



Becoming an Ally

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Introduction: What is Allyship?

Allyship is the act of working in support of people who are marginalized in an identity that is not your own. In the case of being an ally to the LGBT+ community, that often means the actions of people who are cisgender*¹ and straight. However, allyship can also exist between members of the LGBT+ community. For example, cisgender gay men who address sexism and biphobia are allies. White queer trans people who strive to be anti-racist are allies. Allyship is an ongoing action that we can all be a part of and take pride in. Consider this guide a great first step on a journey that will last a lifetime.

Defining Allyship

Within our understanding of allyship, there are a variety of different terms that you may have heard in connection to the discussion.

Allyship: The actions taken in support of a community that is marginalized in a way that you are not. This requires learning with, and acting in support of, that community, but not acting for that community.

Ally: Someone who actively acts in allyship with marginalized communities. There has been some conflict over this term, as some have claimed it as its own identity category. In practice, it's better to act in allyship, and be called an ally by others, than it is to claim the term yourself.

Advocate: Someone who champions a specific cause or person. In the workplace, this could look like a co-worker or supervisor who — with consent — works to ensure that changes are made to make the environment more inclusive for a marginalized employee.

Accomplice: Someone who is not part of a marginalized group but actively takes risks that could negatively impact them. This term originated with Indigenous activist groups who wanted to see people who were not Indigenous risking their privileges in support of Indigenous people. In the workplace, this could look like risking your own career to speak out against active discrimination or employees supporting a lawsuit against their employer on behalf of a marginalized colleague.

Co-resistor: Someone who is part of a different marginalized group, but sees their marginalization as connected and will work together to address them. A great example of this is the Indigenous, South Asian and Latinx queer groups who support Black Lives Matter chapters in various cities across Canada.

Regardless of which term is used, you're reading this guide because you want to act in allyship to address the inequalities and discrimination that you see regarding sexual and gender minorities in Canada's tourism industry. In order to succeed, however, you need to start by looking within at your own biases and how they guide your actions, consciously or unconsciously.

¹Cisgender is someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. For instance, a man who was assigned male at birth, or a woman who was assigned female at birth.

Unpacking Unconscious Bias

Everyone holds unconscious biases. We all make assumptions about people based on stereotypes and prejudices, and these biases affect our word choice and actions, often without us even knowing it. Most of us have been taught these biases throughout our lives, from our earliest moments of being gendered as male or female, to our schooling, our families, our religious and cultural communities, the media we consume and the workplace. Because of this, it's a lifelong process to recognize and unlearn our own biases — conscious and unconscious.

Despite efforts, there are still many societal biases when it comes to marginalized gender and sexual identities, often emerging as harmful stereotypes. Some people assume gay men are better off financially, lesbians all have masculine gender expressions, bisexuals don't exist and trans people are either confused or actively dangerous. In reality, gay men tend to earn less than their heterosexual counterparts,¹ lesbians can have any gender expression, more of the LGBT+ community identifies as bisexual or pansexual than gay or lesbian and trans people are more likely to be victims of violence than commit violence themselves.

These biases have real-world impacts on LGBT+ people in the workplace. LGBT+ people have significantly more trouble securing meaningful and affirming employment.^{1,2} Many LGBT+ people will avoid spaces that they might have accessed otherwise because of biases that have shaped others' interactions with them. For example, you may not attend a company holiday event because your colleagues have always asked about your husband when you have a wife, and you don't think that you would be safe bringing them — even if those who made those assumptions would have been accepting if they knew.

The existence of these biases don't make us bad people, but they still have an impact on those around us. Once we recognize our unconscious biases, we can recognize them and begin the process of unlearning them. The best way to do this is by keeping ourselves accountable, connecting with others and, ultimately, learning to act in inclusive ways.



Making Meaningful Connections: Gendered and Sexually Inclusive Language

In the workplace, the main things that matter are our actions and our words. As a result, it's important to review how to use inclusive language regarding gender and sexual minorities in the workplace. Remember, it's a process to learn how to employ inclusive language, and it's normal to make mistakes along the way.

Defining Gender and Sexuality

Many words and phrases originate within LGBT+ communities. We're always finding creative and beautiful new ways to explain how we see ourselves, our attractions and the relationships in our lives.

The main three terms that we need to understand in the workplace are gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation. These three are the protected grounds that keep LGBT+ people safe in the workplace and are the ones to know if you wish to support or advocate for an inclusive work environment. Similar to other protected grounds like race, national or ethnic origin, disability, marital status and sex, these grounds are the fundamentals that have made a change in making equitable and inclusive workplaces.

