



**PLWG**  
PROGRAM LEADERS  
WORKING GROUP



NEW YORK STATE

**4-H**

Cornell Cooperative Extension

nys4-H.org

## Practices for Inclusion of Individuals of All Genders and Sexual Orientations

As the nation's largest youth development organization, the 4-H Youth Development Program engages millions of people from all areas of the country to provide opportunities for youth to learn life skills, confidence, and compassion. In 2019, National 4-H Council and Cooperative Extension affirmed the inclusion of youth of all genders and sexual orientations in the 4-H Youth Development Program with the [following statement](#) from Jennifer Sirangelo, President & CEO, National 4-H Council:

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*Together, Cornell Cooperative Extension, National 4-H Council and New York State 4-H affirm our shared values of inclusion for all youth in 4-H programs and we know our programs have been particularly relevant and impactful to LGBTQ+ youth. Cooperative Extension institutions have been unwavering in their commitment to serving all youth, including LGBTQ+ young people. 4-H programs in every state and county in America are governed by state laws regarding non-discrimination in public education as well as land grant university policies regarding diversity and inclusiveness in its many forms. We are proud that some of the best examples across the 4-H network in demonstrating this commitment follow 4-H's tradition of youth and adult partnerships working collaboratively. From youth-led summits sharing best practices about inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth to trainings providing guidance for 4-H professionals and volunteers, 4-H is creating safe and inclusive environments where all youth have the opportunity to develop skills in partnership with caring adults and feel a sense of belonging. These programs are only a small sample of our larger network determined to expand its reach to 10 million kids representative of America's diversity over the next 10 years. We understand there are various points of view in our country around the differences we share and many times these views can create a more polarized society. What can't divide or deter us is the common love and acceptance we have for all of our kids. 4-H will continue to stay vigilant in our outreach, support and service to America's youth no matter the challenge, circumstance or implications. This is who we have always been—helping all kids pledge their Head, their Heart, their Hands and their Health to the service and betterment of our country and our world. This is 4-H.*

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To support efforts to be inclusive and affirming of individuals of all gender identities and sexual orientations, the LGBTQ+ Champion Group, a subset of the 4-H Program Leaders Working Group's Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee, modified a [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) document](#) from the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR, 2017). This document is intended to support all 4-H participants and personnel in implementing emerging best practices, as well as universities' non-discrimination policies, at all 4-H events and activities. If



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4-H is the youth development program of our nation's Cooperative Extension System and USDA. The PLWG encourages all Cooperative Extension programs to adhere to their Land-grant University nondiscrimination policy in the development and delivery of Extension efforts designed to engage all people.



NEW YORK  
STATE  
**4-H**

you are interested in utilizing the FAQs document as a template for 4-H in your state, please contact your state’s 4-H program leader.

**Important Note: Prior to implementing any of these practices, please contact the most appropriate individuals to ensure these practices are supported by your university’s Title IX and affirmative action offices, as well as legal counsel. Non-discrimination policies vary by state, so it is important to understand which of these practices will (and will not) be supported in your state’s 4-H program.**

*It is recognized that a 4-H worker may face complex resistance to some or all of this guidance because of their personal religious beliefs and/or cultural implications. As youth development professionals, we maintain a child-centric and positive focus on creating inclusive environments to ensure that all youth feel welcomed in the 4-H program. This effort is guided by statements of non-discrimination set forth by National 4-H Council, National 4-H Program Leaders Working Group, Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, and respective Land-grant University systems.*

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## The Importance of Terminology

Understanding and correctly utilizing language is an important aspect of creating inclusive and affirming 4-H programs. The language and definitions shared here are **not comprehensive** of all gender identities and sexual orientations. Additionally, language describing identities is constantly evolving and can be geographically specific. In addition to learning the words and definitions described here, you may also consider contacting your university's multicultural resource center for more information and training.

**Sex** is a medical term that refers to a combination of physiological attributes. These attributes include reproductive organs, chromosomes, gonads, hormones, and secondary sex characteristics. Generally, people are assigned male or female sex based upon the appearance of their external reproductive organs. It is also helpful to understand two other terms related to sex: **sex assigned at birth** and **intersex**.

**Sex assigned at birth (SAAB)** refers to a person's sex designation as recorded on their birth certificate. Generally, a medical professional or guardian designates a newborn either "male" or "female" sex after examining the infant's genitalia.

