Your Journey
A Career Guide for Trans and Nonbinary Students
developing Your Journey: A Career Guide for Trans and Nonbinary Students

This guide was written by cisgender University of Toronto staff from career centres at the Scarborough, Mississauga and St. George campuses, and the Sexual & Gender Diversity Office. The authors acknowledge that they do not share the same lived experiences as trans and nonbinary people. An important part of the writing process was to ensure ongoing consultation with trans and nonbinary communities. This included focus groups with trans and nonbinary students, alumni, staff, and faculty (one in 2018, two in 2019), as well as one-on-one correspondence and conversations. Our thanks to everyone who contributed to this document — they are named below.

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We welcome any and all questions, feedback, or thoughts on how this guide or other resources can be improved. To share your comments, please email sgdo@utoronto.ca.

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beginning your journey

Navigating a career can be a confusing process. There are many paths and opportunities to explore, and a variety of approaches you can use to work towards your goals.

With all these options, career planning can feel confusing and challenging, and trans and nonbinary people may have questions in addition to those we all wonder about: How do I know if an employer supports trans and nonbinary people? What are my options for sharing my gender identity when I'm looking for a job?

This guide aims to help trans and nonbinary students and recent alumni to figure out their career possibilities, connect to resources, effectively apply for jobs, and excel in their career. There are questions that this guide won’t be able to answer, but the hope is that it provides you with a solid starting point for taking the next steps in your career.

the guide is structured in three sections

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Reflect on your values and goals, and explore ways to get connected to organizations on campus and in the community.

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Understand how to best navigate your identity, disclosure, and the workplace.
get connected

Networking is about building relationships and gathering information that can help you make decisions about your career. Connections with others can help clarify the next steps in your career exploration and inform the decisions you make regarding jobs, further education, and what you want about where you work. Part of the networking process requires you to take some time for self-reflection. It’s important to understand how and when different aspects of your identity connect with your career aspirations and values, and what that might mean for the kinds of employment you might pursue.

connecting with yourself

The following questions can help you to clarify your values, interests and goals as they relate to what you want for your career and work. These might be challenging questions and for some trans and nonbinary people, the answers to certain questions are already determined (e.g. some people don’t have the choice of whether or not to come out). We encourage you to take some time to reflect, and chat with people close to you to figure out your responses.
connecting with yourself: worksheet

When considering your trans or nonbinary identity in a professional space: How important are the various aspects of your identity in relation to your career? Is your identity related to the work you want to do, in any way? Is your identity private or public or both? Is it important to you to be out at work?

Meaningful experiences from your past can help to guide your future. Think about an accomplishment that you are proud of or a time when you were really engaged in a task or event. What was it about the experience that you found rewarding or enjoyable?

What are some key factors when considering a job or organization? This can include salary, location, scheduling, employee health coverage for transitioning, etc.

What impact do you hope to have in your career? Think about what change you hope to achieve and how you want to utilize your skills and values to forge your own paths.

What are your career values and wants? This can include work/life balance, working with others or on your own, being part of a company that values diversity and inclusion, leadership and influence, financial gain, recognition, etc.

Which skills do you enjoy using in your academics, clubs, volunteer or paid work? Which skills do you hope to use in your career?

How do you want to balance your professional and personal identities and/or needs?

Reflecting on your responses to these questions can help you feel more confident, better connect with others, and identify your next steps.
connecting with others

Many groups, organizations, and individuals, both on and off campus, can help you navigate your career and explore your options. Meeting new people and joining new groups can be difficult — this can be especially true if you're unsure whether expressing your gender identity in front of others will be safe and welcomed. Whether it's a group that's in the LGBTQ+ community, or one that aligns with your interests and career aspirations, what's important is that you get involved and get connected.

friends, family, and familiares
It can be easier to start by connecting with people you're already familiar with through your social, school, and professional circles. These familiar contacts may or may not know the career goals you've clarified, so sharing these goals will help them better support you in your career journey. If you have a sense of the type of job or industry you would like to work in, start by identifying some people you already know that may be in that field or in roles similar to what you're looking to do. You can also specifically ask people you personally know — particularly trans and nonbinary people — about how well organizations they know treat trans staff and whether it will be a good fit for you. Keep in mind that you might receive mixed feedback across a variety of experiences; use your best judgement and rely on the perspectives of those you trust most.

support at school
At U of T, the Sexual & Gender Diversity Office (SGDO) provides a host of programs, events and services that can help you in a variety of ways. Programs and events hosted by the SGDO can help you get connected to others, such as Gender Talk — a monthly conversation café for trans and nonbinary students — and the "U of T LGBTQ2+ Alumni & Student Networking Night". The SGDO also supports students who have experienced discrimination or harassment while on campus and/or related to university activities.

