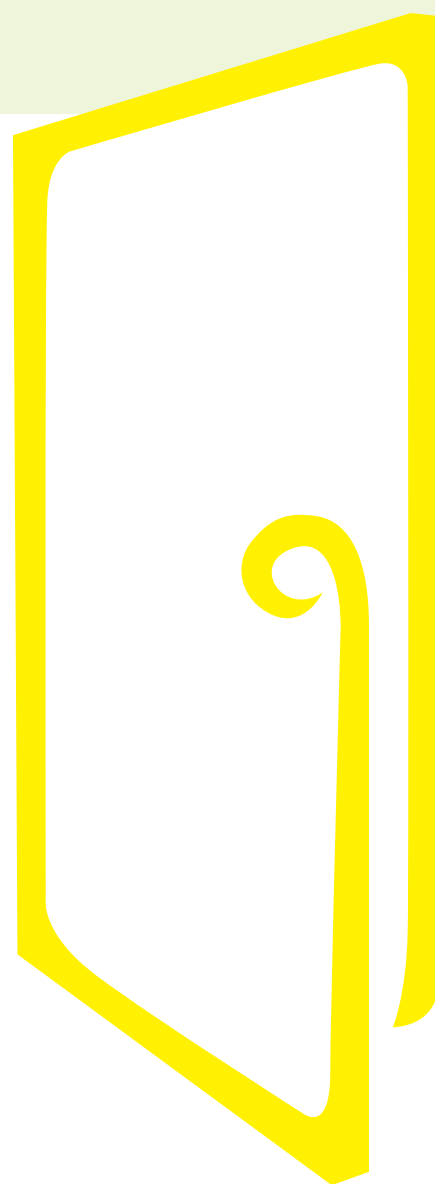


# OPENING THE DOOR

to the inclusion of trans\* people

The nine keys to making Canadian organizations more **trans\*-inclusive**



This document was originally published in 2008 by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Center for Transgender Equality, under the title *Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People*. It has been adapted and printed, with permission, by the Canadian AIDS Society.

This adaptation is part of *The Trans\* Toolkit: Practical Resources for Community-Based Organizations*. For additional copies of the Trans\* Toolkit, please contact:

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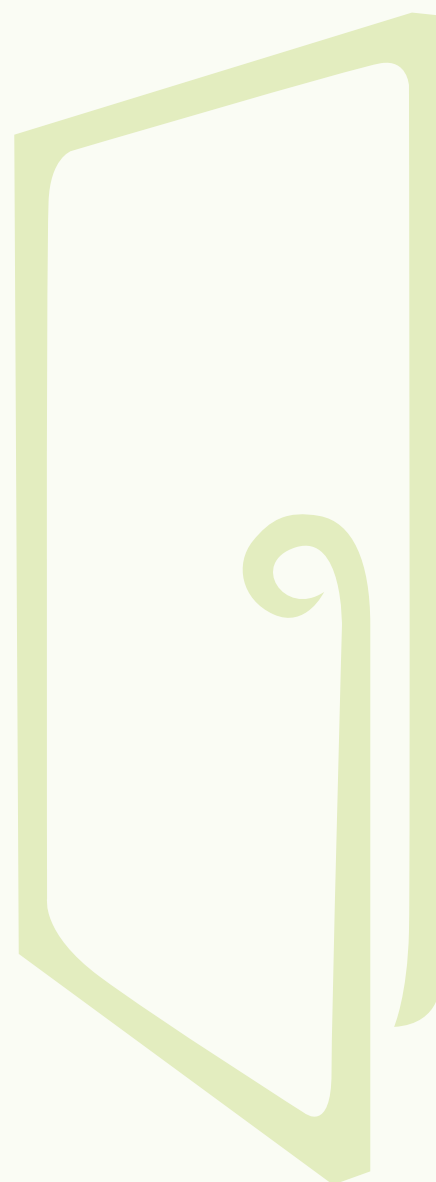
## PREFACE

This resource was originally written by Lisa Mottet of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, and Justin Tanis of the National Centre for Transgender Equality, under the title *Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People*. It was developed specifically for LGBT groups and organizations that wanted to be more inclusive of trans\*<sup>1</sup> people.

The Canadian AIDS Society sought and received permission from the authors to adapt this publication for a broader Canadian audience and include it in *The Trans\* Toolkit: Practical Resources for Community-Based Organizations*.

