources for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

For example, if you're a teacher at a school and a new student comes out to you, you can direct them to local resources in their community. Your school might have an active Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and allies.

The Youth Project (a Halifax-based non-profit serving 2SLGBTQIA+ youth across the province) keeps an active listing of **GSAs in all schools across Nova Scotia**. The Youth Project also has many other great resources for gender diverse youth, such as a program where they provide **free chest binders, gaffs, and other gender affirming items** to youth 25 and under across Nova Scotia.

Another important resource is the Nova Scotia Department of Education's **guidelines for supporting trans and gender-nonconforming students** in schools.

What should I do if I feel confused about something?

Curiosity is a natural human response when we encounter something new to us. That said, it's important to know when and how to express our curiosity so that we don't make others feel objectified or uncomfortable.

For many of us, the idea of someone being two-spirit, trans, non-binary, or gender diverse may be a new concept. It may also involve terminology that is new to you.

It's okay if the world of gender diversity feels new and confusing to you. All concepts are new to each of us at some point, and it's okay that you might have questions at first.

As with any situation involving someone's identity, there are some questions that are useful and appropriate and other questions which can cause discomfort and frustration.

Some questions can be inappropriate and even rude. But there is one place you can always direct your questions without having to worry about causing discomfort or hurt. **This place is Google, or any other internet search engine of your choosing.**

It's important to bear in mind that two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people are often asked unwanted and intrusive questions about who they are, their personal lives, their bodies, and how/if they choose to go through a medical transition process (such as through the use of gender affirming surgery or hormone treatment).

This kind of information is rarely the business of other people. For more discussion about the harms of asking intrusive questions, you can refer to the "importance of avoiding intrusive questions" section later in this guide.

Two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people are often placed in the position of having to educate everyone around them about what it means to be gender diverse. It can be emotionally exhausting to have to have these same conversations repeatedly. It can also be potentially harmful, because it's often during these conversations that others feel like it's okay to ask inappropriate questions.

It should not always fall on the shoulders of gender diverse people to educate everyone about gender identity and the experiences of the gender diverse community. This is a huge responsibility and an enormous undertaking.

We **all** have a collective responsibility to learn about people and experiences that are different from our own. And we have the tools to access this information easily. There are many great articles, videos, and other resources online that can teach us the basics if we don't already know them.

This guide is a great starting place to answer some of your questions. If, for example, you have questions about how to use they/them as a gender neutral pronoun, you can find that kind of information here in this guide.

If you have questions about other aspects of what it means to be gender diverse, it's best not to subject your gender diverse coworker, student, friend, or neighbour to questions that they have probably been asked many times before.

We've included some great online resources at the end of this guide to help you get started in learning more. If these resources don't answer all your questions, you can try typing your question into your search bar.

Any question that you have has likely been thought of and written about many times before. There are thousands of online articles written by members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and other knowledgeable sources that you can find through a quick Google search.

The importance of avoiding intrusive questions

Just as it would be considered rude and inappropriate to ask a cisgender person about what body parts they have or personal details about medical procedures, it is also inappropriate to ask these questions of two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people.

Some two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people choose to medically alter their bodies to better align with their gender identity. Some common procedures include "top surgery" (removal or augmentation of breast tissue to increase or decrease chest size) and "bottom surgery" (surgical alteration of the genitals to better suit that person's idea of their gender).

Not all gender diverse people choose to medically transition or want to medically transition. Some gender diverse people feel perfectly content in their bodies as they are. Others want medical changes that help them feel more comfortable in their bodies. These are both valid ways to be a gender diverse person. Everyone is unique, and everyone's decision is their own to make.

Two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people are frequently questioned about their bodies, their choice to either medically transition or not, their sex lives and partners, and many other topics which we all know not to ask cisgender people.

The only circumstance where you would need to know this kind of information is if you are a medical professional who is providing any kind of care that warrants asking questions about someone's body and/or medical transition.

For example, if you are an endocrinologist (hormone doctor) and are treating a new patient who is trans, it would make sense to ask that patient about whether they have had any previous gender affirming healthcare such as previous hormone prescriptions or surgeries.

If, however, you are an ER technician stitching up someone's knee after a bad fall, it would be unlikely that you would need to know if someone has had any kind of gender affirming surgery or other gender affirming healthcare. If there is a legitimate medical reason why you would need to know this information, then you can ask them or seek that information from their medical file. But before you ask someone for this information, it's best to ask yourself whether you need to know and bear in mind that the person may feel uncomfortable when you ask them these personal questions.

In most situations, you do not need to know this kind of information. For example, if you are a cashier at a convenience store and your coworker has just come out to you as trans, there is never any situation where it would be okay to ask them questions about personal medical decisions such as plans for hormones and surgery.

If someone chooses to share this information with you because they want to, that is absolutely fine! But you should never seek out this information solely to satisfy your own curiosity. Asking these kinds of questions will likely make the person feel uncomfortable. They may also feel harassed or discriminated against, since the same questions would not be asked of a cisgender person. We would not ask a cisgender coworker if they were taking medically prescribed hormones or if they intend to have surgery on their chest or genitals. Similarly, it is inappropriate to ask gender diverse people these deeply personal questions.

It's natural to be curious. But it's important to remember that the bodies of two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse people are not an invitation to ask questions that can cause discomfort and harm. Everyone has a right to their privacy, particularly when it comes to our bodies.

CHARLIE

Gender identity: trans man
Pronouns: he/they
Works in: real estate

Now that I am Charlie, I finally feel like I have the energy and space to focus on what matters in my life. My work ethic and productivity have gone through the roof because I feel confident within myself. I had no idea that coming out as transgender and living an authentic life would positively impact my community and me. Everywhere I go, I feel that I share my light and shine a path for others to follow. Now, I am the successful professional I have always dreamed of being.

WASHROOMS

In this section, we will discuss best practices for ensuring that gender diverse people feel respected and safe when using the washrooms at your organization.

Everyone has the right to use the washroom that best aligns with their gender identity. We are all accustomed to public washrooms being divided in terms of the gender binary. These days, many places also have a gender neutral washroom.