Gender expression is how you publicly present your gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance — such as dress, hair, makeup, body language and voice. Your chosen name and pronoun are also common ways of expressing gender.³

Gender identity is your internal and individual experience of gender. It is your sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person's gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex. Gender identity is fundamentally different from a person's sexual orientation.³

Sexual orientation is a personal characteristic that forms part of who you are. It covers the range of human sexuality, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual and heterosexual.⁴

These three protected grounds, alongside others, have been instrumental in protecting all people, not just the LGBT+ community, as everyone has a gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation. A woman who is told she has to wear high heels at work could challenge this, not just through the protected ground of sex, but also the ground of gender expression.

But what about the terms for the community itself — what does LGBT+ mean?

Defining the LGBT+ Community

As noted, the community uses many different terms to describe ourselves. At the end of the day, no two people will define how certain terms mean to them in exactly the same way. When we think about allyship, it's important that we keep this in mind and respect the ways that people refer to themselves.

Here are some terms you might hear associated with the three grounds:

Gender Expression:

- Feminine
- Masculine
- Androgynous
- Gender non-conforming

Gender Identity:

- (Cis or Trans) Man
- (Cis or Trans) Woman
- Non-binary
- Genderqueer
- Genderfluid
- Agender
- Trans-feminine
- Trans-masculine

Sexual Orientation:

- Straight
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Demisexual
- Omnisexual
- Polysexual

Some terms don't fit neatly into the above categories like Two-Spirit, which is a cultural identity that's unique to Indigenous communities. Intersex is another of these terms, recognizing those that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female but may or may not be considered an identity by intersex folks. Of course, no discussion of language would be final without a discussion of the term queer, which some people use to describe themselves in all of the above categories, or as a political identity. To learn more about the words the community uses, check out definitions provided by different community groups:

- The 519 – Glossary of Terms, Facilitating Shared Understandings Around Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Awareness (Toronto)
- Qmunity – Queer Glossary: A to Q Terminology (Vancouver)
- Centre for Sexuality – Gender Identity Terms and Definitions, Sexual Orientation Terms and Definitions (Calgary)
- OUTSaskatoon – Queer Terms (Saskatoon)
- Fondation Émergence – Lexicon (Montreal)
- Rainbow Coalition of Yellowknife – Resources (Yellowknife)
- Planned Parenthood: Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Health Centre – Resources (St. John's, N.L.)

Now that you know a bit more about the community, let's delve into how to communicate in an inclusive way.

Respectful Language Regarding Gender Expression and Gender Identity

Even if there are many words that are used to define our identities, there are some terms to avoid, as they come from harmful histories and are not considered appropriate or accurate.

Some of these include:

- **Chosen gender, preferred pronoun**
Instead of using language like chosen or preferred, just use gender or pronoun, as these terms refer to who a person is, not necessarily what they prefer.
- **Sex change**
This term is outdated and inaccurate. Instead, try gender-confirming care.
- **Transgendered**
Adding an “ed” to the end of a word makes it something that has happened to someone. Instead, use trans or transgender.
- **Male-bodied, female-bodied**
These terms don’t actually speak to a person. Consider sex assigned at birth. This speaks to how someone was assigned by others instead of their identity.
- **“Hello sir,” “Hello madam”**
Unless someone has told you their gender and terms they use to refer to themselves, these terms make assumptions about a person’s gender and should be avoided.

If you would like to learn more, consider reviewing the Media Reference Guide – Discussing Trans and Gender-Diverse People by The 519.⁵

In order to successfully speak inclusively about gender, we must first look to remove gender from our language as much as we can. This includes not making assumptions about a person’s gender. As Julia Serano noted in her book *Whipping Girl*, we make assumptions every day about a person’s gender and sex without even speaking to them.⁶ It’s up to us to take a moment, recognize our assumptions and move forward without letting those assumptions and biases impact our actions or words.

