

# HOW EMPLOYERS CAN SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

An estimated 2.9 to 3.8 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people live in rural communities across the United States, and they are part of the fabric of rural American life. LGBT people in rural communities often choose to live there for many of the same reasons that other people do: for the strength of community and connection to family, for the pace of life, or simply to be part of the place where they were raised and call home.



However, the structural challenges facing all rural residents, such as fewer doctors or employers, can add to the challenges facing LGBT people in rural and urban areas alike, such as discrimination or mistreatment. By addressing the overall needs and challenges of rural areas, while also directly addressing LGBT-specific experiences in rural areas, meaningful and long-lasting change is possible in rural America, for both LGBT and non-LGBT residents.

## ACTIONS EMPLOYERS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- **Adopt equal employment opportunity policies** that explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **Review health insurance plans and policies** to ensure that transgender employees can obtain medically necessary care and that plans do not contain exclusions.
- **Include LGBT topics in new staff training** as well as trainings focused on engaging customers in culturally inclusive ways.
- **Adopt facility policies that include single-occupancy restrooms and changing facilities**, which benefit transgender employees, parents, workers with disabilities, and others.
- **Create a process for transgender employees who are socially transitioning** to assist with topics such as changing names in computer systems and restroom access.
- **Support and promote LGBT-inclusive resources in the local community**, including by displaying [this flyer](#) in visible parts of the office or workplace.
- **Advocate for the adoption of local, state, and federal nondiscrimination protections.**
- **Speak as a model employer in the community** about your commitment to diversity and act in leadership roles when opportunities arise to support LGBT people in the local community.
- **Speak with other business owners and employers in your community** about the importance of supporting LGBT employees and residents, and about the positive impacts of such support in your workplace.
- **Review the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index** for additional ideas on how to further create a supportive workplace environment.

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## ACTIONS EMPLOYERS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT ALL PEOPLE, INCLUDING LGBT PEOPLE, LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- **Consider allowing employees to work remotely**, allowing for more geographic flexibility and reducing long commute times across wide geographic areas.
- **Provide meaningful wages, paid sick time, family and medical leave with broad definitions of family**, and other benefits that can reduce the economic challenges experienced by rural workers.
- **Implement hiring policies** that reduce employment challenges for individuals with a criminal record, including those who may have interactions with law enforcement related to substance use.
- **Participate in and support investment in workforce development networks** connecting youth and workers looking to change fields or develop new skills with community colleges and training programs that feed into long-term job opportunities.
- **Develop work-based learning partnerships with educational or training institutions**, including work experience, internships, co-ops, apprenticeships and on-the-job training. These efforts can build the talent pipeline for businesses and better prepare workers for the jobs in demand in their communities.
- **Ensure employees have access to high quality mental health services and employee assistance programs** that can provide counseling, rehabilitation, and assistance to employees who may struggle with opioid or other substance use.
- **Create a “return-to-work” program** for employees who have received treatment and support for opioid or other substance use to allow them to successfully return to the workforce.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBT PEOPLE  
IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NEW REPORT

### WHERE WE CALL HOME: LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL AMERICA

[www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt](http://www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt)

View your state’s LGBT policy profile at  
[www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps)

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