The many LGBTQ+ student clubs and organizations across the universities three campuses, including college and professional faculty student organizations, can help you get connected to and network with other LGBTQ+ students, staff and faculty. Also, consider getting involved with student groups or clubs which align with your career aspirations to gain insight into the profession and meet people who share your career interests.
expand your circle
Trans and nonbinary people infrequently see themselves reflected in the workforce and are often presented with visual images and environments that align with binary gender norms. Your trans and/or nonbinary identity is one of many intersectional identities that you hold — such as race, age, (dis)ability, and more — which can also impact feelings of representation and belonging. Connecting with professionals, employers and U of T alumni — particularly those who identify as trans and nonbinary — is a great way to envision yourself doing what you want to do. Reaching out to your personal and community contacts, and connecting with student groups, campus and career resources, can feel intimidating and can take time, but is a necessary part of the job search process.

Don’t forget, you have access to tri-campus career centre programs, services, and resources for up to 2 years after you graduate.

Practicing these skills in familiar environments and using campus supports designed for students and recent alumni can be less intimidating. You can use platforms such as LinkedIn or other industry specific platforms as another entry point for making connections. Another option is to reach out to professional associations and organizations geared towards supporting LGBTQ+ employees and aspiring professionals. However you get connected, it’s important to find people who you can talk to and learn from – it is often through personal and professional connections that people find out about jobs and better prepare their applications.

As trans and gender nonconforming folks, we have additional worries about being accepted, supported, and not tokenized in workplaces. But being part of the LGBTQ2S community also grants you access to LGBTQ2S organizations in Toronto trying to connect queer job seekers and professionals with a professional network and job opportunities, so make use of those! I was surprised at how friendly and willing people were to meet for a coffee and give job-seeking or career advice — people like to share their stories and be of help because they’ve been there too.

“– Elliot, Faculty of Law, Class of 2017
a way to connect: informational interviews

Once you’ve identified a professional who you want to connect with to learn more about their career or a particular job, you can request an informational interview. This is an opportunity to talk to professionals about their career journey and learn from their experiences. This can be a formal invitation or a casual conversation.

Remember, this is also an opportunity for you to share your interests, skills, and experiences and answers to questions (such as some of the questions in the worksheet at the beginning of this section). You’re not required to share anything about yourself that you don’t want to. However, if you feel comfortable, informational interviews can be a good opportunity to discuss your gender identity and expression in relation to application documents, navigating disclosure and workplace culture.

informational interviews: start to finish

1 **Reach out.** When requesting an informational interview, it’s helpful to explain why you’re reaching out and to highlight any common interests or experiences.

2 **Book a meeting.** Professionals often have busy schedules, so be mindful and accommodating of their time. People often meet in public spaces (such as coffee shops), in meeting rooms and offices, and also via video conferencing. You should meet where you feel most comfortable and safe.

3 **Prepare some questions.** Before meeting, do some research and prepare questions, such as:
   - What do you enjoy the most about your current role?
   - What is the most challenging aspect of the role?
   - What is your advice for someone hoping to enter this field?
   - Are there specific resources/groups/contacts that might be useful as I continue my job search?

4 **Follow up.** After your meeting, send a follow-up message to thank the person for their time and insights. You can use this follow-up email to remind them of any commitments they made (e.g. referrals to other contacts, resources, etc.). If they gave you a piece of advice, let them know if and how it was helpful.

If you’re not sure where to start or feel uncertain about how to step into networking and informational interviews, reach out to your campus career centre for help. They can help you map out an action plan, share approaches for finding connections, and support you with preparing for networking conversations.
identifying companies where you may want to work

One of the benefits of getting connected and meeting people who work in places and industries you're interested in is learning more about the work and career options that best align with your skills, interests and values.

A good place to start is connecting with organizations that are keen to hire, celebrate and acknowledge the value of LGBTQ+ inclusion in their workplace (if that is important to you). This can help you decide whether to apply to an organization or it may help you to navigate the application process as you examine various options in your field of interest. When evaluating an employer, there are several things to consider.

what to look for in an employer

- Does the organization have a clear mission, vision, or policy statement that includes diversity and inclusion on its website?