One major component of gender-inclusive language is pronoun use. Pronouns are an important part of our language and reinforce many of the assumptions we make about others. When we talk to others, we refer to them as she, her, he, him or a singular they and them. Some also use neopronouns of many different types, including ze/hir, xe/xem, ey/em, fae/faer and others. To learn more about pronouns consider reviewing the following resources:

- Canada’s LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC) – Trans & Non-Binary Inclusion Guide
- The 519 – Gender-Specific & Gender-Neutral Pronouns
- Time – Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Gender-Neutral Pronouns⁷

Respectful Language Regarding Sexual Orientation

Similarly, there are other terms referencing sexual orientation that are either out of date or rooted in prejudice. Let’s review some of these and discuss terms that could be used instead:

- **Sexual preference**
Like “choice” or “preferred” above, instead of saying sexual preference use sexual orientation, as sexual preference comes from the assumption that sexual minorities could change if we chose to.

- **Homosexual**
This is an older, medicalized term. Instead, use gay or lesbian.
- **“That’s so gay,” “No homo”**
Other than seeming like you are stuck in 2008, these terms imply that there’s something wrong with being gay and should not be used.
- **Gay community**
It’s more inclusive to reference the LGBT+ community or communities. Though many people will self-referentially talk about the gay community, it’s a term that should be only be used by members of the community.
- **“She’s dating a woman. I guess she is a lesbian now.”**
Don’t make assumptions about a person’s orientation based on their current partner. Many people who are bisexual are assumed to be either gay or straight based on their partner, but regardless of partner, a bisexual person is still bisexual.
- **Gay lifestyle**
There is no gay lifestyle. LGBT+ people have just as many different lifestyles as cisgender straight people do.
- **Gay agenda**
There is no unified agenda among LGBT+ people.

When in doubt, make sure you match the language of the person you are speaking with. This means mirroring the affirming language that they use for themselves while recognizing that certain words with a prejudicial meaning may be intra-community words. Use the words for their partners that they use for their partners, the pronouns they use for themselves and the names of the identities that they enjoy using. However, sometimes we still make mistakes by using language that isn’t inclusive. If that’s the case, what should we do?



Making Mistakes

We all make mistakes. This is true regardless of who we are, and can be especially true when it comes to trying to be inclusive. Marginalized communities are used to experiencing discrimination regularly. According to Ozeren, LGBT+ employees often experience harmful comments or discrimination in the workplace.¹ This experience is heightened for those experiencing intersectional marginalization — including queer women, LGBT+ people with disabilities and queer and trans Black, Indigenous and people of colour.

For those who are on the receiving end of the mistake, it can be a difficult experience because of the number of times that people make the same mistakes when speaking with them, as well as the reinforcement of the discrimination that they experience. A mistake can be something harmful that breaks relationships, but it also has the potential to be a learning experience and something that brings people together, based on how we choose to act. To make sure we learn from our mistakes, while also acting positively in the future, we have to keep two key things in mind: intent versus impact and how we stay accountable.

Intent Versus Impact

When we make mistakes, we always need to think about the difference between intent and impact. One of the most common reactions LGBT+ people hear when someone says or does something that hurts them is, “But that wasn’t my intention!” The problem, however, with that statement is that it diverts blame. As a result, it centres the person who made the mistake instead of starting at a place of empathy for the person who was impacted. Below is a case study example:

Alex is calling to book a trip to St. John’s, N.L. Alex has a high voice that Sophia thinks is feminine. When Alex asks for trip options in Newfoundland, Sophia suggests Wild Women Expeditions, which she heard has a beautiful iceberg and arts tour. The tone in Alex’s voice suddenly changes and Sophia isn’t sure why. Alex says they aren’t interested and that they have to go abruptly. Sophia is confused because it is such a great tour, but she shrugs it off and goes on to the next client call.

In this example above, Sophia made the mistake of assuming Alex’s gender based on their voice. Alex identifies as a trans man and felt as though Sophia’s words were a reinforcement of people not perceiving him the same way as he identifies. Sophia had well meaning intentions in suggesting a great tour, but the impact was still felt. One of the simplest ways to visualize intent versus impact is that, if someone accidentally steps on your foot, the harm is still felt even if they didn’t intend to do it. Sophia had good intentions, but the impact on Alex was harmful.

Accountability

Everyone makes mistakes, and when you make one it’s important to find a balance between owning your error and fixing the situation while still recognizing the impact of your error. Here are a few examples of common mistakes that can be made, how to accept being held accountable and how to hold yourself accountable in turn.

Bill is organizing a ski trip for couples and is filling out the paperwork for Vishal. Bill notices Vishal is wearing a wedding ring and asks, “What is your wife’s name for the registration?” Vishal responds, “My husband’s name is Liam.” Bill is flustered, as he hasn’t had a same-gender couple apply before, and knows that some of the other clients on the ski trip would not react well. Bill suggests that maybe this isn’t the trip for Vishal, but Vishal insists that it is and talks to the manager.