**Intersex** is a term that refers to a person who has a combination of male and female physiological attributes. Sometimes people are designated intersex at birth after an examination of genitalia; other times, people are designated intersex later in life.

**Gender identity** refers to a person's internal sense of their own gender. Everyone has a gender identity. A person's gender identity may or may not match their sex assigned at birth. Some common gender identities include: man, woman, gender neutral, transman, transwoman, and non-binary. An individual may indicate another gender identity not listed. Gender identity does not always correspond to gender expression (definition below). It may be helpful to define three additional terms related to gender identity: **transgender**, **non-binary**, and **gender transition**.

**Transgender** is a term that refers to a person whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. This term may also recognize someone who identifies outside of the binary gender affiliations (i.e., man or woman). A **transman** refers to a person who identifies as a boy or man but was assigned female sex at birth. A **transwoman** refers to a person who identifies as a girl or woman but was assigned male sex at birth. A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth has a **cisgender** gender identity.

**Non-binary** is a term that refers to a person who identifies beyond the man/woman gender binary and/or beyond the masculine/feminine binary of gender expression. Related terminology includes gender non-conforming, genderqueer, and gender fluid.

**Gender transition** refers to a process in which a person alters their physical appearance to more closely match their gender identity rather than their sex assigned at birth. A person in gender transition may or may not alter their dress/grooming habits, change their name, or use pronouns that are more congruent with their gender identity. A person may begin gender

transition at any point in their life and gender transition may happen over any length of time. Some, but not all gender transitions include medical procedures such as hormone replacement therapy and surgical alterations of primary and secondary sex characteristics. Not all transgender and non-binary people pursue gender transition.

**Gender expression** refers to how a person presents their gender to others. This can include how a person dresses, styles their hair, speaks, and many other factors.

**Sexual orientation** refers to who a person is attracted to (Note: Ongoing research defines patterns of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction as one's sexual orientation). Gender identity and sexual orientation are two separate aspects of a person's identity.

- An individual who identifies as a **lesbian** is a woman who is attracted to women.
- Someone who identifies as **gay** is often a man who is attracted to men. **Gay** may also be used by a person of any gender who identifies as having an attraction other than heterosexual.
- A person who is **bisexual** refers to an individual who is attracted to two genders (most commonly men and women).
- Someone who identifies as **pansexual** is a person who is attracted to others regardless of the other person's sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.
- An individual who is **asexual** is a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction.
- **Queer** (denoted by the "Q" in LGBTQ+) may be used as an umbrella term that refers to a sexual orientation that is non-heterosexual, or used to describe one's gender identity. Due to the history of this word some people have negative associations and are not comfortable using this word.

## Ensuring Paperwork is Inclusive and Affirming

### 1. What is the most inclusive way to ask participants about their gender?

Personally identifiable information (including gender identity and sex assigned at birth) must be kept confidential. This information may only be disclosed to those 4-H staff and volunteers that have a legitimate programmatic need for the information. In a lot of cases, there is no legitimate programmatic need to ask participants about their gender identity. For example, if youth are registering to participate in your county's 4-H presentation day, there is no reason to ask about their gender identity. Likewise, there is no reason to ask a volunteer judge their gender identity.

In the limited cases when there is a legitimate programmatic need, the best option is to ask the following open-ended question:

What is your gender identity? (Fill in the blank) \_\_\_\_\_

If you will be collecting too much information to read each of the responses for an open-ended question, then use the following question:

What is your gender identity? (Select one or more options)

- Female

- Male
- Gender Identity Not Listed Above (if space allows, leave a line to indicate their gender identity)
- Prefer Not to State

## 2. Is it appropriate to verify that an individual is really intersex or transgender?

*Note: The terms “intersex” and “transgender” are not interchangeable when listed in this instance or following considerations. See [terminology on page 2](#).*

Verification is neither necessary nor appropriate. 4-H does not require a medical diagnosis, treatment, or identification documentation that reflects an individual’s gender identity, and the 4-H program may not ask for them. Individuals are not required to notify the 4-H program that they are transgender or intersex. Electing not to inform the 4-H program is perfectly fine. As soon as an individual lets the 4-H program know that they are intersex or transgender, or that they are beginning gender transition, 4-H will treat that person consistent with their gender identity.