The history of the gendered nature of washrooms is quite interesting. Historically, most public washrooms were for single users, but in the Victorian era, the Western world started to see more and more washrooms designed for multiple users. This was also the era when washrooms became gender segregated, as women began to enter the workforce and spend more time in public spaces.

Washrooms were originally gender segregated for the privacy and protection of women. These days, we live in a very different world from when gender segregated washrooms were first envisioned. Most public washrooms have stalls, which ensure privacy. Our modern norms have evolved too, meaning that as a culture we don't have the same controlling and protective view of women that many people held in the Victorian era.

It is still common practice that washrooms are gender segregated. But these days, more and more organizations also have washrooms that are gender neutral. Sometimes gender neutral washrooms are single stall washrooms meant for only one person. But it's also becoming more common to see multi-user (multi-stall) washrooms designed for people of all genders.

These gender neutral spaces represent an evolution in our collective thinking about the gender binary.

We recognize that most spaces still have gender segregated washrooms, and that changing these into gender neutral spaces may involve significant renovations and costs. These days, many places that have gendered washrooms also have a separate gender neutral washroom for people outside of the binary or people who don't feel comfortable using the male or female washroom. Gender neutral washrooms are an important step toward inclusion of people of all genders.

The following best practice tips take into account the fact that most spaces still have male and female washrooms. But we also encourage you to think outside the box in terms of gender norms and gendered spaces. We know that not every organization is ready to make all of its washrooms gender neutral, and so the following section will help you navigate ways to be as inclusive and welcoming as possible within the structures that currently exist.

Best practices for inclusive washrooms

If you are part of an organization that has male and female washroom facilities, here are a few best practices that you can adopt:

> **Always support people in using the washroom that aligns with their gender identity.**

This means that trans women should always be allowed to use the female washroom, and trans men should be allowed to use the male washroom. It does not matter how far along the person is in their transition, whether they "look like" their intended gender identity, or whether others in your organization are biased against that person because of their gender identity. Trans people always have the right to use the washroom that best fits who they are as a person, not how others perceive them.

> **If someone is not ready to use the washroom that aligns with their gender identity, that's okay too!**

In other words, if someone has only recently come out as trans, they may not be ready to switch to the washroom that best aligns with their identity. If that person is at an early stage in their transition, they may not feel like they "pass" as their gender identity sufficiently to use that washroom. The reason for this is usually fear of harassment.

For example, a trans man who has only just started taking hormones may still be seen as feminine by the rest of the world, and so he might be afraid of harassment or even violence from cisgender men if he used the male washroom. These fears are valid and are grounded in the lived realities that trans and gender diverse people face everyday.

The takeaway point is that **it is important to recognize that trans and gender diverse people always know best in terms of which washroom is the safest, most comfortable space for them at any given point in time.** It's important to respect these choices and take steps in your organization to ensure that no one feels harassed, scrutinized, or unsafe when they're simply trying to use the washroom.

> **Make sure you have a gender neutral washroom in addition to male and female washrooms.**

These days, it's commonly accepted that gender is a spectrum, not a binary. This means that male and female washrooms don't accurately reflect the broad range of gender identities that exist in the world. For this reason, many organizations have taken steps to provide gender neutral washroom spaces that can accommodate people who don't fit the binary.

Most often, these gender neutral washrooms are single-person washrooms. It is important that these spaces be wheelchair accessible, so that anyone can use them regardless of ability. It's also important that gender neutral washrooms have signage that marks them as gender neutral. Ideally, this signage should include text (which can simply say "gender neutral washroom" or "all gender washroom") and an appropriate symbol. It's important to include a symbol as well to be inclusive of people who don't speak English and people who have difficulty reading. Being broadly inclusive would mean having Braille text as well, for those who have impaired vision.

The Youth Project has some examples of gender neutral washroom signs which can be found **here**.

TEO

Gender identity: non-binary
Pronouns: they/them
Works in: queer youth education

Being queer to me means giving yourself permission to be your most authentic self and show up for yourself. Too often as queer people we don't get to stand up and show up for ourselves and others. Being queer means being yourself. Being scared and afraid, but being queer anyways, because being queer is sometimes all that we have. With our chosen families, that is enough.

CREATING SPACE BEYOND THE BINARY

Gendered titles and more inclusive alternatives

Titles (which are also known as honorifics) are a part of language that is used in front of someone's name to show respect or to convey formality. Examples of titles include "Dr.", "Ms.," "Mr.", among others.

These days, gendered titles like Mrs., Ms., and Mr. are increasingly regarded by many people and organizations as outdated and unnecessary.

The problem with gendered titles is that whenever they're used, this generally involves an assumption about what someone's gender is. As we've stressed throughout this guide, this can be a harmful assumption to make.

Some people still like to use titles because they see them as an important way to show respect or convey formality in certain contexts. It's great to want to show respect for others. But the problem with gendered titles is that they can inadvertently show disrespect and cause hurt.

You can't know someone's gender from what they look like, the clothes they wear, or even their name. For this reason, it's best to avoid using gendered titles and language wherever possible and instead choose more inclusive options.

If you do use gendered titles, it's always best to check in with someone about what title they want you to use when you refer to them. You should always give them the option of a gender neutral title or no title at all, because not everyone identifies with "Ms." or "Mr.", particularly those whose identity falls outside the gender binary.

Many organizations, including many government departments, medical offices, and universities, have moved away from using gendered titles on their official correspondence. Instead of using "Mr. Jones" or "Ms. Jones" on official letters or documents, it's common practice these days to instead simply use the person's full name - for example "Morgan Jones."

When you use a person's first and last name instead of a gendered title, this avoids any risk of misgendering that person.

Remember that you can't know someone's gender just from their name alone. Some people may have a name that is traditionally associated with masculinity or femininity, but even then you can't know for certain that that person identifies with that gender. Some people have names that could be associated with any gender. Others have names that you may have never heard before, and so it wouldn't even make sense to make a guess.

For all of these reasons, it's best to avoid assuming and instead make it your default practice to avoid using gendered titles unless you've checked in with that person and gotten their consent to use a particular title.