Bill made the mistake of assuming both that Vishal was straight, and that those who would come on the couple’s retreat would be straight as well. Vishal held Bill accountable by speaking to the manager to ask for changes to be made so that the trip, as well as the booking process, can be made more inclusive for him and his husband.

Being held accountable is difficult. In that moment there is often a feeling of internal discomfort that we want to get away from. It’s important, in those moments, to recognize that a mistake was made, learn from it and sit in that discomfort for a moment. LGBT+ people have to sit in discomfort because of discrimination every day, and that discomfort is amplified when that queer or trans person is also disabled, Black, Indigenous or a person of colour. Although the discomfort is difficult, use it as a learning experience and do better in the future. But what about the situations where you aren’t being held accountable by the person you made a mistake with?

Jacinda works with Tai as a lifeguard at a popular beach that attracts a lot of families. Tai recently came out as non-binary in the workplace and uses they/them pronouns. When Tai started working there, however, they went by the name Tiffany and used she/her pronouns. Jacinda finds herself having a hard time using the right name and pronouns, and that is compounded by the fact that none of the regular families are using they/them pronouns for Tai. Tai doesn’t correct anyone, but Jacinda can tell it is affecting them.

In this case, Jacinda can take actions to hold herself accountable by asking another coworker to be her accountability buddy. In *Gender: Your Guide*, Lee Airton suggests that an accountability buddy is someone who you can practise gender-neutral pronouns with and who will hold you responsible when you make mistakes.⁸ Having an accountability buddy can be useful for more than just practicing pronouns, and can hold you accountable for other potentially prejudiced, biased, ableist, racist, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic mistakes you may make. By committing to holding each other accountable, you can grow and address your unconscious and conscious biases.

Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 as a way of explaining the particular lived experience of Black women, where the experience of anti-Black racism and sexism that's directed at them is different than either on their own. Intersectionality, however, can be applied to all forms of marginalization. When we experience privilege in an specific area we may not be able to recognize that privilege. We need to think about race, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, however we must also consider Indigeneity, language, ability, religion, education, citizenship, class, relationship orientation, current location, their place of origin, and position in the organizations. These and many other aspects make up a person, which means that there are always areas where we can act in allyship with someone of a different identity than your own even if you are members of the same community.

When all other things are considered equal, the rich have more privilege than the middle class, and both the rich and middle class have more privilege than the working class or poor. For instance, in Canada all people of colour experience some form of racism however, if you're Black or Indigenous, that discrimination can be compounded. Women in Canada who are bisexual make less money than those who are lesbians despite both being queer women. These individuals would face even further marginalization if they were transgender rather than cisgender, or Muslim rather than Christian.

Since our goal is intersectional inclusion, it's critical to examine these interactions in order to better equip ourselves to address and overcome prejudice and biases — conscious or unconscious. Consider if there are other intersecting identities that need to be considered at your workplace?

Many pieces make up a person and impact their level of privilege or marginalization. Even within the above categories, there can be distinctions — for instance, if someone got their education in a different country, it may not be equivalently respected in Canada. Are there other intersecting identities that need to be considered at your workplace?

Allyship in Action

We've talked at a high level about what allyship is, but what are concrete actions that you can take? There is no single answer about how to act in allyship, but we've provided a few examples in three areas when working with coworkers, prejudiced clients and organizational change. Regardless of the situation, take a moment to reflect on the best strategy in that situation — that moment will help you make the best and more inclusive choice.

Strategies to Intervene with Coworkers

When it comes to supporting colleagues, we need to always prioritize their needs and wants if we want to act as an ally. Many people who are marginalized may not want you to leap in at a moment's notice to their defense as it may put more focus back on them. There are, however, many practices that respect a colleague's needs while also supporting them.

- **Be a support person**
When you see harm happening, be willing to simply be present and talk to the person experiencing harm. On an ongoing basis, this might also include being willing to go with them to the bathroom or even being with them to address issues with human resources.
- **Address comments or jokes**
If you hear homophobic, biphobic, transphobic or otherwise prejudiced comments, be willing to address them. One way to do this with jokes is asking, "Why do you think that is funny?"
- **Be willing to suggest more inclusive language**
When you see an opportunity, provide options of more inclusive language that a colleague could use. If they are resistant, make it clear that this is an issue of professionalism.