## Programmatic Considerations

### 3. What inclusive practices can help ensure that participants of all gender identities and sexual orientations will feel comfortable in 4-H?

- Ensure the 4-H practices for inclusion have been widely shared with the entire 4-H community. Do not focus discussions about inclusion on a particular individual as this violates their privacy and may create an unsafe experience for them. If questions or concerns arise, keep the discussion on 4-H practices and policies, rather than on a particular individual’s participation. Here’s one idea to get you started: Include a copy of your Land-grant University’s non-discrimination policy in your 4-H welcome packet along with a statement that all individuals are welcome to participate in 4-H programs.
- Set up training for your 4-H staff and volunteers about inclusivity. Ensure that the training includes terminology lessons about sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, as well as coaching on how to answer questions from members and families. There are often many local community and university resource centers that can provide in-person training for your program. If you need help setting up a training, please contact your respective state’s 4-H office.
- Normalize using appropriate pronouns and names. Ensure that name tags and rosters (and the like) reflect individuals’ expressed pronouns and names. Lead by example for others in the 4-H program in using those pronouns and names consistently.
- Avoid segregating and categorizing participants by gender (for example, do not ask members to form a boys’ line and a girls’ line).
- If someone shares their identity with you, you can ask them what concerns they have (if any) about participating in 4-H. If you aren’t sure how to respond, reassure the individual and let them know that you will get more information for them and get back to them soon. Then contact your respective state’s 4-H office. Just like with all 4-H participants, be sure to check in to see how things are going.

- When feasible, allow individuals to tour 4-H program facilities. Discuss what options are available for using the bathroom. If relevant to your 4-H event or activity, also discuss what options are available for sleeping and showering, and make clear the 4-H program defers to individuals' preferences (more on this below). In overnight situations, ensure that each individual has their own sleeping space (i.e. one youth member in a bed).

**4. A youth member has shared their transgender identity with 4-H; however, the member's parents are not supportive of their child's gender identity. What is the most inclusive response?**

4-H will treat all participants according to their gender identity, even if a youth member's own guardian raises objections. While the guardians may choose not to allow their child to participate in 4-H, 4-H will not discriminate against the member to accommodate the guardians' objection.

## Facility Considerations

**5. Where should people who identify as transgender or intersex sleep, use the restroom, and shower when facilities are gender segregated?**

When there are gender segregated facilities and/or activities, individuals who identify as transgender or intersex must be allowed to sleep, use the restroom, shower and participate in alignment with their gender identity. Some individuals who are early in the stages of gender transition may feel more comfortable participating in ways that are in alignment with their sex assigned at birth, which is okay too. If your event has room assignments, it is a great practice to let all campers indicate who they would prefer to share a room/cabin with. Regardless of sex and gender identity, people are often most comfortable in shared sleeping spaces when they select their own roommates.

Do not require an individual to utilize single-user facilities (sleeping, restroom, or shower) unless the other participants are also required to do so. Singling out one individual because they have a different gender identity or are intersex can be alienating and, despite good intentions, may be harmful to the individual. A single-user facility or other private option should be made available to anyone who requests it. Some ways to offer private options include: using dividers, hanging curtains, or arranging private bathing/showering times.

**6. Where should people who identify as transgender or intersex sleep, use the restroom, and shower when facilities are co-ed?**

In a co-ed facility, people who identify as transgender or intersex should utilize the common sleeping, restroom, and shower facilities in the same manner as the rest of the 4-H participants. Do not require an individual to utilize single-user facilities (sleeping, restroom, or shower) unless the other individuals are also required to do so. Singling out one individual because they have a different gender identity or are intersex can be alienating and, despite good intentions, may be harmful to the individual. At the same time, many people, regardless of gender identity or sex, feel more comfortable showering and changing in private. As such, it is best practice to offer all participants the option of privacy at all 4-H events and camps. Some 4-H programs have installed curtains in the group showers and partitions in changing areas for all participants' privacy. Another successful strategy is to offer signups for private shower times throughout the



day. The key is to make these options available to all participants, not just those who identify as transgender or intersex.

