

Transgender inclusion self-assessment for agencies that work with youth and families

This document is intended to assist agencies in looking at how well they are able to serve Transgender clients. While self-audits are inexpensive ways to gauge the inclusivity of your organization they are limited in what they are able to tell you about your organization. Professional diversity auditors who specialize in transgender inclusivity will be able to objectively assess your organization, will see issues that you are not aware of, and have specialized education, training and experiences specific to ensuring equal access to services by all people. One of the most meaningful uses of a self-audit is during conversations with leadership discussing the need to bring in professional and qualified consultants to do a full audit.

This assessment will describe some model policies and best practices that include the following (1) Assessing your agency; (2) LGBTQ cultural competency training; (3) Collaboration with transgender and ally organizations; (4) Working with staff, board members, and volunteers; (5) Making your organization a welcoming environment; (6) Direct services practices, including advocacy and group services; (7) Outreach and media; and (8) Resources.

1. Assess Your Agency

The first step for implementing the model policies described above is figuring out where to start. A thorough organizational assessment should be done so you know what is going well and where the organization can grow to better serve trans and gender non-conforming youth. A good assessment that will serve your agency well will include ascertaining whether the following building blocks are in place for better serving transgender and gender non-conforming youth:

- Is Support already established for organizational growth toward improving services. This can include people outside of the organization such as key stakeholders, funders, and other allies, and it can include people within the agency, such as coworkers or colleagues. Ideally, both the board and the staff should have a commitment to serving trans and gender non-conforming youth?
- Is there Involvement of all parties in the process? One way to ensure this is to have an advisory committee formed of staff, board members, volunteers, and former clients (or other trans youth if impractical).
- Have you reached out for technical assistance and advice from LGBTQ and Trans specific organizations and from other organizations that have gone through a similar process?
- Would the use of a third party diversity consultant that specializes in transgender inclusion be practical?

2. Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Cultural Competency Training

The question is not “Do we need more training?” but “How much more training, and in what areas do we need it?” Even the most culturally competent organizations incorporate on-going training around certain topics in order to maintain their competence.

- Trainings should include an introduction to Transgender identities and communities (Trans 101). This can be part of a larger LGBTQ training, but extra time should be devoted to understanding the needs of transgender communities and individuals, since so many people struggle to

understand how they are different from those of LGB persons, and because national data show that transgender individuals are especially impacted by violence of all kinds.

- Training must also be conducted on the specific issues of Transgender youth and the ways that transgender youth experience different forms of violence.
- Agencies should provide training that assists in identifying abuse that may be related to the youth's gender identity.
- Because of the powerful links between oppression and violence, anti-oppression training should be an integral part of any agency's regular staff development curricula. It is important to provide staff and volunteers the vocabulary, conceptual structure, and tools to address situations that arise around issues of oppression within the organization, whether the oppression is related to gender identity and/or sexual orientation, racial identity, class identity, religious identity or another identity.
- All training should be mandatory to new employees as well as ongoing training for current employees.

3. Collaborate with Transgender, LGBTQ, and Ally Organizations

Becoming truly Trans inclusive is a demanding, and rewarding, process that requires input from knowledgeable sources. Collaborating early in the process with an organization that has expertise in LGBTQ violence issues is strongly recommended. Seeking out and building partnerships with Trans specific, LGBTQ, and ally organizations can offer important benefits to all organizations:

- Ongoing technical assistance, as noted above, can provide valuable support and address challenges and pitfalls.
- Strong connections to Trans and LGBTQ community organizations can be a source of support for you in figuring out how to best serve the needs of Clients.
- Networking with Trans, LGBTQ and ally service providers can help you stay informed about other services available for trans clients.
- Maintaining awareness of current issues relevant to Trans and LGBTQ communities, such as legislation that may impact access to services, can help you understand the social and legal framework that families must navigate.
- Good relationships with Trans, LGBTQ and ally organizations are a way to create accountability to those communities. These connections can give you the opportunity to find out what Trans service providers have heard from clients about your services and your reputation in LGBTQ communities. Trans service providers might be able to offer suggestions for changes you could make to improve accessibility to community members.