Strategies for Dealing with Prejudiced Clients

Dealing with clients who are prejudiced can be a bigger challenge for many. In cases where a client is prejudiced, you need to evaluate how you address the situation and those who are around you — including other clients and staff. These steps are necessary to create a truly inclusive environment:

- **Support other clients**
If it is a situation where harm is being done to other clients, then it should be made clear that those actions are unacceptable within your workplace and that, should they continue, the prejudiced client will no longer be welcome. This showcases to others that your priority is inclusion.
- **Support other employees**
Consider how LGBT+ employees are impacted by the client. This may be a situation where you can act as a support person for your colleague, or it may mean that you volunteer to work directly with a client so your colleague doesn't have to.
- **Do self-care work**
Dealing with prejudiced clients can be extremely emotionally draining. It's important to not forget about yourself in this process, as someone who is too tired is unable to act in allyship in other situations. Sometimes self-care might look like choosing to not address a comment that directly affects your identity with a prejudiced client if no one else is around.



Organizational Allyship: Best Practices for Workplaces

We need to also be ready to intervene within our organizations. This requires becoming an advocate for those in your organization who don't always feel like they have a voice. This includes advocating for:

- **LGBT+ inclusive policies and practices**
Consider reviewing the CGLCC's Policies and Procedures resource guide.
- **All-gender washrooms and changing facilities**
Look to make options for all clients and staff, including non-binary ones.
- **Positive space campaigns**
Engage a positive space or allyship campaign to get others involved in making your workplace LGBT+ inclusive.
- **Creating space for pronouns**
This could mean including them on business cards, name tags and email signatures.
- **Engaging with the LGBT+ community**
This could include creating a program where a certain amount of revenue goes to an LGBT+ charity.

Self-Education

A major component of allyship is continual self-education. One of the biggest effects of privilege is that we don't know what we don't know. Communities for people with marginalized gender or sexual identities have an impressive level of diversity, creativity and dimension. This means even for members of the LGBT+ community there's always more learning to do in order to understand all the different intersections of how to act in allyship within the community. Here are some tips:

- Always remember that just because someone is LGBT+ does not mean they should be an educator on topics related to LGBT+ inclusion.
- Look to Google, YouTube, TikTok and other platforms to find LGBT+ people talking about their life experience.
- Consider attending webinars, conferences and training provided by organizations that do LGBT+ inclusion, like Pride at Work Canada and the CGLCC.
- Look at e-learning programs like Pride at Work Canada's LGBTQ2+ 101 and Workplace Inclusion Certificate program.
- Consider attending CGLCC's Navigating LGBT+ Diversity and Inclusion in the Tourism Industry workshops.
- Read books created by community authors. Consider buying these books from LGBT+ bookstores such as Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto or Little Sister's Book & Art Emporium in Vancouver.
- Engage with local LGBT+ community events. This could be Pride, but look to attend events in other parts of the year as well.



How the Tourism Industry Can Act As Allies

Those in the tourism industry can look at different ways they can act as allies to the LGBT+ community as well. Often, when working in allyship, we think primarily about individual actions and less about our organizational or professional impact. It's important to think about ways specific to the industry that you can act in allyship including:

- **Make sure your house is in order**
Make sure all your organizational policies, forms and facilities are inclusive to LGBT+ people and that your staff are trained on how to be inclusive in their language with clients and guests.
- **Get involved with Pride**
In many cities, Pride is one of the biggest tourist events of the year. Consider creating and advertising a Pride package for LGBT+ tourists.
- **Be aware of inclusive tourist attractions**
Investigate whether the tourist attractions you suggest to others are LGBT+ inclusive. Consider listing whether an attraction is inclusive and, if you hear feedback that an attraction has been discriminating against LGBT+, look to unlist it and explain why. For more information about LGBT+ inclusive locations, visit the CGLCC website to learn more about their Rainbow Registered accreditation program.
- **Think about procurement**
Consider buying directly from LGBT+ businesses. The CGLCC can support you through its Supplier Diversity program.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, allyship is an ongoing action rather than a title to be achieved. True allies know that their work is never finished. No matter who you are, and what knowledge you have gained, there are always more people to meet and experiences to learn from. The moment that you consider yourself an “expert” on all things LGBT+ is the moment that you have failed as an ally. This guide should be a helpful resource when starting out, but the rest of the journey is up to you.

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Funded by the
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