**7. What is the most inclusive response when participants who are openly gay request to share overnight accommodations?**

This is a great time to think about the difference between identities and behaviors. An individual's participation may not be restricted because of their sexual orientation. Therefore, if heterosexual participants are allowed to identify roommates, then all participants should be as well. If the facility has gender-segregated sleeping arrangements, all individuals should participate in alignment with their gender identity, irrespective of their sexual orientation. 4-H programs should have clear guidelines about acceptable and unacceptable physical contact, as well as the consequences for violating these guidelines. Any participant who violates these guidelines should receive the same corrective action regardless of their sexual orientation. Note that gay/lesbian/bisexual members are no more likely to engage in inappropriate physical conduct than other youth.

**8. Our 4-H program has swimming times where participants wear bathing suits. What is the most affirming response if a participant who identifies as transgender wears a bathing suit that is revealing of their sex/reproductive anatomy?**

This is another example of the need to respond to behaviors rather than identities. 4-H should provide the following guidelines (or include your respective state's 4-H dress code) about bathing suits and dress for all prospective participants and families:

*All participants at 4-H programs should wear clothing (including swimsuits when needed) that is not revealing. Clothing and bathing suits should cover all reproductive anatomy (breasts and genitals) as well as buttocks. Any participant whose clothing reveals reproductive anatomy or buttocks will be asked to change into clothing that is not revealing.*

If any 4-H participants are wearing clothing (including a bathing suit, when needed) that is revealing of their reproductive anatomy or buttocks, you should ask them to change their apparel in a non-judgmental way. You should simply remind them of 4-H dress guidelines (or other indicator for the particular event's dress code) and ask them to change. It is important that all 4-H participants be held to the same standards of dress, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation. You must be careful to prevent selective enforcement of these dress guidelines that targets individuals of certain sexes, gender identities, gender expressions, or sexual orientations, which would be discriminatory.

**9. For an upcoming 4-H event this year, there is a female participant who is planning to wear a suit and wants to attend with a female partner. What is the most inclusive response?**

4-H prohibits discrimination based on gender expression and sexual orientation. 4-H may not limit individuals' participation in activities because they appear or behave in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity or in a manner that does not conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity. This is true for uniforms, other attire requirements, recognition ceremonies, and all other activities. Please refer to 4-H dress guidelines (or other indicator for

the particular event's dress code). If partners are allowed at the dance, then they must be allowed without regard to gender, gender identity, gender presentation, and sexual orientation.

### **10. Should adult chaperones supervise youth during showering and changing times to prevent any potential bullying?**

Adult chaperones should remain within hearing distances of youth members during showering and changing times. At no time should an adult visually supervise youth members during showering and changing times. Adult chaperones who remain within eyesight of youth changing and showering are at risk for violating youth privacy and safety.

## **Communication Practices**

### **11. Is it appropriate to notify 4-H staff and volunteers that a transgender or intersex member will be participating in 4-H?**

Only in very limited situations. Personally identifiable information (including gender identity and sex assigned at birth) must be kept confidential. This information may only be disclosed to those 4-H staff and volunteers that have a legitimate programmatic need for the information. For example, a 4-H staff and/or volunteer may need to know in order to ensure a specific request by the individual is fulfilled. A participant simply identifying as transgender does not constitute a legitimate programmatic need. 4-H staff and volunteers who do not have a legitimate programmatic need for the information may not be informed. Even if an individual has disclosed their gender identity or sexual orientation to some members of the 4-H community, 4-H shall not disclose this information to others. Inclusivity training for 4-H staff and volunteers is suggested as well as creating opportunities to discuss how to implement non-discrimination policies. These discussions and trainings will help prepare staff and volunteers to address questions, concerns, harassment, and bullying that may occur.

### **12. Is it appropriate to notify youth members and/or parents of other youth members that a transgender or intersex individual will be participating in 4-H?**

No. Gender identity and sex assigned at birth are considered personally identifiable information, which must be kept confidential. Protecting transgender and intersex individuals' privacy is critical to maintaining safety and well-being, ensuring that individuals are treated in a way that is consistent with their gender identity, and preventing potential harm. The same is true for sexual orientation. 4-H staff should inform all parents and youth members about the inclusive environment and non-discrimination policy of the Land-grant University. If parents or youth members are uncomfortable with these policies, they may decide to limit their participation in 4-H.