If your organization uses gendered titles, it's important to be aware of the fact that **these days there are gender neutral options for titles as well.**

Some of our titles have always been gender neutral - for example, titles like "Dr.," which can be used to refer to someone who is a medical doctor or a professor. "Dr." doesn't tell us any information about the person's gender, and using it doesn't involve making any assumptions about gender.

These days, it's becoming more common to see an additional gender neutral title added to the list of options. This title is "Mx." and is the equivalent of the titles "Mr.", "Mrs.", and "Ms." In other words, it can be used for any person regardless of their profession.

"Mx." (pronounced like "Mix") is most commonly used to refer to people who identify outside of the gender binary. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the first instance of Mx. being used in a print publication was in 1977. "Mx." was added to the **Merriam-Webster dictionary itself in 2016.**

"Mx." hasn't caught on everywhere yet, but it is being used by more and more organizations as a more inclusive option for people who identify outside the gender binary. These days, it's becoming more common to see "Mx." included in drop-down menus available when you sign up to new services such as online banking or a new cell phone provider.

> ## THERE ARE TWO GOLDEN RULES TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS SECTION:
>
> **Gendered titles are not necessary as a means of showing respect, and can in fact cause harm. It is perfectly acceptable and respectful to refer to someone solely by their first and last name on any official correspondence or document.**
>
> **If your organization chooses to use titles, it's always best practice to check in with clients and other users about what title they want you to use when referring to them. You should always avoid making assumptions based on what someone looks like or what gender you may associate with their name. If you do use gendered titles, always make sure to include gender neutral options such as "Mx." and the option to not use a title at all if someone does not wish to be referred to by a title.**

Gendered greetings and more inclusive alternatives

All the points that we've made above about gendered titles also apply to gendered greetings.

When you're addressing people whose gender you don't know, it's always best to default to options which are inclusive of people across the gender spectrum.

So, instead of using greetings like the following,

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen."

"Hey, guys!"

"Hello, ladies."

"Good morning, boys and girls."

Try options like these:

"Welcome, everyone!"

"Good morning, valued colleagues."

"Hello, friends."

"Hi, folks."

Greetings such as "Welcome, everyone!" are inclusive of people who might not identify with the traditional gender binary of male and female. When you use any of the options we've listed above, or any other gender neutral greeting, this represents an important step in being inclusive and welcoming of everyone. Also, adopting gender neutral greetings prevents you from assuming someone's gender and causing them discomfort.

The same principles apply when you're addressing single individuals as well, not just groups. So, instead of saying any of the following:

"Good morning, ma'am."

"Hello, sir."

"Welcome, Miss. Please take a seat."

Try options like these:

"Good morning, friend."

"Good morning. It's great to see you!"

"Hello there! If you need any help, please let me know."

There is really no need to refer to anyone by gendered language. As we have emphasized throughout this guide, you can't know someone's gender unless they have told you. Using gender neutral language as a default is a safe, inclusive approach to human interaction and means that everyone can feel like they belong in your space.

Important considerations regarding uniforms

In spite of the growing acceptance that gender is a spectrum and not a binary, clothing is one area of life that is still commonly gendered as either male or female.

It's okay to want or prefer clothing that aligns with your gender! But it's important too to recognize that there are many people in the world who fall outside the gender binary and who may feel uncomfortable in traditionally gendered clothing.

Some employers, service providers, and other organizations require that people wear uniforms - for example private schools, hospitals, and some restaurants and stores that want all employees to have a standard, recognizable look.

If you are part of an organization that requires its employees or participants to wear uniforms, you should always have gender neutral options and sizes that can accommodate people of various body types. If you require uniforms, it is best practice that these uniforms be as gender neutral as possible so that you're not imposing norms and expectations about gender on the people who have to wear them.

If you have male and female uniform options, you should always let the person who is going to be wearing the uniform choose which style works best for them. This means you shouldn't assume that people you see as women will want to wear uniforms that have skirts or blouses. You also shouldn't assume that people you see as men will want to wear uniforms with pants or neckties. It's always best to let people have space to express their gender as they choose to and according to their own sense of their identity.

It's important too to recognize that some people might feel uncomfortable in traditionally gendered clothing. For example, think about a high school student who realizes that they are non-binary but who is perceived by the outside world as female. Requiring this person to wear a skirt and blouse to school or work might cause them to feel uncomfortable or that their gender identity is being erased or invalidated.

Gendered uniforms can feel uncomfortable for cisgender people as well. For example, at one point in time it was not uncommon to see female servers at pubs or restaurants wearing uniforms with short skirts and tight shirts. These kinds of uniforms can contribute to an unsafe work environment, where objectifying and harassing women becomes normalized.

If you require uniforms, it is best practice to choose uniforms that everyone can feel comfortable wearing.

If your organization uses traditionally gendered clothing for its uniforms, it's important to allow people to choose which articles of clothing make them feel most comfortable and safe. This means that women (both trans and cisgender women) and people outside of the gender binary should always have the option to choose pants instead of a skirt or a looser shirt rather than a fitted, more "feminine" option.

On the same note, if neckties or any other similarly gendered article of clothing are available to some people in your organization, these should be available to anyone of any gender who would prefer to dress in a more "masculine" or gender neutral fashion.

It is also important to have a wide variety of size options for all uniform options that you have available. "Men's" clothing typically runs in bigger sizes than "women's" clothing, which means that the size options which are most commonly available won't always be a good fit for two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people.

For example, some trans women require larger shoe and clothing sizes than some cisgender women. And some trans men may require smaller sizes than the majority of cisgender men. **Diverse bodies can be different in all sorts of ways, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.** All this means is that each of us is unique in our bodies and our experiences.

We all deserve clothing that makes us feel comfortable and at ease in who we are. It's important to recognize the important role clothing plays in how we all express ourselves and our gender. When it comes to uniforms, it's important that everyone has access to clothing options that make them feel respected, seen, and valued in their diversity.

MELISSA

Gender identity: gender fluid
Pronouns: they/she
Works in: adult education

I love being queer because I don't find it necessary to follow the heteropatriarchal scripts. Being queer makes space to reimagine all aspects of life that align with my values, for my community and for myself.

Creating welcoming spaces for all people

Since we know that gender is a spectrum, not a binary, it is important to examine why many of our programs, groups, and activities are still designed with the gender binary in mind.