- Does the organization have inclusive practices around gender identity and gender expression?

- Are there employee resource groups (ERGs) or employee affinity groups (e.g. Queer U of T Employees (QUTE))?

- Does the organization note on their job descriptions that applications from underrepresented groups are highly encouraged?
  - Do they specifically identify trans people as one of these underrepresented groups?
  - Does the organization offer multiple gender options on their job application?

- Has the organization celebrated or participated in recognized events like Pride or highlighted LGBTQ+ visibility in other ways?

- How has the organization presented themselves in the media with regards to LGBTQ+ issues?

- Are trans or nonbinary employees already a part of the organization and how have they described their experiences?

- Does the organization (or the employee union) provide benefits that support a diversity of employees? (family leave, paid sick leave, transition support)

National and international rankings of employers can be a good starting place to identify companies that are striving to be more inclusive. While these rankings can be helpful and may contribute to your assessment of the organization, these lists don't replace the research you do on your own.

Some rankings of employers for diversity include Canada’s Top 100 Diversity Employers and Canada’s Best Diversity Employers
apply well

Applying for work is a complex process that requires making decisions about how to portray yourself, your experiences and your interest in a job or career opportunity. Campus career services can help you develop and refine your application materials, as well as support your interview preparation and practice. This section considers various aspects of the application process for people who identify as trans or nonbinary.

start with yourself

When it comes to reflecting gender identity or gender expression on your application, it’s up to you how you want to represent yourself. Think about what matters to you and your own comfort in this process. When considering and preparing your application, don’t sell yourself short. You have important skills and experiences gained through your academic courses as well as co-curricular, volunteer, and life experiences that will add value to any organization lucky enough to hire you!

The application process can be frustrating and complex, so be sure to take care of yourself and be prepared to rely on your support systems. Create a plan for finding and applying to work and remember to balance your time and energy. Apply strategically and pace yourself rather than applying to every single job posting you find. And remember, you don’t have to do this alone. Your campus career centre and professionals you’ve connected with can provide perspective and support on how to communicate your experiences authentically and effectively. Most importantly, do what’s right for you.
social media — what does the world see?

Your presence online and on social media is an important part of your public-facing persona. You can be intentional about your use of social media to build your online presence and leverage connections and engagements to find opportunities. Employers sometimes look at professional social media platforms like LinkedIn and personal social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others to find out more about their applicants.

Review your publicly accessible accounts to ensure they reflect the professional and personal information you’d want to share publicly. If you have any concerns about an employer seeking information about you through social media and other online platforms, you can consider changing your name on your accounts to make it harder to find.

Photos are not typically included on applications in North America for roles outside the entertainment and arts industries, but social media makes it relatively easy for employers to find pictures of applicants. Social media relies heavily on images, and LinkedIn reports that profiles with photos are viewed much more frequently than those without. If you don’t want a photo of yourself on your LinkedIn, consider an alternative (e.g. a photo of a project you worked on or a logo of your business or organization).

applying for jobs

Here are a few things to consider as you develop your application materials, prepare for interviews and think about references.

developing your resume and other documents

Resumes and cover letters give you the opportunity to showcase skills you’ve gained across different experiences and share your accomplishments. Effective applications are tailored to respond to the requirements of a job description. When it comes to your personal identity and experiences, you can decide what information you want to share and how.
**let’s start with your name**

Resumes and cover letters are not legal documents. You can use your legal name, or another name or both (e.g. James “Jasmine” Jefferson, or Jasmine (James) Jefferson). You might want to consider:

- Where you’re applying — what is the organization’s culture? How might this inform the decision(s) you make about what name(s) you use when you apply?

- How would you want to present yourself if you were given an interview or if you were hired? This might change over time and should reflect whatever best serves your current interests and concerns.

It’s up to you how you present yourself at each stage of the job search process, such as application documents, interviews, and when you’re on the job. Whatever you choose should reflect your comfort and goals. If you’re navigating multiple names in your application documents, be mindful that the employer may require additional documentation to verify your candidacy and identity. This might include requesting legal documentation, letters of reference or a review of your social media presence.

Transcripts and other forms of documentation that include your name may be required for some job applications. These may include background or criminal record checks, work permits or letters of reference. Students can visit their Registrar to change their name and/or gender at the University of Toronto (a legal name change is not needed).