We extend our sincere thanks to the original authors for their generosity in allowing us to re-focus their excellent work for our purposes.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, we use the word trans\* (with the asterisk) as an umbrella term that includes transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, intersex and otherwise gender non-conforming people. However, not every individual who falls into one or more of these categories will necessarily identify with the term trans\*.



# THE JOURNEY TO A TRANS\*-INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION



Although the path of each organization towards full trans\*-inclusion is different, there are some common stages. Organizations spend varying amounts of time in each stage and may experience these in a different order. This is not always a linear process but we hope to show the ways in which organizations change over time as they become more inclusive.

## Stage One: Not on the radar

Organizations in this stage have not yet recognized that they have an exclusionary posture and practice regarding trans\* people. They have no out trans\* people on their staff or board; they make no attempt to serve trans\* people or make their facilities or events trans\*-affirming or –accessible. There are no policies to address transphobia or harassment, so jokes about gender non-conforming people, if they occur, go unchallenged. The organization makes no alliances with organizations that serve or advocate for the rights of trans\* people.

## Stage Two: Not stated in policy, but trans\* people are welcome

Leaders and members of these organizations may be personally welcoming of trans\* people, but the organization itself has not yet adapted its policies with gender identity in mind. People running these organizations may say they are not sure how to be trans\*-inclusive, since they may believe they don't know any trans\* people. They may believe there is no need to be trans\*-inclusive because they are not aware whether an active trans\* community even exists in the area. In this stage, individuals in the organization or on the board may challenge anti-trans\* attitudes, but there is no organizational commitment to addressing this systematically, and no larger trans\*-affirming policy work.

## Stage Three: Trans\*-inclusive policies, and the beginnings of trans\*-inclusive programming and/or advocacy

An organization in this stage has incorporated trans\* people in their policies. However, their trans\*-inclusion may be mostly on paper. The actual activities of the organization may not have caught up to the changes in policy, leaving trans\* people to have negative or mixed experiences with staff or at events.

An organization in this stage may have begun to strive for trans\*-inclusivity, by ensuring that educational events/ programs include trans\* people as speakers, posting event notices on trans\* listservs, and using the term LGBT instead of LGB. But while trans\* people are invited to participate, there is no effort to recruit trans\* people into leadership positions.

## Stage Four: The organization's work is trans\*-inclusive and there is greater trans\* involvement throughout the organization

Organizations in this stage have trans\*-inclusive policies and they take this seriously. There are trans\* people at most levels of the organization, from staff to board members. In terms of its policy work, organizations at stage four commit to being fully inclusive of trans\* rights and concerns.

This stage includes organizations that sometimes do things are not fully trans\*-inclusive. They may not have fixed all of the physical space issues that block trans\* people from fully participating, or there are some people affiliated with the organization who are not fully on board with trans\*-inclusion or don't know how to be.

Nonetheless, there is an institution-wide commitment to understanding and addressing the needs of trans\* people. Anti-trans\* jokes and attitudes are confronted and challenged. Trans\* people feel positive accessing services and coming to events. Trans\* people on staff have access to the same advancement opportunities as their cisgender peers.

## Stage Five: The fully-inclusive organization

The fully trans\*-inclusive organization has trans\* people involved at all levels and the activities of the organization always reflect the needs of trans\* people as well as cisgender people. Safe, accessible bathrooms are the norm. Organizations at this stage recognize that there are some activities that need to be done specifically to meet the needs of trans\* people and it is an organizational priority to get these things done. For example, an AIDS service organization at this stage might be developing trans\*-specific sexual health resources, as well as participating in initiatives to advance trans\* priorities beyond the organization.

## Keys to Trans\* Inclusion

In the sections that follow, we will outline nine concrete principles that are key to full trans\* inclusion in your organization. We have found that when organizations pay attention to these particular areas, they have significantly greater success bringing trans\* people fully into the life of the group.

Each of these principles can be seen as a key that helps unlock doors to the participation of trans\* people. They are not listed in order of importance – we believe that organizations need to address all of these areas in the course of their work. However, some organizations may already be doing well in some areas. The individual circumstances of your community and the history of your work with trans\* people may make it necessary to address some areas before others. Use this information in whatever way you believe will be the most effective in opening doors to increased trans\* participation.



### WORK TOWARD FULL INTEGRATION AT EVERY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

The first key to becoming a trans\*-inclusive organization is to have trans\* people integrated throughout the organization. A fully inclusive organization brings trans\* leaders onto the board, recruits volunteers, identifies staff, serves clients, attracts members, and engages participants in the organization's events, etc.