Whenever possible and appropriate, best practice is to create spaces that include everyone, recognizing that there are many people in the world who don't fit into the traditional gender binary.

In many situations, excluding an entire category of people can be hurtful. In some cases, it can also be a violation of human rights legislation. For example, if a university department refused to hire any women or a store refused to allow Indigenous people to shop there, these would be clear violations of the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act* or whichever human rights statute is relevant.

While this guide cannot provide legal advice, we can with certainty say that there are some situations where dividing people according to the gender binary does not make sense and may cause feelings of harm in your organization.

For example, if you're part of a workplace that creates social events for its employees based on gender norms and stereotypes, you should consider options that are more inclusive. If your workplace has "guys' nights" social events focused around events like drinking, playing golf together, or other activities which have been traditionally seen as masculine, you should ensure that these events are inclusive of people of all genders.

The same goes for workplaces that hold events where only women are invited, such as paint nights, yoga classes, or other events that have been traditionally seen as feminine. Holding social events for only one gender means excluding people needlessly. The reasoning behind single-gender activities is also usually based on stereotypes about what men and women enjoy.

There is no reason why any workplace social activity should involve excluding an entire gender of people. These kinds of events and activities also implicitly exclude people who identify outside of the gender binary, such as non-binary people.

When people feel like they're being defined by gender stereotypes and norms, this means that they are not able to thrive and be their full selves. We all deserve spaces and programs that let us be our authentic selves without compromising. Teams are much stronger when diverse perspectives are included. People in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community offer news ways of thinking and support innovation and creativity at work.

When we can collectively examine and dismantle our tendency toward thinking in terms of the gender binary, we take huge strides toward creating a world in which everyone feels valued, respected, and recognized.

That said, there are some situations where it's appropriate to plan programs, policies, and activities with a particular gender in mind.

This is because of the reality that gender-based discrimination is still very real and common, and so there are situations where it makes sense to carve out space for the people who are most impacted by gender-based discrimination and violence.

For example, think about organizations such as shelters, housing organizations, and other agencies and services that are focused on addressing intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based

violence. It makes sense for organizations such as these to restrict or focus their services around the needs of women, trans people, non-binary people, two-spirit people, and other gender minorities. This is in recognition that these people are the most likely to experience gendered violence and need a safe space for themselves and their families.

Many organizations that were once defined as "women's" organizations (such as shelters and transition houses) have now expanded their services to include non-binary people, two-spirit people, and trans people across the gender spectrum. This is because each of these identity categories are made up people who are disproportionately impacted by the harms caused by misogyny, transmisogyny, transphobia, and other forms of gendered oppression.

On a related note, it also makes sense for organizations to provide services solely to men when these services are intended to respond to the realities of how the gender binary impacts men as well. For example, organizations that provide programs that model healthy masculinity, address the disproportionate prevalence of suicide among men, or otherwise address the mental health needs of men are types of programming where men-only policies would be reasonable and likely supported by the law.

Our human rights statutes across Canada recognize the importance of programs and policies which are designed to increase equitable inclusion and participation for groups who have faced historical and systemic disadvantages. Examples of this kind of recognition would include designated hiring practices (for example, when a job is designated for people who identify as Indigenous or African Nova Scotian) or programs and policies which are intended to address the systemic discrimination which still impacts many of our marginalized communities.

If you refer to the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act*, you will note that section 6(i) allows for an exception for programs and policies which may on their face seem discriminatory (because they are intended solely for a particular group) but in fact are designed to uplift or empower groups of people who have historically been marginalized. This means that organizations are allowed, for example, to limit their services to women and gender diverse people in recognition of the harms these groups have faced and the importance of creating safe spaces for these communities.

If you are part of an organization that intends to create programming that is solely aimed at one group of people, it's always a good idea to consult with your local Human Rights Commission for advice on whether you could face a complaint based on excluding a category of people. The contact information for both the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Human Rights Commission is included at the end of this guide.

TAM

Gender identity: non-binary, gender fluid
Pronouns: he/she/they/chanh
Works in: biochemistry research

I am a gen 1.5 nonbinary genderfluid researcher and use a combination of English and Vietnamese pronouns (he/she/they/chanh). To me, queerness means a never-ending self-accepting journey. I came into terms with my queerness in late 20s just when I thought that I am done with my self-discovery journey. Still, I don't regret having this journey! I'm very proud that I did!

ONGOING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE 2SLGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

Reading this guide is an important first step in ensuring that your organization is meaningfully inclusive of gender diverse communities.

That said, we acknowledge that this guide may not be able to answer all of your questions. We recognize too that language and practices focused on diversity and inclusion may evolve over time. For this reason, it is important to recognize the importance of continuing to learn and grow.

This means that your organization should always bear in mind the importance of ongoing engagement with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. This means committing to continuously learning about the needs and experiences of this community from members of the community itself.

Here are some important steps you can take to ensure that your organization demonstrates a continued commitment to meaningful and ethical inclusion:

1. Invite guest speakers/trainers from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to come to your organization to share their knowledge and expertise on meaningful inclusion. We'll discuss this in more detail in the following section, but please bear in mind that if you do bring in a guest speaker, it is always best practice to compensate them in some way for their time and the important information that they share.

2. Have print resources available in your office, storefront, classroom, or other space which provide basic information about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and the importance of treating everyone with respect and dignity. Depending on the setting, these resources might include pamphlets or posters about local 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations and events, tip sheets on appropriate language choices such as **this one**, or a statement that hateful language and discrimination will not be tolerated in your space.

3. Encourage your staff, students, coworkers, and others to attend webinars and training sessions focused on 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion. Egale, for example, has **many great online trainings and webinars** that are free and accessible to everyone. The same is true of **Pride at Work Canada**.

Knowledge sharing and the importance of ongoing, paid engagement

Many people from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, particularly those who are outspoken as teachers and activists, are accustomed to being asked to provide their consultation and education services for free.

Some people are happy to do this, particularly if the organization that asks for their services is a non-profit and does not have significant resources to allow for compensation. That said, it's important to recognise that people who have important lived experience and expertise to share deserve to be fairly compensated whenever this

is possible. It's important to recognize that people doing this kind of work are often doing so in addition to their existing workloads.