If you plan to have more than one name on your application, you may want to pre-emptively reach out to the human resources contact (who is required to maintain confidentiality). Here’s a template you can consider:

“Dear ________,

Attached is my unofficial transcript and background check. While the name on these documents refers to my legal name, I use [name] and would like my professional documents and application to reflect this.

Please let me know if you require any additional documentation. Thank you very much for your consideration and I hope to hear back from you soon.

All the best,

[name]”
**moving on to your experiences and skills**

Everybody makes decisions about what experiences to include on resumes. One consideration is how an experience might “out” you. Co-curricular or volunteer experiences with LGBTQ2+ groups offer amazing opportunities to develop great skills in leadership, communication, collaboration and other areas highly valued by employers. These same experiences may also reveal aspects of your identity you may or may not wish to disclose to a potential employer.

You have several options when creating your resume. You can be specific and include all roles and experiences relevant to demonstrating the skills the employer is seeking. If you’re worried that your LGBTQ2+ related experiences might reveal your gender identity or expression to the organization to which you’re applying, consider a few options:

1. **Keep it as is.**
   Your involvement with LGBTQ2+ organizations may have helped you develop important skills and gain valuable experiences that are relevant to your application. Additionally, your identity might work to your advantage in cases where larger organizations have employment equity initiatives that position you as an even more desirable candidate. If this is the case, your work within LGBTQ2+ organizations may be seen as an asset.

2. **Use a more general title.**
   If you’re using a different title, be prepared to explain the name. One way to do this is to use a name of a department or division that broadly encompasses your office or unit (e.g. “U of T HR & Equity Office” instead of “Sexual & Gender Diversity Office”). Another way is to refer to the kind of work without naming the specific group (e.g. “A political party candidate’s campaign” instead of naming the particular political party).

3. **Abbreviate the name of the organization.**
   This strategy could be a temporary fix to get you past the resume stage and into the interview. For example, the Centre for Women and Trans People can be changed to CWTP. However, be prepared to expand on what the abbreviation stands for in the interview.

4. **Group skills and achievements from various organizations.**
   This can help shift focus from the organization to skills and achievements, while also showing a diversity of experience. For example:
   
   *Events Volunteer Experience (City of Toronto, The 519, New Pride)*
   - managed logistics for fundraising drive, which raised over $1500 for charitable purposes
   - completed 15 hours of cultural sensitivity training to better serve general membership and create a more inclusive environment

5. **Remove specific LGBTQ2+ experiences from your resume.**
   If you have plenty of other experiences outside of LGBTQ2+ organizations, you could remove some from your resume. If not, removal might create a gap you may need to account for, or could decrease the strength of your application. Nevertheless, you can decide if this is a strategy for you. Be sure that the information on your resume and cover letter is focused on your strengths, transferable skills and is targeted to the role, while showcasing your ability to add value to the company.
preparing for interviews

Interviewing can be a stressful process, but is also a rewarding opportunity to share your accomplishments and experiences. Take some time before your interview to reflect on your experiences and choose examples that demonstrate skills most relevant to the job description. Take some time before your interview to reflect on your experiences and choose examples that demonstrate skills most relevant to the job description; this will help you best illustrate why you should get the job. You may also want to think about what you're comfortable sharing in an interview. For example, consider in advance whether sharing a particular experience might out you if you aren't out already. By preparing before the interview, you will feel better equipped to draw on the experiences that help you feel more confident as a candidate.

pre- and post-interview tips

- Research the company, hiring managers, and industry to gain a better understanding of who they are and what they care about.
- Brainstorm potential interview questions by going through the job description and highlighting the main skills required and how you've performed those skills.
- Don’t forget to practice! Practicing can help you feel confident with sharing how you choose to present yourself and your accomplishments in a tailored way.
- Follow up after the interview and thank them for the opportunity. Try referring to something you spoke about in the interview that resonated.

pronouns – to share or not to share?

You may want to share your pronouns when applying, following up to accept an interview offer, or when introducing yourself at the beginning of the interview. If the interviewers share their pronouns either in their email signature or in person, it’s a good indicator of the kind of training and awareness they have around gender diversity.

when to disclose

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<td>benefits</td>
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<td>Put yourself forward and weed out employers that don't have the environment you're looking for.</td>
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<tr>
<td>drawbacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>You may worry that a decision about whether to interview you was based on identity rather than qualifications.</td>
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things to consider

Discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression is against the law. However, transphobia (and discrimination on other protected grounds) can happen if you provide this information at the application stage. If you’re unsure whether or not to include this information at the application stage, you can speak to a human resources representative or another employee at the company if you know one, to see how this information would be handled.

