

**WE BELIEVE NATURE  
SHOULD BE A PLACE  
WHERE EVERYONE FEELS  
THEY BELONG**

***A TOOLKIT ON BUILDING BELONGING IN OUTDOOR PROGRAMS FOR  
THE LGBTQIA2S+ COMMUNITY***



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# ABOUT US

By creating a space where queer individuals can belong to nature and to each other, we contribute to so much more than the sense of belonging; we are improving mental health, lowering suicide risk, building community and fostering resiliency among our most vulnerable populations.

## **Core Offerings:**

- Host & Co-Host Queer Specific Nature Based Programs in Orange County, CA and surrounding areas.
- Beginner Friendly Nature Based Programming
- Free Gear Swaps & Introduction to the Outdoors Workshops
- Community Gear Library (in process)

## **Additional Services:**

- Tailored Trainings & Workshops: Engaging sessions designed for staff, leadership, and volunteers to build knowledge and capacity around LGBTQIA+ inclusion, equity, and trauma-informed practices.
- Gender Support Plan for Staff & Participants
- Site Visits and Organizational Audit

# A BUSINESS CASE FOR CHANGE

The outdoors has long been celebrated as a place of freedom, healing, and connection; a sanctuary where individuals can find healing, respite, be challenged, and build meaningful relationships with nature and others. *Yet, despite its transformative potential, the outdoor recreation industry has yet to fully embrace inclusivity and safety for all LGBTQIA2S+ individuals.*

While some organizations are making strides to address these issues, significant gaps remain. These shortcomings are not just missed opportunities—they perpetuate harm and limit the ability of the industry to truly serve all people. *Creating inclusive, affirming, and safe outdoor spaces is not just a moral imperative but a strategic business decision. The need for intentional, systemic change has never been more urgent.*

**Growing Market:** The outdoor recreation market is valued at over \$778 billion, with LGBTQIA2S+ consumers representing a significant and growing segment. *Over 61% of adults who participate in outdoor programs, identify within the LGBTQIA2S+ community (Outdoor Industry Association, 2023).*

# UNDERSTANDING LGBTQIA2S+ IDENTITIES

There is no one right or wrong way to being queer, trans, or human.

**L**esbian

**G**ay

**B**isexual

**T**rans

**Q**ueer & Questioning

**I**ntersex

**A**sexual

**2S** Native term for two spirited

**+** Represents the diverse range of identities

## Gender is a Spectrum

Expression vs. Identity

Medical vs Social Transition

**Pronouns:** Language used to refer to a person. Some individuals may use more than one pronoun.

Examples are She/Her, He/Him, They/Them, Xe/Xem, Fae/Faer, Ze/Zir

**When you don't know - Ask!**

## Considerations of Intersecting Identities:

For queer individuals this means that their experiences of discrimination are not solely based on their sexual orientation or gender identity

Race

Ethnicity

Socio-Economic Status

Disability

Neuro-Divergency

Immigration Status

Age

Mental Health considerations including PTSD & CPTSD

Religion

Culture

# UNDERSTANDING BELONGING

"Belonging is being somewhere where you want to be, and feeling like you're meant to be there."  
-Brené Brown

## What is Belonging:

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- A deep sense of **acceptance, safety, and connection** to themselves and others
- An experience one feels when given the freedom to be their most authentic self without fear of judgment or isolation
- Beyond inclusion and tolerance

## Key Elements of Belonging:

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- **Safety:** Physical, and emotional security
- **Representation:** Seeing yourself reflected in leadership and participants
- **Accessibility:** remove physical, financial, and social barriers.
- **Inclusivity:** ensuring others feel seen, valued, and respected regardless
- **Community Building:** fostering connections and relationships
- **Consistency & Commitment:** sustain and maintain an inclusive environment

Reference - Lily Zheng

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

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This is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a roadmap to *evaluate, adapt, and implement* changes that align with your unique needs.