4. Working with Staff, Board Members, and Volunteers

Transgender people who work and volunteer in your organization must feel safe to be out in that environment, or they will not be able to contribute to making the organization accessible to other transgender clients.

- The employee handbook and organizational policies should contain anti-discrimination policies that include gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, and marital status, along with other protected classes real or perceived. Further, they should be paired with carefully outlined procedures for reporting discrimination and harassment.

sign next to the gendered bathrooms that indicates where single-stall bathrooms are located in the building. There are other options as well!

- Make Trans and Gender Non-conforming books, resources, and pamphlets available to clients. Keep LGBTQ magazines, newspapers, and service-related brochures in your waiting area. If you have a lending library, ensure that quality and appropriate books and movies with Transgender and gender non-conforming topics and/or characters are included in the collection.
- Display Trans inclusive posters and images in your office or shelter. There are lots of organizations that will send you posters for free or who have posters available online for free download.

6. Direct Service Practices:

- **Advocacy**

Being an effective advocate for Transgender and gender non-conforming youth requires competency in working with LGBTQ communities. Following are ways that advocates and others working in direct service positions can work with clients in a respectful way.

- Use gender-inclusive language in all levels of your work, including on the phone, in person, in your forms, and when talking about your clients. This shows respect for trans people and their identities. Conversely, using the wrong term to describe the sexuality or gender of a client or their family member can make that person feel unsafe, invisible, and unwelcome. Another way to be respectful is to mirror the language that people use for themselves.
- Consider whether you really need to know how someone identifies their gender. If you are not filling out a form, it may not come up. It may be more functional to simply ask what pronoun the person prefers.
- Help Trans Clients by preparing them to deal with providers who may have biases. Give them an idea of which programs work better with LGBTQ individuals and which do not. Be available to clients in case they want your help in educating providers about their issues as LGBTQ persons, or if they need your support in dealing with a transphobic, homophobic, biphobic, or heterosexist situation that arises while interacting with a provider.
- Interrupt and confront transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism. When these kinds of remarks or situations (microaggressions) go unaddressed, trans people can feel hurt, humiliated, angry, embarrassed, or threatened. Additionally, the person making the remark or creating the situation gets the message that it is acceptable to behave in this way. These problematic comments and actions should be interrupted whether they are coming from clients, from coworkers, or from other providers

- **Group Services**

- Support group guidelines should have clear and strict boundaries about confidentiality. Guidelines should also include your organization's antidiscrimination policies around race, class, gender, gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, etc. Oppressive or offensive comments or actions in the group setting should be dealt with as soon as possible, and

- Standard procedures for hiring should include advertising positions in LGBTQ publications, message boards, and listservs. Job listings should always clearly state that LGBTQ persons are encouraged to apply and that your discrimination policy includes transgender and gender non-conforming identities. During interviews, prospective employees should be made aware that your organization works with Transgender youth. Assess whether applicants are comfortable with these sections of the agency's mission and policies before making hiring decisions.
- Agencies should protect the trans clients they work with as well as Trans and gender Non-conforming people on staff through a policy of screening all volunteers, employees, and board members during their interview and application process. In addition to this it is important to have a procedure in place to describe how your organization will respond if a staff member or volunteer is being abusive in the workplace or if allegations of abuse are brought to the agency.
- To be fully welcoming to all employees, organizations should have written procedures for accommodating all transgender health-related concerns, including gender transition in the event that an employee transitions from one gender to another.
- Health insurance should provide comprehensive transgender coverage, including coverage for Hormone and other prescription medications; all forms of Gender conformation surgery and other reconstructive interventions, including hair removal; and mental health services. Medical leave policies should include time off for transition related medical services including hair removal, mental health services and safe time.
- Policy and procedure manuals should be easily accessible to all staff and volunteers, and executive staff should be ready to respond to questions regarding policies and procedures.