Tip: If you want to disclose at this stage, you can consider including your pronouns next to your name on your resume, or in your signature at the end of a cover letter.
Disclosing in person can help you control tone, which may allow you to casually raise what's important in a moment that feels most appropriate. You're able to then present yourself how you want, and the responses of the interview committee members may give you an authentic reading of the organization.

To help interviewers accurately refer to you in their decision-making process, you could choose to share your pronouns at the end of the interview once they've learned about your skills and experiences.

Once offered, it is unlikely that an interview offer will be withdrawn (if it is, this may be grounds for a human rights complaint).

Tip: Speak to or email someone at the company (e.g. human resources) about any needs associated with your application. You can share your gender pronouns and inquire about all-gender or single-user washrooms and other needs you may have during your interview.

Interviews go two ways. As they're assessing you, you're assessing them too. Even if you get an offer, do you want this job?

Tip: Consider your personal reaction when being misgendered, and the impact it might have during an interview. It's helpful to prepare how you will respond (or not) if you are misgendered.
what employers can, and can't ask
Employers are not allowed to make hiring decisions based on gender identity or gender expression (except in very limited circumstances where one of those things relates to the core duties of the job). So employers shouldn’t ask questions about your gender – either directly or indirectly – during or outside of the interview context (such as casual conversation before or after the interview).

If they ask these questions, you’re not obligated to answer. This might feel challenging in an interview setting, so if an employer asks you an inappropriate question, you have a few options.

1. Answer if you feel comfortable.
2. Deflect or address the concern you think the question is about. If, for example, someone asks you about a previous name that you used, you could respond with something like, “That is my legal name and this is the name I use.”
3. Ask the interviewer to explain how it’s relevant to the role to make them realize it’s not an appropriate question. For example, you could say, “I’m not sure I understand how this would be relevant for this position. Can you explain?”
4. Refuse to answer the question.

you’re interviewing them, too
Keep in mind that an interview serves two purposes. Not only are interviewers assessing whether they want to hire you, you are also assessing whether you want to work for them. An interview is a great opportunity to determine the company’s diversity and inclusion policies, practices and culture in the workplace. Consider asking:

- What does diversity and inclusion look like in practice here?
- I was excited to read the statement on diversity and inclusion/non-discrimination policy on your website. Can you tell me a little bit more about how your organization or department supports diversity and inclusion? What does this policy look like day-to-day?
- What opportunities or initiatives are there to contribute to an inclusive workplace?

Remember, if you were invited for an interview, they’re already impressed with your qualifications!
asking for references

References are usually required when being considered for any position. Consider the type of reference needed and who might be the best person to talk about your skills, strengths, and how great you are. If you use a name and/or pronoun(s) that differ from those used in previous employment and volunteer positions, there are a few ways to navigate this when requesting a reference.

If you feel that you have a good relationship with your referee, and are confident they can effectively speak to your strengths and skills, then consider having a conversation with them about your current name and pronouns. You can also get a reference from people other than a manager. For example, was there someone else more senior than you on the team who might be able to speak to your skills and strengths? Alternatively, sometimes organizations want a character reference, for example, a colleague, professor, or someone that you volunteered with.

If, based on your research, you believe the future employer will be supportive, you might consider letting them know you formerly went by a different name and pronoun at your last job, meaning past supervisors may refer to you by your previous name.

If none of these options work for you, there may be other or new experiences you can draw on for a reference. This could include asking professors who know your work and skills, or finding new opportunities such as Work Study jobs or volunteer positions. This might feel a little daunting, so speak with your friends, supports, or a career advisor to help you decide the most comfortable option.

“It can be nerve-wracking to be yourself in interviews and cover letters but I promise you that people almost always prefer you being yourself over who you think they want to meet. It also helps to be yourself because it means you’ll end up in a work environment that is safe and supportive of who you are.”

– Ayesha, Philosophy and English, Class of 2018
on the job

You’ve landed the job! This is definitely a moment to celebrate your achievements and prepare for a new chapter in your career journey. While there are questions we all have when starting a job — what is my team like? Will I enjoy the work? — you might have additional questions about navigating your gender identity and expression in a new workplace. In this section, we review Ontario laws that protect trans and nonbinary employees from discrimination and harassment. We also outline some common situations and a few ways to address any potential breaches of your workplace rights.

what the law says about employment

Legal forms of protection on the basis of gender identity and gender expression have progressed in recent years. Many employers have taken steps to develop policies and implement additional measures to create inclusive workplaces. Still, trans and nonbinary employees may find themselves in workplaces that do not always reflect legal forms of protection.