1

Create a culture of inclusion, acceptance, and respect

2

Increase Inclusive Language, Messaging, and Representation

3

Design Organizational LGBTQIA2S+ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policies & Training

4

Create Inclusive Intake & Registration Forms

5

Establish Inclusivity in Program Development

6

Ensure access to All Gender Facilities

7

Organizational Gender Support Plan

8

Increase Access & Reduce Barriers

9

Engage, Advocate, and Support the LGBTQIA2S+

# ACCESS & SAFETY TO ALL-GENDER FACILITIES

42% of transgender individuals avoid outdoor activities due to safety concerns and lack of access to all-gender facilities (GLSEN, 2019)

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- Develop and implement a policy that clearly states the organization's commitment to providing all-gender facilities
- Provide clear, visible signage that communicates your facilities are for use by anyone regardless of gender identity
- Replace existing gendered signs with inclusive, all gender signs
- Choose locations that also accommodate the diverse needs of your participants at off-site locations and incorporate bathroom buddy system whenever possible



# ORGANIZATIONAL GENDER SUPPORT PLAN

## Key Scenarios:

- Staff transitioning
- Participants coming out as transgender
- Changes to gendered housing/facilities

## Address Key Areas of Support:

- Names and Pronouns
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Facilities Access
- Program Modifications
- Emergency Response Plans

## Core Principles:

- Designate an inclusive and trauma informed staff member to lead these conversations with empathy and respect.
- Voluntary Participation

YOU BELONG OUTDOORS - TOOLKIT



– Confidential –

### Gender Support Plan for Camp

The purpose of this document is to create shared understandings about the ways in which the camper's authentic gender will be accounted for and supported at camp. Camp staff, parents/guardians and the camper should work together to complete this document. Ideally, each will spend time completing the various sections to the best of their ability and then come together to review sections and confirm shared agreements about using the plan. Please note that there is a separate document to plan for a camper's gender transition at camp.

Camp: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Camper's Preferred Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Legal Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
Camper's Gender (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Assigned Sex at Birth (optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent(s)/Guardian(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Meeting Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

#### PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

Are parent(s)/guardian(s) of this camper aware and supportive of their child's gender status?  Yes  No

If not, what considerations must be accounted for in implementing this plan? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### CONFIDENTIALITY, PRIVACY AND DISCLOSURE

How public or private will information about this camper's gender be (check all that apply)?

Camp Leadership will be aware (Owners, Directors, Associate Directors, etc.)  
Specify the adult staff members: \_\_\_\_\_

Site level leadership/administration will know (Head Counselor, Camp Nurse, etc.)  
Specify the adult staff members: \_\_\_\_\_

Counselors and/or other camp staff will know  
Specify the adult staff members: \_\_\_\_\_

Camper will not be openly "out," but some campers are aware of the camper's gender  
Specify the students: \_\_\_\_\_

Camper is open with others (adults and peers) about their gender

This is an example of a personalized roadmap to meeting the needs of gender diverse individuals

Reference: [Gender Spectrum](#)

# QUICK START & PRIORITIES

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1

Audit and conduct a policy review to identify gaps and barriers in accessibility and inclusion

2

Develop a training calendar and offer specialized training on LGBTQIA2S+ inclusivity topics, disability awareness, mental health first aid, environmental stewardship and more.

3

Develop a clear Code of Conduct that sets the expectation for respectful behavior. Implement a confidential reporting system that is easily accessible and timely handled.

4

Update intake and registration forms to be inclusive and use language that avoids assumptions about gender, family structures, ability etc.

5

Establish a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force and Employee Resource Groups

6

Begin modifications to existing facilities to provide inclusive all-gender options for restrooms, changing areas, and sleeping arrangements.

**NOW WHAT?**



# Be an Active Ally

It is okay to not know everything; what matters is your willingness to learn and take action that echos respect, inclusivity, safety, and belonging for everyone.”

– River Milburn



# PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

## Educate Yourself

Learn about barriers faced by marginalized groups  
Follow, listen, and learn from diverse outdoor voices and stories

## Practice Active Allyship

Speak up against exclusion  
Amplify marginalized voices  
Support inclusive organizations

## Lead by Example

Model inclusive behavior  
Share your experiences  
Challenge discriminatory language



## Seek & Create Inclusive Spaces

Join diverse outdoor communities  
Organize inclusive events  
Collaborate with like-minded folx

## Reflect & Grow

Examine your own biases  
Seek feedback  
Stay informed on evolving issues