It is especially important to bring trans\* people into the decision-making bodies of the organization so that their insights can help set the agenda. Whether a group is writing a strategic plan, revising its mission, setting priorities, deciding which services to provide, or choosing speakers for an event, with trans\* voices at the table the organization will be better able to make decisions that reflect the needs of the community. Additionally, visible trans\* leadership tends to attract trans\* members and participants much more effectively than "outreach" methods driven by cisgender people.

One common pitfall that organizations have fallen into is to rely on the leadership of one trans\* person (or a select few) or to use one person as a liaison to the rest of the trans\* community. While well-intentioned, this is ineffective and can undercut your attempts to make the organization fully-inclusive.

The truth is that no one trans\* person can represent or access the entire trans\* community or communities. An organization that integrates trans\* people at every level will be better able to consider the full range of trans\* perspectives and issues. It will not need to seek outside counsel on how to conduct its work in a trans\*-inclusive way.

#### Action Ideas

- Do an inventory or assessment of trans\* participation at all levels of your organization. Identify areas in which there should be more trans\* involvement.
- If you have trans\* people at the "lower" levels of your organization but not in the decision-making bodies, consider recruiting and training them for higher levels of involvement.
- If your organization has primarily relied on one trans\* person to give information or organize programs, consider starting a "trans\* advisory board" or "trans\* services committee" (whichever is more appropriate for your work) to involve more trans\* people in your organization's work. This will allow you to continue to include that person's voice while also expanding the number of trans\* voices giving input to the organization.



### RECRUIT A BROAD RANGE OF TRANS\* PEOPLE

The trans\* community is multifaceted and diverse, including people of all races, ages, classes, ethnicities, abilities and sexual orientations. Additionally, there are female-to-male and male-to-female trans\* people, as well as those who do not identify as either or both, and people who live part-time time in one gender and part-time in another.

Because of these multiple dimensions of diversity, you need to be diverse in your outreach to them. The work of full integration will never be done. You must continually work at recruiting trans\* participants. Reaching one segment of the trans\* community should not be interpreted as a sign that you have now reached the “trans community.”

Not having any trans\* people involved in your organization should never be understood to mean that trans\* people are disinterested or don’t need the services you are providing.

It just means that you have more work to do to locate, engage and serve them. Reaching the first few members of a marginalized group is often the most difficult because they don’t see anyone else like themselves in your organization yet.

Sometimes organizations become frustrated because they invite trans\* people to participate and no one shows up. Trans\* people are much more likely to show up if your organization has shown up for, supported and lent resources to their events and projects.

#### Action Ideas

- Do an internet search for your city, town or province and the word “transgender,” even if you’ve done this in the past. There may be new groups since you last looked and existing groups may have new leadership or programs.
- Contact the leaders of those groups to give them information about your programs and get their ideas and input. But don’t limit your contact to the leaders; your goal is to work with them to increase outreach. Getting together in person is more effective than corresponding by email.

- Get direct input from trans\* people in your community about your programs and services. This might take the form of a survey, focus group or direct conversations. Listen and get feedback.
- Hold an event specifically to draw a large number of trans\* people to help you reach critical mass.
- Support trans\* events in your community by attending, providing a service or serving as a sponsor, and take the opportunity to listen to those who are there.
- Contact service providers and ask if you can distribute material through their offices. Ask them for ideas about how you can reach or serve their trans\* clients.
- Be aware of legislation and other public policy initiatives that will impact trans\* people. Take steps to have a positive impact on these policies.



### CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

When people enter your building, go to your website, or read your brochure, they begin to evaluate – consciously or unconsciously – whether you genuinely welcome them.

You can create a space that feels safe and supportive by improving your physical environment, your verbal environment and your communications materials.

Trans\*-inclusive posters on the wall and trans\*-relevant notices on the bulletin board convey an inclusive space.

Make sure that you address security issues as well as you can, providing safe, well-lit places for parking, meetings and so forth. Personal safety is a huge issue for many trans\* people.

A strong message of trans\* inclusion comes from having gender-neutral washrooms. In addition to helping trans\* people, gender-neutral washrooms make your space more accessible to people who need assistance in the washroom from someone of a different gender, such as parents with children, people with disabilities, or seniors with caregivers.

- If you have single-user washrooms, make them all gender-neutral.
- If you have multiple-user washrooms, make all or some of them gender-neutral.
- Provide clearly marked signs on the doors of gender-neutral washrooms. If you have male and female washrooms, place a sign on the door that states that people are welcome to use the washroom of their choice.
- If anyone objects to a trans\* person in the washroom, it is absolutely critical that your staff make it clear that all washroom space is available to everyone. It is unacceptable for trans\* people to be denied washroom use or harassed in the washrooms.