As we mentioned earlier in this guide, it often falls on the shoulders of 2SLGBTQIA+ people to educate their colleagues, peers, students, and others about the realities of what it means to be part of this community. This is a huge undertaking, and one that can have a great emotional toll for anyone whose life path has been marked by discrimination and oppression.

Teaching is in general a task that involves expending a lot of energy. It can also involve a significant time commitment in terms of both preparation and delivery. If the subject on which you are teaching overlaps with your own identity and experience, teaching can become draining and emotionally difficult in a deeper and more personal way.

This is not to say that members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ never want to teach others. In fact, members of this community are the best situated to teach others about 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion, because they understand the importance of this issue and its nuances. Many members of this community love having the opportunity to teach and provide consultation to organizations that authentically wish to become safer spaces for diverse people.

The point that we want to make is that when people from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community come into your organization to provide education or consultation, they are providing an important and essential service that deserves compensation as any other service would.

If your organization has the means to pay the 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals who provide you with these services, then it's important to do so. Providing fair compensation is an important gesture of respect not only of the person themselves but also of the topic they are helping you to understand or navigate.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ONBOARDING AND OTHER HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

When recruiting and onboarding new employees, there are some important considerations to bear in mind to ensure that your organization feels welcoming and safe for people of all genders.

If you have images in your promotional materials recruiting new employees, it is a good idea to include visuals depicting people who are gender diverse. This sends the message that your organization recognizes and values gender diversity.

That said, the appearance of diversity is not enough. It is important to not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk - meaning that if your organization is genuinely committed to being inclusive, it's important to also have policies, procedures, and best practices in place to ensure that gender diverse employees and clients feel seen, valued, and supported.

Best practices can include the following:

1. **Check in with all new employees about their pronouns**. This does not only include people who you think might be two-spirit, trans, non-binary, or gender diverse. This policy should be applied to everyone. Remember that you can't tell someone's gender from their name or what they look like. Checking in with everyone about their pronouns normalizes the fact that we all have pronouns and that it's good not to make assumptions.

2. **Make sure that your organization has a policy for supporting gender diverse people at work.** We are happy to offer a free policy template (here) for any organization to use. Ensure that your organization reviews this policy with all new and existing employees.

3. **Implement an easy process for employees to update their names and pronouns when applicable.** Some organizations have standard forms for any kind of information updates, including address updates, emergency contact updates, and other relevant personal information. If you have a form like this, you can easily modify it to also include fields that let people update their pronouns and names. You could also create a stand-alone form for this purpose. Or, you can simply allow employees to inform their direct supervisor or Human Resources about these kinds of updates so that changes can be made to the employee's personnel file, business cards, name tags, and any other place where name and/or pronouns are displayed.

4. **Respect and protect the privacy of two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people.** This means that you should never out someone at work or in any other context. Workplaces should also have streamlined, confidential processes for keeping track of legal names and chosen names when these are different. A good practice when someone is hired is to have them fill out a form with personal information including their legal name and chosen name. This form should be shared with as few people as possible

to minimize the risk of outing someone in the workplace. If a new employee must provide documents that may have a different name than their chosen name (for example, a criminal record check), these documents should not be shared with anyone who does not need to see them.

5. **Have training available for all current and future employees focused on 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion.** This training can be given during onboarding, so that new employees can understand how best to demonstrate respectful inclusion. It is important for all employees to have such training, particularly members of Human Resources and management, so that they can navigate conversations about name and pronoun updates with care and respect. Check the Resources section at the end of this guide for information about online trainings and other resources which may be useful.

6. **Support employees who are transitioning at work.** This can include updating names and pronouns as required, and making sure that your two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse employees feel safe accessing the washroom that best aligns with their gender identity. As we discussed earlier in this guide, it is also important to have a gender neutral washroom available. Additionally, another important way that you can show support for employees who are transitioning is to provide appropriate medical benefits and time off for those who wish to access gender affirming healthcare. We will discuss why this is so important in the next section.

Employee benefits and time off for gender affirming healthcare

For many two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people, it can be a matter of both physical and mental wellness for their bodies to align with their internal understanding of their gender.

Surgeries that modify the shape of the chest or genitals are one way to accomplish this. Hormone therapy is another medical process that some two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people use to make changes to their bodies. Hormone therapy can, for example, make changes to the quality of a person's voice, whether or not they grow facial hair, chest size, and many other adjustments to appearance.

Some other procedures that are common among two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people include chest contouring and electrolysis. Chest contouring is a procedure that some transmasculine and non-binary people require as an addition to "top surgery" (which is the medical procedure by which breast tissue is removed to create a flatter chest). Chest contouring is important for many people in order to achieve a more masculine appearance.

Electrolysis involves the removal of body hair, a process which can be especially important for people who are transfeminine. Excess body hair is a quality that is often associated with masculinity, and so for some people the removal of body hair is an essential part of their transition process.

It is essential to bear in mind that procedures such as the ones we have described above are considered medically necessary by many doctors and organizations that advocate for and have expertise in transgender healthcare.

Surgeries and procedures such as those described above are not purely aesthetic or cosmetic.

CARMEL

Gender identity: trans
Pronouns: they/them
Works in: queer youth support and education

I am incredibly lucky to work within an organisation that actively works to not only affirm my gender identity but tangibly supports my transness through comprehensive benefits programs, numerous 2STGNC (Two Spirit, trans, gender-nonconforming) staff, board of directors members, and Youth Board members, represented in postions of power, as well as the intentional organisational celebration of the diversity of 2STGNC community and experience. It saddens me that this reality is rare and I am deeply invested in and hopeful for a future where this is reflected for 2STGNC folks locally and beyond.

These procedures play an essential role in ensuring both the mental and physical health of many people. For some people, gender affirming care is a suicide prevention measure. These procedures are not done on a whim, but rather represent a person's important choice to live a life as their authentic self.

Many two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people choose not to undergo surgical intervention or hormone treatment. These choices are valid and should always be respected.

For others, medical intervention is necessary. This is a reality that must also be respected. Gender affirming surgeries and other procedures that two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people require are no different than any other medically necessary procedure that allows a person to have a level of wellness necessary to live their life and engage in regular activities that are important to all of us.