5. Making Your Organization a Welcoming Environment

- Create and maintain a comprehensive list of local resources for LGBTQ people. Include shelters, medical programs, support groups, legal assistance, hotlines, and any other resources that are LGBTQ specific. Since not all LGBTQ resources are fully trans inclusive, be sure to include some trans-specific resources. Be sure to keep the list updated and listen to clients' feedback about which programs work well and which do not.
- Agency anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies must be explicit and be made available to both employees and clients. Clients and families should receive this information in their handbook and during their intake into the program, so that they are receiving it both orally and in written form. Information should similarly be available about how and where to file a grievance.
- In order to be effective, program staff must act quickly and fairly to implement policies around discrimination and harassment when an incident occurs.
- Forms must be modified to be inclusive of all genders, as the simple choice of male or female does not work for many people. There are a number of options around how to modify forms to be inclusive of transgender and gender non-conforming people.
- If your organization requires photo identification or name badges, then consider having a space for a client's preferred name along with their legal name. This helps trans people feel more welcome as well as many other people who go by a nickname rather than their legal name.
- Bathrooms must be safe and accessible for transgender and gender non-conforming people. There are many ways to accomplish this. One is to provide single-stall bathrooms. If your program is in a building that has single-stall bathrooms, but not on your floor, you can post a

preferably within the group. This sends the message that this is unacceptable and supports members of the group who may have been hurt by the comments or actions.

- Determine whether you will have mixed-gender groups. Many advocates are uncomfortable with this idea, but organizations where this has been implemented have found them to be very successful, noting that there is amazing power in seeing people of all genders who have experienced abuse, sharing similar experiences. Some organizations choose to have one group that is inclusive of all genders and another that is for girls only. Girls can then decide which group they would prefer to join. Female-only groups must still be inclusive of transgender girls and if there are male-only groups, those groups should be inclusive of transgender boys.

7. Outreach and Media

Consider your organization's public face through the following:

- Revisit your organization's mission and name. Many sexual and domestic violence programs have mission statements that are specific to women and their children. This will ensure that many LGBTQ people, especially gay, bisexual, and transgender men, believe that those services are not available to them. For some programs it may be easy to change language of "women and children" to "individuals and families". Others may face more difficult challenges because their name is centered on women. Also look at the use of "girls and boys" and consider "children" or "youth" instead.
- List Trans and gender non-conforming youth as people you serve on all press releases, brochures, annual reports, web pages, social networking sites, and other publications. Make sure that language in all publications is gender-inclusive. Incorporate stories about Trans and gender non-conforming youth and issues into your publications, your outreach, your prevention work, and your trainings.
- Respond to LGBTQ abuse and sexual violence stories in the media in the same way that your organization responds to all other abuse and sexual violence stories in the media: by dispelling stereotypes, providing information, and letting people know about your services.
- Get the word out to LGBTQ communities in your service area that you exist and are welcoming to Trans and gender non-conforming youth. Advertise in LGBTQ media sources and make sure that LGBTQ service providers know that you work with Trans and gender non-conforming youth.
- Attend LGBTQ events. In addition to Pride events and marches, LGBTQ community events can include theater performances, queer softball leagues, dance classes, parenting groups, and a multitude of other activities. Your organization could participate by flyering at these events or working an outreach table, by co-sponsoring an event, volunteering to help out, offering meeting space, or helping with publicity. Transgender Day of Remembrance, Transgender day of visibility, and Trans Pride celebrations and marches also exist and are excellent ways to support local trans and gender non-conforming youth.
- Participate in transgender campaigns and causes. Your organization can support campaigns around legislation and governmental policy change by writing press statements to the media, joining coalitions, attending rallies and hearings, or by signing petitions about relevant transgender causes.

Adapted From Virginia Anti Violence Project Model Policies