It’s important to be familiar with the laws that protect your employment rights so you can make informed decisions about your workplace experience. Knowing these rights can help you speak more confidently when addressing concerns with colleagues and managers. The terms of your employment contract and relevant policies at your organization may further clarify your rights. These documents can provide resources and outline processes your employer will take to resolve challenging situations.
understanding the Code and the Policy

The following briefly defines harassment, discrimination and the duty to accommodate.

**Discrimination**

Discrimination against trans or nonbinary people could include the denial of employment or services, withholding benefits that are available to others, or having extra burdens imposed on them and not others, for reasons that are at least in part related to them being trans or nonbinary.

**Harassment**

The Code defines harassment as “engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.” In deciding what is “reasonable”, the perspectives of trans and nonbinary people are included. The Policy outlines many forms of gender-based harassment and sexual harassment, including derogatory language, insults, comments related to a person’s gender identity and expression, and the refusal to refer to someone by their self-identified name and pronoun.

Discrimination and harassment are not always overt or obvious. Individual acts themselves may be ambiguous and explained away, but when viewed as part of a larger picture, these acts may reveal a pattern of conduct that amounts to discrimination or harassment based on gender identity or expression.

**Duty to Accommodate**

Trans and nonbinary people have the legal right to request reasonable accommodation in the workplace, and employers have a legal duty to accommodate the needs of people because of their gender identity and gender expression, unless it would cause the employer undue hardship (which could include cost or compromising health and safety). Accommodation is a multi-party process with shared responsibilities between the employer and the individual seeking accommodation. Ultimately, the duty to accommodate seeks to achieve respect for dignity, individualization, integration and full participation in the workplace.
Under the Code, people in Ontario are protected from direct and indirect forms of discrimination and harassment on the basis of 18 different grounds — including gender identity and gender expression — in the following areas:

- Employment
- Contracts
- Goods, services and facilities
- Membership in a trade union, trade or occupational association, self-governing profession
- Accommodation (housing)

The Code places the responsibility on employers to build gender-inclusive work environments. As a result, employers have developed policies and practices for creating trans-inclusive workplaces in Canada. The following is a list of some practices you might expect from a trans-inclusive organization.

**A trans-inclusive organization will:**

- Support your health and safety at work and foster an inclusive culture that promotes the well-being of all employees.
- Create an environment that supports respectful communication and strives to be free of harassment and discrimination.
- Address matters of harassment and discrimination quickly and effectively with a clear complaint resolution process.
- Facilitate training and raise awareness of gender diversity and inclusion.
- Support the everyday use of your name and gender identity, regardless of your legal documents.
- Update and/or maintain communication records (such as organizational charts, email addresses) that align with your correct name and gender identity. (Remember, legal name and gender information will be kept confidential in personnel records).
- Place you at the centre of determining your accommodation request and/or transition plan with your manager (if you are transitioning in the workplace), as well as deciding how and when this information is shared.
- Ensure you have appropriate access to washrooms, changerooms, or other facilities.
what to do if you experience harassment or discrimination in the workplace

We all want our work experiences to be positive and supportive. Our hope is that you'll work at an organization that is committed to inclusivity and creates a welcoming environment, with a manager or supervisor who is understanding of your identity and needs on the job. At times, however, this might not be the case. You may encounter difficult relationships with certain colleagues or even with your supervisor, or experience other negative treatment in the workplace. In these instances, here are a few steps you can consider:

1 **Documentation:** Keep detailed notes of harassing or discriminatory experiences, including times and dates of your experiences, what happened, and who was involved, including who was a witness. Save any documents such as emails that demonstrate what happened. Documentation is helpful if you want to make a complaint about your concerns.

2 **Organizational policies:** Check your employer’s policies to see if any of them cover your situation and provide a route to address it. For example, if you think a decision has been made based on the fact that you're trans or nonbinary, their policy may provide a way to appeal the decision. If you have been harassed, the policy may also outline how to file a complaint.

3 **Report up:** To the extent possible, discuss any concerns you have with your supervisor.