If you offer exercise classes or other activities for which participants may need to change, you might consider the need for private changing rooms.

People who cross-dress may feel unsafe – for very good reasons – coming to and from your events while dressed in the clothing generally associated with a different sex. The same is true for people who live as a different gender part-time, or who are in the process of transitioning. Providing places for people to change their gender presentation conveys a welcoming environment designed with trans\* people in mind. You can designate a room as a dressing room and then communicate in your invitations that this option will be available to those who wish to dress after arriving at the event or program. It is helpful to provide mirrors in the dressing room.

#### Action Ideas

- Designate gender-neutral washrooms and changing spaces and create necessary signs.
- Update brochures, websites, forms and other written material to clearly, visibly and respectfully include trans\* people.
- Evaluate your training material to be sure that all presenters know how to address issues like pronouns, gender references and washrooms. Provide the same material to guest presenters, entertainers, etc.



Language can either create trans\*-inclusive space, or prevent people from experiencing a safe space. When people come together at an event, leaders should consciously set a trans\*-inclusive tone from the very beginning.

Include in remarks (such as during announcements) the location of gender-neutral washrooms and/or the fact that trans\* people are welcome to use whichever washroom they prefer.

Do not assume a person's gender. When calling on someone in a group, for example, identify them by articles of clothing instead of gender (for example, the "person in the blue shirt," instead of the "woman in the blue shirt."). Similarly, avoid saying "Sir" and "Ma'am" unless you are sure about a person's gender identity.

Evaluate your brochures, website, program listings and forms. It is important that they clearly communicate the presence of trans\* people in your organization.



### DEAL WITH PREJUDICE

Transphobia is the fear of, discomfort with, disrespect of, or dislike of trans\* people and/or those with non-traditional gender identities or gender expressions. Transphobia can manifest itself more obviously in anti-trans\* jokes or in statements that show disrespect for a trans\* person's identity, or in more insidious ways like misusing pronouns (he, she, etc.).

Regardless of the reasoning behind different people's biases against trans\* people – be it personal, cultural or political – it must be addressed.

A lack of understanding should be called out for what it is: transphobia. Those showing disrespect need to be further educated about trans\* people. Various small-scale or larger-scale interventions may be in order: a person may need individual education, the board may need trans\* training, staff may need to be trained on respectful treatment, or policies may need to be developed. The only truly wrong action is to look the other way.

#### Action Ideas

- Read books on trans\* people and experiences. There are fun books and serious books, but either way you go, you will get more comfortable with trans\* people and issues, and start to unlearn unconscious prejudices.
- Bring trans\* educational programming or more formal training on trans\* issues to your organization.
- Hold ongoing diversity training and make sure it includes trans\*-sensitivity as well as addressing the full range of diversity represented in our community.
- When you hear a transphobic remark, talk to the person about it to educate them, or make sure the organization addresses it. Support those in your organization who speak out against transphobic language and actions.
- Create a policy about pronoun usage, which includes information on how to correct mistakes and how to inform colleagues about others' pronouns. Make sure that all staff, volunteers, and board members know the policy and understand the reasons behind it.



### ACKNOWLEDGE PAST MISTAKES REGARDING TRANS\* INCLUSION

There are many ways in which organizations that have admirably served the LGB communities have not been trans\*-inclusive, or have even been anti-trans\*, in the past. Examples include: a political action committee that supported an LGB-only protective discrimination law or policy; a centre that disallowed trans\* women from attending women's support group meetings; an athletic association that told trans\* people they had to compete according to the gender they were assigned at birth; a health organization that did a fundraiser featuring a trans\*-insensitive performer; or a non-profit that looked the other way when coworkers created a hostile environment for a transitioning employee.

An organization can mend broken relationships and become a fully trans\*-inclusive organization by taking responsibility for its mistakes, taking action to create a welcoming environment, and demonstrating integrity with the trans\* communities.

#### Action Ideas

- Meet with trans\* community leaders to acknowledge and apologize for previous actions.
- Ask trans\* community leaders and members what corrective actions they believe would be helpful; then implement them as appropriate.
- Develop an overall plan for corrective action that addresses past mistakes and ways to prevent future steps that damage your relationship with the trans\* communities.
- Create an official organizational policy about trans\* inclusion.
- Create trans\* advisory boards to help facilitate change. Hire trans\* people as consultants to a transformational process.