### **13. What tips do you have for addressing questions from youth members about individuals who identify as transgender?**

It is important to provide opportunities for positive discussion and educational moments as they arise. At the same time, it is also necessary to protect the privacy of individuals. Keep discussions generic, referring to "people" rather than a specific person. With younger members, a fairly simplistic discussion is often the most appropriate. For example:



*Young Member: Why does that boy dress like a girl?*

*4-H Volunteer/Staff: I don't know about that member's experience. We often think there is one way to dress like a girl and one way to dress like a boy. But really, people can dress in lots of different ways. In 4-H, we want people to be comfortable to dress like themselves. What do you like to wear?*

For older members, it may be helpful to provide more information. For example:

*Older Member: Last year, that member stayed with us in the girls' section. Why is she staying in the boys' section this year?*

*4-H Volunteer/Staff: I don't know about that member's experience but sometimes people are assigned female at birth and as they grow up they realize that they feel like a boy. Sometimes people are assigned male at birth and as they grow up they realize that they feel like a girl. Sometimes people grow up and realize that they don't feel like a boy or a girl. There are lots of ways people can feel about who they are. In 4-H, we want everyone to feel comfortable being themselves.*

#### **14. A youth member (or members' parents/guardians) contacted 4-H to say that they do not want to share sleeping accommodations with a youth who identifies as transgender. What is the most inclusive response?**

As mentioned above, it is a great practice to let all campers indicate who they would prefer to share a room/cabin with. Regardless of sex and gender identity, people are often most comfortable in shared sleeping spaces when they select their own roommates.

You should also inform the individual that you are required to follow the respective state Land-grant University's non-discrimination policies. According to these policies, 4-H does not disclose information about individuals' gender identity. Additionally, these policies state that a youth refusing to share sleeping accommodations with another youth who identifies as transgender is discriminatory. While 4-H members (or their parents/guardians) may choose not to participate in the 4-H event/camp, the 4-H program will not allow discrimination against any individual, despite objections or concerns from staff, faculty, youth members, adult volunteers, families, or other community members. Additionally, you may provide the contact information for the state's Title IX officer if someone continues to raise objections to the non-discrimination policy and how it influences University Extension programs, such as 4-H.

#### **15. A parent/guardian of a 4-H member called and wants to know why, in their opinion, the 4-H Program is putting the rights of children who identify as transgender over the rights of their child. What is the most inclusive response?**

4-H provides equal opportunities for all youth and families to participate in 4-H programming. Ensuring full participation for members who identify as transgender does not infringe on the rights or opportunities of other members. While a youth (or youth's parent/guardian) may decide to limit their own participation, 4-H will not allow discrimination against any individual, despite objections or concerns from staff, faculty, youth members, adult volunteers, families, or other

community members. Provide the contact information to the state's Title IX officer if someone continues to raise objections to the non-discrimination policy. Families/individuals who object to the non-discrimination policies and decide to participate in 4-H anyway should be advised about prohibition of harassment. University personnel should also be aware that these families may present a higher risk to an individual who identifies as transgender.

## Responding to Concerns and Complaints

### 16. What is the appropriate response to a report that an individual is being harassed because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression?

Whether this report comes directly from the individual, someone else, or direct observation, a thorough response is required. All 4-H programs must provide a safe environment free of harassment based on an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. If harassment occurs, intervention should occur immediately. A single offensive comment should be discussed and a review the 4-H code of conduct and the state's non-discrimination policies shall be implemented. Failing to treat individuals in a way that is consistent with their gender identity, including using their expressed names and pronouns, may constitute harassment. If harassment continues, 4-H personnel should immediately stop the harassment, prevent the reoccurrence, and engage in appropriate corrective action. In all cases, take steps to ensure the individual who experienced the conduct is secure and safe, and check in with them regularly to make sure the behavior has stopped. All reports of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment or sexual violence must be reported to the state's affirmative action compliance & Title IX officer (or similar respective title).

For more information on how to report harassment and discrimination go to:  
[caringcommunity.cornell.edu/report-concerns/](https://caringcommunity.cornell.edu/report-concerns/)

### 17. How can someone file a complaint in regards to the non-discrimination policy?

Share the state's non-discrimination policy in materials distributed to 4-H families. Provide the contact information for the respective state's affirmative action compliance & Title IX officer including phone number and email address. For more information on how to report harassment and discrimination go to the respective state Land-grant University's compliance website:

<https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/policy/policies/prohibited-bias-discrimination-harassment-sexual-misconduct>

## Non-Discrimination Policy of Cornell Cooperative Extension

Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.

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