

# INCLUSIVE PAPERWORK GUIDANCE

# Introduction

This guide will provide some first steps to developing intake forms (and other paperwork) that are inclusive of LGBTQ youth! If you are reading this, you are already interested in making your paperwork affirming, but may not yet know how to do that. It's important to remember that the world of LGBTQ language is constantly evolving and that your forms should be revisited periodically to ensure that they best meet the needs of the young people you serve.

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## Leave questions open-ended.

Preliminary research shows that the most affirming way to ask LGBTQ youth about their identities is to make your questions as open-ended as possible. Given the number of identity labels out there, it is highly unlikely that a multiple-choice question could cover all of the options. Letting youth write in their own answers, instead of choosing from a menu of options, gives them the chance to tell you exactly how they identify.

### **But how will this translate into my automated system?**

This is a common question, and one that it is important to clearly answer for your staff.. Frequently, the answer will be to use the designated "Other" option in your system. For example, if a young person is asked their sexual orientation/identity and writes in "Queer," but your system only has the options of "Gay," "Straight," "Bisexual," and "Other," you should select "Other" for them.

### **But if I'm just going to select 'other' then why am I even asking this?**

Research shows that the ability to self identify can promote resilience in LGBTQ young people. It's also important to track this information for advocacy purposes because your organization will have more specific data about the LGBTQ youth in your programs and organizations.

### **Which parts of my form should I make open-ended?**

We recommend that any questions that *can* be open-ended, particularly questions about identity, *should* be open-ended. Some examples include but aren't limited to:

- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation/identity
- Pronouns
- Race

### Can you give me an example?

Sure! Perhaps your form currently reads as follows:

Gender identity (the sense of gender that every person feels inside):

- Cisgender Woman
- Cisgender Man
- Transgender Woman
- Transgender Man
- Another identity

Try the following instead:

Gender identity (the sense of gender that every person feels inside): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you identify as transgender (as someone who identifies with a different gender than the one assigned to you at birth)?: \_\_\_\_\_

What gender pronouns do you use?: \_\_\_\_\_

Tell me what words you use to describe your race \_\_\_\_\_

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## Explain why you need sensitive information.

There is some information that LGBTQ youth may not feel particularly comfortable providing, but that you are required to collect by a funding source or by insurance companies. For example, insurance companies may require a young person's legal name, whereas for the purposes of programming you only need the name they would like to be called. If this is the case, the best thing to do is to be transparent with youth about why you are collecting this information. Also be sure to display the names and pronouns young people want to be referred to as prominently on all paperwork so there is no confusion.

### How should I prepare my staff to talk to LGBTQ youth about these parts of my organization's paperwork?

It is important that staff understand that certain pieces of information may be seen by LGBTQ youth as sensitive information. Staff should be prepared to explain that this information is being collected for legal/insurance purposes only, and that youth are encouraged to also provide their pronouns, name used, and other relevant information. Consider preparing staff with answers to these questions, or even creating a form explaining why your organization collects the information it does.

### **What is an example of a statement that might accompany this kind of information request?**

For example, you may be required to collect young people’s legal names for insurance purposes. Language around this could be:

Legal Name\*: \_\_\_\_\_

Name You Use: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Although we will only ever refer to you using the name you use, we are required for insurance purposes to collect your legal name.

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## Recognize the nuances of sex and gender.

Sex and gender are significantly more complex than most intake forms take into account. To recognize all the options, we recommend including the following categories as *necessary*: Gender identity, Transgender status, Sex assigned at birth, Legal sex, and Diagnosed intersex condition.

### **What is gender identity?**

Gender identity is the sense of gender that every person feels inside. There are many different gender identities—make sure you ask youth for their gender identity as an open-ended question.

### **What is transgender status?**

It is important to ask about transgender status independently of gender identity because not everyone will include it in their description of their gender identity. For example, a woman of transgender experience may write “Woman” under gender identity, but may also select “Yes” in answer to the question, “Do you identify as transgender?”

### **What is sex assigned at birth?**

This is the sex that a doctor designated a person at birth. It may or may not correspond with a person’s legal sex or a person’s gender identity and/or gender expression.