# HAVE TRANS\*-INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES, AND SUPPORT TRANS\*-INCLUSIVE PUBLIC POLICY

In our society, there are a limited number of places that trans\* people – especially visible and out trans\* people – can go, be themselves and be safe. Your organization can increase that number with every trans\*-inclusive program that you provide, every group you sponsor and every piece of trans\* rights legislation you support.

The programs you conduct and the way you include people in them can make all the difference. There is a need for trans\*-specific programming, and trans\* people want to participate in other programs as well.

Trans\* people may want the opportunity to gather with those who understand and share their experiences. There are unique questions that people may want to ask others like themselves and topics of conversation that are most appropriate or feel safest within that context. Therefore, trans\* people want trans\*-specific programs that meet their needs.

Trans\* people – like all people – have a variety of needs and those needs may change over time. Trans\*-specific programming could include a group for those who are newly identifying as trans\* as well as topics of interest to people who have been out for a longer period of time.

Trans\* people who are members of some other group that you serve (e.g. MSM, African, Caribbean or Black, injection drug user, etc.) may be coming to your organization because of those identities, rather than because they are trans\*. If you have a gay men's book discussion group or a women's social, think of how to communicate that trans\* gay men who are interested in books or trans\* women are welcome in those groups.

## Action Ideas

- Conduct a needs assessment of the local trans\* community. Find out what services and programs trans\* people in your community want or need.
- Create programs and services that address the unique needs of trans\* people. Based on your needs assessment and input from community members, develop trans\*-specific programs.
- Make sure that trans\* people know they are welcome to participate in all programs.
- Check your internal policies and procedures to make sure they are all trans\*-inclusive. Evaluate each policy considering trans\* inclusion. Eliminate any policies that reference surgical or hormonal status.
- Support public policies that protect trans\* people from violence and discrimination. Develop organizational policies that clearly state your commitment to supporting only LGBT legislation that is trans\*-inclusive.



### UNDERSTAND TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCES

In order to work effectively with trans\* people, it is important to learn about their experiences. Learn the terminology trans\* people use to refer to themselves, and learn how to use correct names and pronouns.

Trans\* allies should not expect trans\* people to teach them everything they need to know about trans\* issues. In addition to talking to trans\* people, read books, explore websites and watch documentaries. Stay abreast of newspaper articles and legislative initiatives.

Being trans\* may or may not be the most important factor in an individual's life. During certain periods, such as when someone is transitioning, it may be an all-consuming issue. At other points in a person's life, they may rarely think about the fact that they are trans\*.

When people reveal to you that they are trans\*, it is impolite to ask them questions about their medical history, surgery or genitals, unless there is some compelling reason you need to know (for example, if you are a medical provider treating someone with a groin injury).

Trans\* people live in a world in which transphobia, discrimination and anti-trans\* violence is prevalent. For someone who is visibly trans\*, just walking down the street may be life-threatening. Additionally, they may fear – based on real experience – that they will not be protected by the police or treated properly by emergency medical personnel. Trans\*-inclusive organizations can provide havens of safety and acceptance in an all-too-often hostile world.

It is important not to view trans\* people as victims, even while recognizing the negative impacts of transphobia.

#### Action Ideas

- Listen to trans\* people tell their stories – in person or through a book, documentary or blog. Consider multiple trans\* perspectives by thinking about the ways in which different people share their unique stories.
- Learn about different trans\*-related terms and what they mean. Make sure that your organization is using proper terminology.
- Advocate for the rights of trans\* people. Be an ally.
- Speak up against any stereotypes or jokes that you hear about trans\* people. Confront anti-trans\* prejudice and myths when you hear them by giving accurate information that you've learned.
- Let children in your life know that it's okay to be themselves, however they express their genders.



### UNDERSTAND ONE'S ROLE AS AN ALLY

The eighth key to being a successfully trans\*-inclusive organization is to be an organization of people who are trans\* allies. A trans\* ally is a person who has taken the time to understand the trans\* experience and takes personal responsibility for ensuring that the actions of the organization are trans\*-inclusive. A trans\* ally doesn't just talk about being inclusive, but instead takes concrete action, using their privilege as a cisgender person to effect change. And, an ally challenges transphobia.

Being an ally also means that one should help facilitate the trans\* community's goals and agenda, without undue influence on setting the agenda.