For all of these reasons, it is important to provide support and accommodations for two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people who require gender affirming healthcare.

This support can take the form of permitting employees time off for gender affirming care and recovery. It can also take the form of providing a benefits package that covers gender affirming care.

In 2019, Pride at Work Canada and the Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto jointly conducted **the first Canadian study dedicated to understanding employer practices and policies for supporting trans and gender diverse employees**.

The study surveyed a number of Canada's largest employers, with an aim in mind of understanding issues like access to healthcare benefits such as gender affirming healthcare.

The survey found that 75% of surveyed organizations provided benefit packages that covered essential gender affirming healthcare such as time off for transition-related medical procedures and hormone therapy. However, only 13% of surveyed organizations provided coverage for healthcare procedures outside of basic provincial coverage, such as chest contouring and electrolysis. As the study stresses, procedures such as electrolysis are considered medically necessary by the **Standards of Care** released by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH).

When your organization is determining what kind of benefits and accommodations to provide to employees, it is important to bear in mind that some processes that might seem purely aesthetic are in fact medically necessary for that person.

BEST PRACTICES FOR BEING AN ALLY

Being an ally means supporting, learning from, and respecting others regardless of their identity and experiences. It also means recognizing the ways in which others' identities and experiences have shaped their lives.

For people from marginalized communities, discrimination and oppression are a lived reality that they have to confront sometimes on a daily basis. Being an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community means recognizing the ways in which people from this community face barriers and oppression that straight cisgender people do not.

Being an ally means actively working to build a fairer, more equitable world for everyone.

There are many ways to be an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We've discussed many of these throughout this guide, but we'll also repeat some of the most important ones here:

1. **Listen to and learn from 2SLGBTQIA+ teachers and experts.** There are many great online resources and trainings that can help you in your learning process. You can refer to the back of this guide for some recommendations. It's also a great idea to bring in local teachers, activists, and leaders from the 2SLGBTQIA+ to deliver training to help your organization evolve into a welcoming space for everyone.

2. **Honour everyone's pronouns**. Get comfortable using pronouns you aren't as confident with.

3. **Put your pronouns in your email signature and encourage others to do the same if they feel comfortable doing so.** You can refer to the "Pronoun" section of this guide to better understand why this is so important.

4. **Support your two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse employees, colleagues, students, and peers in their transition process.** This means adapting to using new names and pronouns when these are shared, supporting people who need time off for gender affirming healthcare, and creating space for people who don't fit into the traditional gender binary.

5. **Respect everyone's choice in using the washroom that best aligns with their gender identity.** If your organization has male and female washrooms, it's also important to have a gender neutral washroom for people who identify outside the gender binary or don't feel comfortable using either the male or female washrooms.

Moving Beyond the Binary: A Guide on How to Make Your Organization Meaningfully Inclusive of Two-Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary, and Gender Diverse People

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Being an authentic ally: the importance of avoiding pinkwashing

There are many important and helpful ways to be an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We've detailed many of these in this guide. There are also many other ways in which you can show your commitment to supporting the diverse communities that make up our world.

Some other ways that you can support 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion include displaying both the trans and rainbow Pride Flags in the window of your business, organization, or shopfront to show that your space is a welcoming environment for everyone.

In many public spaces, you'll now see a newer version of the Pride Flag called the Progress Pride Flag. The Progress Pride Flag includes the traditional rainbow colours, brown and black to represent people of colour, and light pink, light blue and white to represent the trans and gender diverse community.

These days, many organizations participate in the yearly Pride Parade that happens in most cities and many municipalities across Canada.

Attending or having a float in the Pride Parade as an organization can be a welcoming and proactive way to show your commitment to 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion. However, if you're doing this, it's important that this kind of commitment exists year-round, and not only on a single day or week of the year.

There is a term known as "pinkwashing" which has become common in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. "Pinkwashing" or "pride capitalism" is used to describe allyship that seems more like a performance than an authentic commitment to inclusion.

"Pinkwashing" as a term comes from the idea of "whitewashing" - i.e. the practice of putting a fresh coat of white paint on a wall to make a space look fresh and new. While there is nothing wrong with a coat of fresh paint, whitewashing is only a superficial means of covering the blemishes and wear that exists beneath. It doesn't change the structure underneath.

The same is true of pinkwashing. Pinkwashing is the practice in which organizations, usually large corporations, put on a display of inclusivity during events like the Pride Parade but don't actually practice what they preach. Pinkwashing creates distrust within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and makes it appear like organizations aren't really invested in diversity but only want to capitalize on the popularity of Pride events.

Pinkwashing can exist in many forms.

For example, if your organization has television ads which depict both straight and queer families but doesn't have gender neutral washrooms or straightforward processes for clients and employees to update their pronouns in your records, this could easily be seen as an example of pinkwashing.

Pinkwashing is focused on outward appearance, not authentic inclusion across the organization.

There is nothing wrong with attending Pride Parades and putting on a colourful display of your commitment to supporting the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. But if you're going to do this, it's important to examine whether you're being supportive and inclusive inside your organization itself and not just for external appearances.

STEVI

Gender identity: little bit of both, sometimes neither
Pronouns: they/them, he/him
Works in: youth programming

My gender is a little bit of both and sometimes neither end of the binary. I know the importance of being able to be yourself at work for the sheer fact that we spend too much time at our jobs to not feel like we can be ourselves. Working in a school system has given me the responsibility and honour to create safe spaces because if I have the space to be who I am, it allows the kids I work with the freedom to be who they are also.

To make sure that your organization is not engaging in pinkwashing, it's a good idea to examine your internal policies and processes to make sure that these are equitable and inclusive of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and their needs. You may find that there are additional steps you need to take to be authentically inclusive, such as opening up conversations about pronouns with your colleagues and peers, making sure that you aren't enforcing the gender binary in your event planning and workplace activities, and making sure that people in your life feel supported if they come out to you as two-spirit, trans, non-binary, or gender diverse.

There are many small but meaningful steps that we can all take to create safer, more inclusive spaces for people of diverse genders.