4 **Explore organizational resources:** If discussion with your supervisor isn't an option, or if it doesn’t fix the situation, there may be different resources you can contact in the organization (e.g. human resources, human rights or equity offices).

5 **Contact your union:** If you're a member of a trade union or employee association you can contact them to discuss your options.

6 **Request an investigation:** If there's a complaint or investigation process available through your employer, you may wish to use it. As investigations can take some time, ask HR about supports available during the investigation, and/or use your support systems outside your employer.

7 **Explore alternative solutions:** There might be other processes available at your place of employment such as mediation, facilitation, workforce restoration, to help you and your colleagues address issues and develop a more positive work environment.

8 **External resources:** If you aren’t able to find resources within your organization, you may find other resources on the Human Rights Commission website and can contact the Commission.
your rights in the workplace

To help you understand how the previous steps apply to your rights and responsibilities in the workplace, we’ve outlined a few key protections that might be relevant, and provided suggestions for navigating challenging situations.

You cannot be denied opportunities or advancement due to your gender identity or gender expression.

in the workplace: The fact that you’re trans or nonbinary can’t play a part in a decision not to give you a promotion or any other opportunity or benefit. If a decision in the workplace takes your gender identity or expression into account this may be discriminatory, unless gender identity or gender expression is related to a core requirement of the job. If a decision in the workplace takes your gender identity or expression into account this may be discriminatory, unless gender identity or gender expression is related to a core requirement of the job. Legal protections have improved conditions for trans and nonbinary applicants and employees, yet many continue to experience disproportionate levels of discrimination in the workforce.

what you can do: If you find yourself in this situation, check your employment contract and your employer’s policies to see if they describe how to appeal the decision or file a complaint. Seek assistance from your supervisor if possible, and if not consult with your employer’s human resources or equity office. If you are represented by a union, you may be able to file a grievance.

You have the right to reasonable accommodations in the workplace that allow you to perform your job while respecting your gender identity and gender expression.

in the workplace: Employers may not (initially) perceive gender identity or expression as grounds for accommodation, as these protections are relatively new, and traditionally the duty to accommodate has been applied to other grounds (e.g. disability, family status). An example of reasonable accommodation might include wearing a uniform that aligns with your gender identity and gender expression.

what you can do: Inform your employer or interviewer of any request related to gender identity or gender expression and work with that employer to arrive at a reasonable accommodation.
You have the right to socially and/or medically transition at any point during your employment without threat of termination.

**in the workplace:** When you transition is up to you. The reality is that wait times for medical supports (if they are sought) can be lengthy and can determine certain aspects of this timeline. During your transition, you continue to have the right to be free from discrimination and harassment, and the duty to accommodate applies to aspects of your transition process that impact your work.

**what you can do:** There are many personal and practical factors you may want to consider as you plan your transition process. Some include:

- Are you in a probationary period?
- If you have them, have your benefits taken effect? Do you have access to medical leave if you need it?
- Are there workload issues, ongoing projects and partnerships that might inform when you request an accommodation?
- Is there an employee assistance program, equity, diversity and/or inclusion support office or human resources representative in your organization that might be able to help support you? Advance notice can help the people you work with plan some elements of your transition at work (e.g. changing your name or pronouns), so consider communicating your request early if possible.

Questions about your rights? Seeking legal advice? Find resources in the appendix.

You have the right to answer to, and be referred to, by your correct name and gender pronouns.

**in the workplace:** Misgendering and misnaming can be common, but your employer should take your complaints about being misgendered by coworkers seriously.

**what you can do:** Where and when it’s possible, you can start by addressing the person directly to correct the mistake. Individual egregious incidents as well as ongoing issues can and should be reported to a manager or supervisor, as misgendering may be a form of discrimination or harassment.
connecting with colleagues

Social relationships at work are an important part of your success on the job and can inform your engagement at work, career advancement, and wellbeing. It’s important to make an effort to build relationships and network with your colleagues. These questions can help you consider how to build these relationships:

- What do you need to feel comfortable at work?
- What would you want your colleagues to know about your gender identity?
- How have you built relationships in the past? What might be an effective relationship-building strategy in the workplace?
- How can your colleagues help you when you start thinking about the next step in your career?