#### Action Ideas

- Talk to the trans\* people involved in your organization or in the community about how they would like to work on trans\* issues. Do they want you to take the lead or follow their lead?
- Use your power as a non-trans\* person by tackling a trans\*-inclusion problem at your organization. See what it feels like and whether or not you are listened to in part because you are not trans\*.
- Sit down and make a list of all the things you would change about your organization so that it will be more trans\*-inclusive. Tackle them one by one.



### HAVE FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Regardless of the human rights legislation in your jurisdiction, we recommend that all organizations uphold workplace practices that ensure fairness for all employees.

The organization, its staff and board should share a commitment to upholding non-discrimination policies that include gender identity and expression. These policies should be included in employee handbooks.

Every job posting should include a non-discrimination statement such as “Our organization is an equal opportunity employer. We encourage visible minorities, trans\* people and people living with HIV to apply for this position.”

Keep in mind that a trans\* applicant may be known to a previous employer or references by a prior name, and some past employers may give a poor reference because of their own transphobia.

If a new employee has a non-conforming gender presentation, clarify which pronouns they use and model them. For example, you might send out an email saying, “Please welcome Pat Freeman to our staff. She brings a wealth of experience and we are delighted she is here.” This lets people know which pronouns to use without making a big deal about it.

Not all trans\* people are out, so speak with your new employee about whether that information is something that should be shared with other staff or clients.

Learn how to support employees who transition on the job (see *Workers in Transition*<sup>2</sup>, by the Canadian Labour Congress).

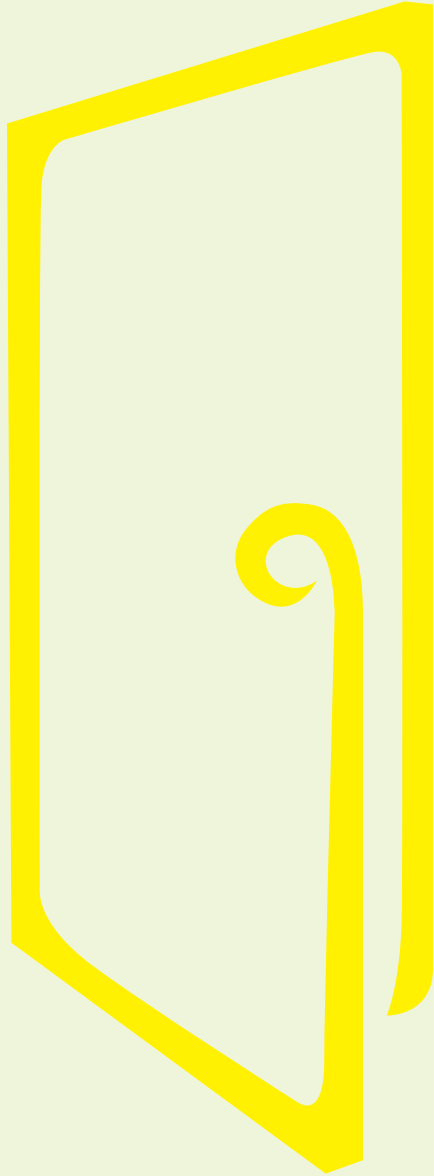
If you have a dress code or norms about appropriate standard of dress – for example, no jeans or shorts – these rules should apply equally to all employees, regardless of gender, gender identity or expression.

Employees should be offered a safe and private place to change if uniforms are required.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.canadianlabour.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/workers\\_in\\_transition\\_guide\\_-\\_en\\_-\\_web.pdf](http://www.canadianlabour.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/workers_in_transition_guide_-_en_-_web.pdf)

#### Action Ideas

- Review your hiring practices and employee manuals to be sure they address the needs of trans\* workers. Work with other organizations who have already addressed this issue if you need ideas. Be sure that you consider issues of confidentiality and non-discrimination.
- Ensure that when your organization is hiring, you publicize the position to the trans\* communities in your area. Post job listings on the trans\* message boards.
- Be sure that you have accurate information about trans\*-related health care provided under your insurance plan. Consider whether this is adequate to provide trans\* employees with the same level of care as your other employees. If it is not, develop a plan of corrective action.
- When doing employee evaluations and organizational planning, consider their effectiveness in reaching the trans\* community.
- Develop policies regarding hotel room sharing, if applicable, that meet the needs of trans\* employees.



*The Trans\* Toolkit: Practical Resources for Community-Based Organizations* was developed by Sue Scruton and Kim Thomas of the Canadian AIDS Society, and the Trans\* Community Advisory Committee:

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