We all deserve a world where we can all be our authentic selves everywhere we go. The tips and tools that we've shared in this guide represent some simple but meaningful steps that you as an organization can take to help make this world a reality.

GARRY

Gender identity: gender-fluid, non-binary
Pronouns: they/she/he
Works in: 2SLGBTQIA+ education in healthcare

Being queer and genderfluid, I am intimately tied to a beautiful and rich community full of history, activism and chosen family. I am not held to traditional notions of sex, gender identity and expression or sexual orientation. This can create euphoria and self love beyond what I thought possible. While it is incredible, we still face so many intersecting barriers, oppressions and discrimination. The time for action, co-creation and collaboration is now. Nothing about us should be created without us. Until all marginalized and oppressed groups are uplifted, none of us are so let's create a future of belonging and action together.
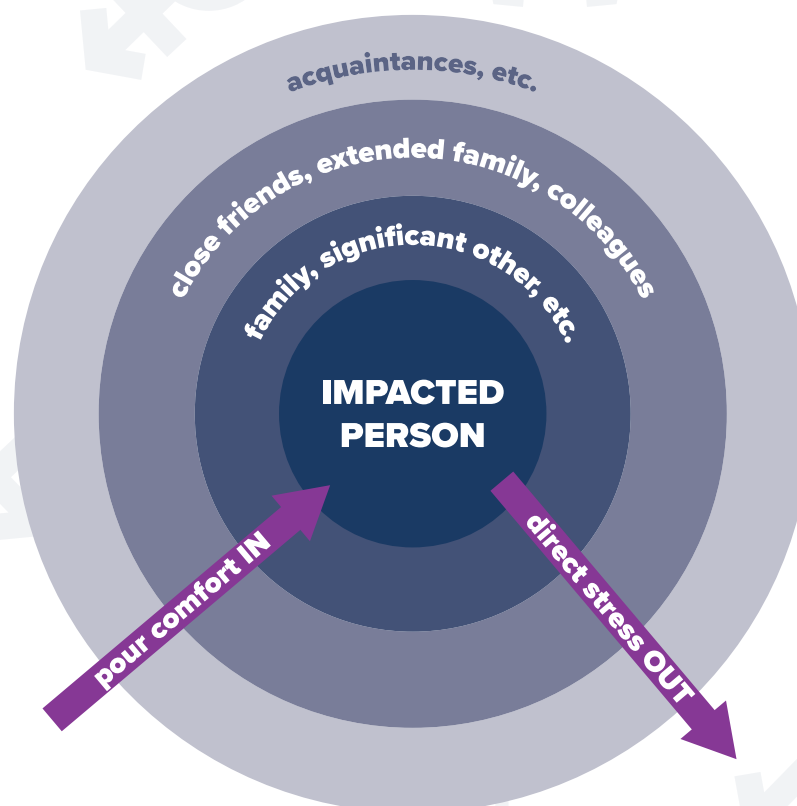
CIRCLES OF SUPPORT: THE IMPORTANCE OF LEANING OUT

It can be uncomfortable to learn about something new and adjust to changes in our world. If you are struggling to adjust to changes in someone's gender identity, it can feel compelling to share those struggles with that person, but this can add additional stress and labour to someone who is already undergoing changes.

When you need support, a helpful rule of thumb is **ring theory,** developed by psychologist Susan Silk and her friend Barry Goldman. The idea of ring theory is that whenever someone is going through a challenging experience or crisis, that person should exist at the center of a community of support. Around the person in crisis, there are multiple "rings" or circles of support that expand outward. The closest inner ring represents a person's closest relationships like family and significant others. The next ring represents close and trusted friends, extended family, and close colleagues. The outer ring represents relationships that are less close, like acquaintances.

In this model, the idea is that **only comfort goes toward the center of the rings toward the person in crisis,** and complaints, needs for support, or other grievances are **only dumped outward.**

When you are caring for or talking to a person in a ring smaller than yours (someone closer to the center of the crisis), **the goal is to help that person rather than seek their help or support**. This visual might help:

Diagram of concentric circles labelled from outside to inside: "acquaintances, etc."; "close friends, extended family, colleagues"; "family, significant other, etc."; center "IMPACTED PERSON". An arrow pointing inward reads "pour comfort IN" and an arrow pointing outward reads "direct stress OUT".

The reason for this is that it makes sure that the person who needs support most doesn't experience added burdens of supporting others. It also means that people who are in closer or farther rings from the person in crisis can receive support from **appropriate places.**

An example of how this works:

> *Zee feels that they/them pronouns are right for them and notified their boss. The people in Zee's inner ring of supportive relationships have been offering only love and care to Zee as they navigate all the changes. These close connections lean on each other, or on outer circles for support. Zee's boss was receptive to their updates but also struggling to adjust to the new language. Instead of complaining to Zee about this, Zee's boss met with a colleague in Human Resources to talk through the difficulty they were having, to review best practice in pronoun use, and to practice using the new pronouns conversationally. In this example, Zee is spared from additional burdens of caring for those around them and so can instead focus on caring for themselves.*

Remember: Give comfort to those who need it, and lean away from those in crisis to get the support that you yourself need.

To create your own ring model to clarify support networks:

1. Draw a circle. In this circle, write the name of the person who is in crisis or needing support

2. Now draw a larger circle around the first one. In this ring, put the names of the people who are closest to the person in crisis or needing support

3. In each larger ring, put the next closest people.

This map can support you to identify who you can lean on and who else is involved in this network of support. We all deserve love and care whenever we go through something difficult or navigate big changes.

ART

Gender identity: non-binary
Pronouns: they/them
Works in: newcomer support

As a nonbinary person living and working in a culture that barely understands transgender people, I live a double life. I go to work and pretend to be a cisgender, digestable version of myself and when I go home I can be my full-blown queer self. My hope for the future is for my workplace to become educated on the diverse identities of their employees and create practical initiatives to make their trans/gender-non-conforming/nonbinary/queer employees feel respected. I want workplaces to not only tick inclusivity boxes, but truly understand the lives of transgender people. Until workplaces understand this necessity, I will continue hiding myself and living a double life.

RESOURCES

This resource list includes two kinds of resources. The first are mainly Nova Scotia-based organizations which provide services and support for 2SLGBTQIA+ people and communities. The second type of resources included in this list are online educational resources where you can find more information about how to ensure that your organization is supportive and inclusive of two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people.