### **What is legal sex?**

This is the sex that is listed on a person’s legal documents. It is possible that someone’s legal sex could be different from their sex assigned at birth or their gender identity and/or gender expression.

### **What is a diagnosed intersex condition?**

An intersex condition diagnosis means that someone’s reproductive or sexual anatomy does not conform to our definitions of “male” and “female.”

### **Should I always ask all of these questions?**

Not necessarily. We encourage you to ask as few questions as possible that might be seen as invasive by LGBTQ youth. For example, you may not need to report a youth's sex assigned at birth, in which case you can omit it from the form. However, if you ask any questions about a young person's sex, you should also ask youth their gender identity and if they have been diagnosed with an intersex condition; doing so gives gender- and sex-diverse youth a chance to answer these questions without feeling they will be misunderstood.

### **How can I incorporate these questions into my intake form?**

Try something like the following:

Gender identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you identify as transgender?: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex assigned at birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Legal sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been diagnosed with an intersex condition?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

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## Collect the information you need to be respectful.

Many LGBTQ young people use names and pronouns different from those assigned to them at birth. Make sure you are collecting this information as part of your intake process.

### **Can't I just ask the young people whose pronouns I'm not sure about?**

Selectively asking about pronouns doesn't work for a few reasons. First, asking one person their pronouns when you have not asked this question of others singles them out as different. This can be an othering experience for a young person. Also, for many different reasons, not everyone who identifies as trans or gender expansive *looks* like they do. Finally, it is good to normalize asking people about their pronouns; this will go a long way toward shifting the culture of your organization towards inclusivity.

### **What should I do with the information I collect?**

Something to be mindful of is that LGBTQ youth may not want to have discussions about things like their sexual orientations/identities or gender identities. Just because you collect this

information on an intake form does not mean it is appropriate to ask youth about it. Including the questions on your form and taking the other steps outlined in the True Inclusion Toolbox will show LGBTQ youth that your organization is inclusive of them, but let them approach you about talking about their identities if they want to. That said, make sure you are using the correct name and pronouns for each young person at all times.

**Should I ask youth where they would like to be housed?**

If your organization has separate facilities for men and women, and you can, make sure to ask youth which facilities they would feel most comfortable using as a part of your intake process. If you are required to separate participants by legal sex, let youth know that this is the case so they can decide if your services meet their needs.

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## Remember that names and pronouns are subject to change.

Many LGBTQ young people try out different names and pronouns over time, or feel comfortable with different ones at different times. It's important to accommodate these shifts.

**What should I do about paperwork?**

Make it clear on your paperwork that you understand that information is subject to change. Let young people know that they are welcome to change their name used and pronouns at any time, and whom they can speak to to do so.

**How can I show young people that they are welcome to try out different names and pronouns?**

One good system for letting youth try things out is daily nametags. Instead of creating permanent name tags for youth, try asking them to fill them out each day with their name and pronouns. Explain the reasoning: you are trying to make it easy for those who want to switch what name and/or pronouns they use, whenever they want to.

## Provide options for keeping personal information private.

Many LGBTQ youth are not out to their parents, guardians, relatives, coworkers, or friends. It is important not to out them to these people. For example, if the word “gay” is in the title of your organization, you should not leave a message on their home phone with your organization’s name in it without their permission. Or, if they use a different name or pronouns than the one on their birth certificate, you should make sure you know which name to use when calling them at work.

### Can you give me an example?

Try something like the following:

Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_

What name and pronouns should we use when calling this number? \_\_\_\_\_

Is it ok to leave a message/voicemail at this number? Circle YES or NO

Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_

What name and pronouns should we use when calling this number? \_\_\_\_\_

Is it ok to leave a message/voicemail at this number? Circle YES or NO

Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

What name and pronouns should we use when calling this number? \_\_\_\_\_

Is it ok to leave a message/voicemail at this number? Circle YES or NO

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## Model respect.

A great way to show LGBTQ youth that your organization will be respectful of them is to model the respectful use of names and pronouns.

### How can my staff model respect?

Have staff wear name tags with pronouns. When staff introduce themselves to young people, ask them to say their names and pronouns. For example: “Hi, my name is Aaron! I use the pronouns he, him, his and they, them, theirs.”