Find your allies in the workplace and build a circle of support to help reduce isolation and stress. One way to do this is finding colleagues you trust. Get started by joining a social group or eating lunch with colleagues. Alternatively, seek out vocal allies and diversity champions or consider joining an LGBTQ2+ group at your work if there is one.

sharing your identity

Choosing what to share about your gender identity at work can sometimes feel personal and confusing. Many people have legitimate concerns about revealing aspects of their identity, particularly if this could impact their job and career opportunities (e.g. name, age, disability, cultural attire). Decisions about whether or not to disclose your gender identity, gender expression or to transition in the workplace are also personal decisions that can have benefits or drawbacks for your experience in the workplace. Depending on who you are, how you identify, and how you express your gender, disclosure may or may not be a factor for you.

Because of my gender presentation and transition, people do often get confused about my pronouns both at school and work... I’ve had to really learn to love myself and validate my own gender with little reflections everyday, regardless of whether or not people understand who I am right away. The biggest thing is being true to who you are, because people you encounter throughout your career will see that and respect that more than anything else.

– Adrián, History and Equity Studies, Class of 2019
Unfortunately, not all forms of disclosure are based on personal choice. Outing, or threatening to out someone as trans, is a form of gender-based harassment.
dressing for work

Workplaces vary in the degree to which employees are expected to comply with particular norms concerning dress and uniform. Employers are not legally allowed to have transgender-exclusive dress codes, but it is customary for employers to establish reasonable employee dress codes and grooming guidelines for work-related activities.

This may be to:

- Maintain a certain image with customers and competitors
- Ensure safety (e.g. closed-toe shoes, goggles or gloves)
- Increase visibility and ensure employees are recognizable

While your career goals and ambitions shouldn’t be determined by whether or not you can comfortably express your gender in any given job or industry, it’s important to consider expectations and possible restrictions on dress when you’re exploring and/or applying for a job.

Additionally, if you are binding, packing, or tucking, consider the length of your workday or shift and how that aligns with your personal needs. While some industries and professions have adopted seemingly all-gender uniforms (nursing, law enforcement, some restaurant and service industries) others have not, and there are variances even within some industries. For example, many larger organizations are moving away from formal dress codes and instead adopting “dress for your day” policies.

look into their policies

It may be wise to inquire about an employer’s or sector’s policy concerning dress and attire. For example, Public Services and Procurement Canada has the right to regulate employee appearance in the workplace for reasonable business purposes. In this instance, a trans employee can dress consistently with their gender identity and is required to comply with the same standards of dress and appearance that apply to all other people in the workplace. Consider what you need or want to wear that can help you feel both professional and true to yourself in the workplace. There may also be flexibility in the expectations for workplace attire — perhaps the workplace has an informal “casual Fridays,” or the environment is casual unless you are meeting with external clients or hosting workplace events. Understanding the culture of the workplace or organization will help you decide what to wear.
moving forward

Whether you’re thinking about your future career, looking for work, or are currently employed, this guide addresses issues that frequently concern trans and nonbinary people as they consider their options, apply for work, and navigate the workplace.

One of the main purposes of this career guide is to stimulate your own reflection on what’s important to you and help you to clarify what you want. For many career-related questions, there isn’t always just one answer or approach. We hope this guide helps you find the answers that work for you.

We encourage trans and nonbinary students and recent grads to access career services on U of T’s three campuses and engage in networking to help identify next steps. We also want to remind you that there are legal protections for trans and nonbinary people in Ontario, and this guide offers tips and strategies for dealing with discrimination and transphobia that may still persist in some workplaces.

We hope you feel more optimistic about the career exploration and job search process — it can be challenging, but you are not alone. We are here to support you. Reach out to your friends, your community, and your campus resources for help. Having read this guide, you’ve already taken an important step in your career journey. You have many valuable skills and experiences that could benefit a variety of workplaces, and we hope this guide helps you achieve success.

guide citation

appendix

references


services

on-campus

Downtown Legal Services
Website: http://downtownlegalservices.ca
Phone: 416-978-6447

Career Exploration & Education
Website: http://www.careers.utoronto.ca
Phone: 416-978-8000

Sexual & Gender Diversity Office
Website: https://sgdo.utoronto.ca
Phone: 416-946-5624

external

The 519
Website: https://www.the519.org
Phone: 416-392-6874

Ontario Human Rights Commission
Website: http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en
Phone: 416-326-9511

Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario
Website: http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/hrto
Phone: 416-326-1312

resources

Career and Co-Curricular Learning Network (CLNx)
https://clnx.utoronto.ca/

Resume and Cover Letter Toolkit
https://uoft.me/resumetoolkit

Ontario Human Rights Code
https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19

Ontario Human Rights Commission