Organizations that provide support and outreach on the local or national level:

- **Youth Project** - Organization that provides support for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and education and outreach across Nova Scotia. **youthproject.ns.ca**

- **Valley Youth Project** - Satellite organization of the Youth Project, providing support for youth in the Annapolis Valley **valleyyouthproject.wordpress.com/about-us/**

- **Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project** - Volunteer-run 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy organization **nsrap.ca** Email: **nsrap@nsrap.ca**

- **Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission** - Toll free in Nova Scotia: 1-877-269-7699, Local in Halifax: 902-424-4111 **humanrights.novascotia.ca**

- **Canadian Human Rights Commission** - Toll free: 1-888-214-1090 **chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en**

- **prideHealth** - The prideHealth navigator provides navigation support for 2SLGBTQIA+ adults and youth Tel: 902-487-0470, **nshealth.ca/content/pridehealth** Email: **prideHealth@nshealth.ca**

- **Trans Lifeline** - Peer support hotline run and staffed by trans people for trans people. Toll free in Canada: (877) 330-6366 https://translifeline.org/

Online Educational Resources:

- **Egale** - A Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ organization with many online webinars and free workshops focused on making your organization inclusive. We encourage you to peruse the many great resources on their website

- **Harvard Business Review** - Creating a Trans-Inclusive Workplace

- **Out and Equal** - Best practices guide for non-binary inclusion in the workplace

- **Hibob** - Guide for non-binary inclusion for Human Resources professionals

- **Public Service Alliance of Canada** - Building Trans-Inclusive Workplaces: a Guide for Managers, Unions and Workers

- **Province of NS** - Guidelines to Support Trans and Gender Variant Employees (for employees of the Province of Nova Scotia)

- **GLAAD** - Tips for Allies of Transgender People

- **Pride at Work Canada** - Multiple guides and other resources on building trans-inclusive workplaces, best practices for hiring, supporting employees in their transition, etc.

- **The Guardian** - a guide on using they/them pronouns

- **NS Guidelines for Trans and Gender-nonconforming Students**

- **Pflag** - Support resources for families of 2SLGBTQIA+ people

- **The 519** - Creating Authentic Spaces: a Gender Identity and Gender Expression Toolkit. The 519 also has many other great online resources about supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, so we encourage you to explore their website.

- **Pronoun practice** - Online guide for learning and practicing new pronouns

- **Forge** - A US-based organization with many online resources for service providers and other organizations seeking to make their spaces trans-inclusive.

GLOSSARY

Ally - Someone who actively supports a marginalized community through their actions and commitment to learning. An ally is usually someone who is not part of the community (for example, a straight ally who supports 2SLGBTQIA+ rights) but sees the importance of making positive changes that benefit the oppressed group.

Cisgender - Someone whose gender identity is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth. For example, a cisgender woman is someone who was identified as female when she was born and still identifies with this gender.

Deadname - The name that a two-spirit, trans, non-binary, or other gender diverse person was given at birth and that is different from the name they have adopted for themselves.

Gender affirming healthcare - This includes a variety of medical processes and treatments that allow a person to feel that their body is better aligned with their gender identity. Some examples of gender affirming healthcare include hormone treatment, chest surgery, electrolysis, and many others.

Gender assigned at birth - This term refers to how someone is categorized at birth according to the gender binary. For example, a baby with a penis will usually be assigned male at birth and a baby with a vulva will usually be assigned female at birth. A person's gender identity can be different from the gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender expression - How someone expresses their gender (for example, whether they wear clothing or hair styles that are traditionally read as masculine or feminine; what pronouns they use; how they speak; the name they use).

Gender identity - How someone identifies and understands their own gender (for example, if they identify as a man, a woman, two-spirit, agender, genderqueer, more than one gender, or somewhere else within the gender spectrum). Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of self, while gender expression more often refers to how they outwardly express their gender.

Pinkwashing - A term for when organizations show only a superficial commitment to 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion, for example, when companies participate in a Pride Parade but do not have inclusive policies aimed at supporting their 2SLGBTQIA+ employees and clients. Pinkwashing is sometimes also known as pride capitalism.

Genderqueer - Someone whose gender identity cannot be categorized as exclusively male or female. Some genderqueer people identify with both ends of the gender spectrum, while others identify as outside of gender or have a fluid understanding of their gender.

Man - someone who identifies as a man, which includes both cisgender and trans men.

Non-binary - Someone who identifies outside the gender binary of male and female. Non-binary people are often grouped under the trans umbrella, but not all non-binary people identify as trans. Non-binary people sometimes use gender neutral pronouns such as they/them, but not all non-binary people do. Remember to ask about someone's pronouns rather than assuming.

Trans or Transgender - Someone whose gender identity is different than how they were identified at birth. Trans people may identify with the gender binary (for example, trans men and trans women) or outside the gender binary (for example, non-binary people).

Transfeminine - A term to refer to trans and gender diverse people who are on the feminine end of the spectrum, for example trans women.

Transmasculine - A term to refer to trans and gender diverse people who are on the masculine end of the spectrum, for example trans men.

Two-spirit - A term used by Indigenous communities to describe someone who identifies as having both a masculine and feminine spirit. "Two-spirit" can refer to gender identity or sexual orientation or both of these. Being two-spirit may mean that someone experiences same-gender attraction, or it can mean that the person is gender diverse (i.e. not cisgender), or it can mean both of these things. "Two-spirit" should only be used to refer to people who are Indigenous.

Queer - A term used to refer to people who are not straight and/or not cisgender. If someone refers to themselves as queer, that person may fall anywhere in the 2SLGBTQIA+ umbrella. "Queer" doesn't necessarily tell you a lot of information about someone, such as what kind of people they're physically or romantically attracted to (if they experience attraction) or how they identify in terms of gender. "Queer" used to be a slur, but has been reclaimed by the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as empowering.

Woman - someone who identifies as a woman, which includes both cisgender and trans women.

2SLGBTQIA+ - An acronym used to refer to the following identities: two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and + for the many other identities that exist within the queer spectrum.