

# LGBTQ INCLUSION IN PUBLIC GARDENS: A TOOLKIT

A Project Report

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Public gardens increasingly recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion in their work. This toolkit provides concrete ways to address LGBTQ inclusion in gardens. It explains the importance of LGBTQ inclusion, including the challenges LGBTQ people face and the perspectives they can bring to an organization. A description of tools that other organizations have developed with explanations for how gardens can use those tools, including workplace protections, museum LGBTQ inclusion, and considerations for local communities is included. Finally, the toolkit provides summaries of four gardens in different phases in their LGBTQ inclusion journeys, from having LGBTQ inclusion as a small consideration in a broader diversity and inclusion plan to developing specific policies and programming welcoming the LGBTQ community to the garden.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Trey is receiving a Master of Professional studies degree in Horticulture, with a concentration in Public Garden Leadership, from Cornell University. Trey obtained their Bachelor of Science in Plant Sciences from Cornell University in 2012. They are particularly interested in education and outreach in public gardens, as well as expanding diversity and inclusion efforts at gardens.

Trey came out as queer in 2008 and as genderqueer in 2009, and at that time decided to make LGBTQ advocacy a major part of their life. At the same time, they found that science seemed to have less room for their LGBTQ identity than other fields. After several years of searching, Trey came to the public garden field as a place they can combine their science background, interest in social justice, and desire to pursue education and outreach. They hope no one else feels turned away from science the way they did, and hopes to help others make their fields more welcoming.

This project is dedicated to those who have fought for LGBTQ justice and who have gotten us where we are today. I also remember those who lost their lives to anti-LGBTQ violence and oppression.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Why should gardens care about social justice?” Someone asked me that question after I talked about my work with LGBTQ inclusion in public gardens. I tried my best to answer at the time: we have a responsibility to serve the public interest, and that includes those who face discrimination and oppression, I told them. But there was more I did not have time to say. Public gardens, like many institutions, are often complicit in discrimination and bias, though they may not intend to be. Gardens have to work to overcome perpetuating oppression. I also believe that, as cultural institutions, we have a further responsibility to set an example and be a source of social change. Other garden professionals are increasingly realizing this, addressing topics like racism as they come to the forefront in American discourse.

In many ways things for LGBTQ Americans have improved, yet 2021 is a record year for state-level anti-transgender legislation (Krishnakumar 2021). What’s more, the legislation primarily targets transgender youth, an already incredibly vulnerable population. The fight for LGBTQ justice is an ongoing struggle, and public gardens must recognize their role in addressing their own biases and pushing forward positive change within their organizations and public work.

### *The Purpose of this Toolkit*

This toolkit is meant to help people working to improve LGBTQ inclusion at public gardens. Anyone, including board members, staff, and volunteers, may be able to find a way to use this toolkit in their LGBTQ inclusion work. Like many of the



resources I draw from, the recommendations herein could be applied more broadly to other organizations such as museums, nature centers, and parks. Contained within are a rationale for why LGBTQ inclusion in public gardens matters, existing resources and my analysis of how to apply those resources to gardens, and case studies of other gardens which are doing LGBTQ inclusion work.

In focusing on public gardens, I recognize gardens as workplaces, where employees make a living and pour their passions, and as cultural centers, where visitors come for personal wellness and growth. LGBTQ inclusion is important at all levels of a garden's operation, from their leadership to their volunteers and from their facilities to their community outreach.

#### *A Note on Terminology*

I use many different terms familiar to the LGBTQ community but that others may be unfamiliar with. A glossary is provided (on page 46) to define terms. An appendix (on page 49) also includes additional resources, noted by superscripts, that readers may find useful, including PFLAG's thorough glossary of LGBTQ terminology<sup>1</sup>. A broader explanation of two particular terms: "LGBTQ" and "diversity and inclusion" is below.

I chose to use the term "LGBTQ" in this document. LGBTQ stands for **L**esbian, **G**ay, **B**isexual, **T**ransgender, and **Q**ueer. There are many different variations on acronyms that represent the LGBTQ community, to include everyone whose gender and/or sexuality falls outside of cultural or societal norms (i.e., straight and

cisgender). This includes people who are questioning or uncertain, people who are asexual and aromantic (not experiencing sexual or romantic attraction), indigenous two-spirit people, and many more identities and ways of experiencing sexuality and gender. I recognize the importance of adequately representing all of gender and sexual diversity, while at the same time I understand how the various acronyms can be confusing. I have increasingly observed U.S. organizations using LGBTQ and LGBTQ+ today and therefore have limited my use to the acronym LGBTQ in this paper.

There is also a lot of different terminology around diversity and inclusion. The American Public Gardens Association (the Association) primarily uses “inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility,” or “IDEA.” Each word within the acronym has different meanings and connotations and could also include terms like “justice,” “belonging,” “equality,” and others. For simplicity, I primarily use the term “diversity and inclusion” or D&I for short. For me, true diversity and inclusion requires addressing historical injustices, systemic oppression, and long-held biases. It goes beyond existence and acceptance of difference, but embracing it.

### *LGBTQ Inclusion in the United States*

When I began working on this action project in 2019, the US presidential administration was hostile to LGBTQ people in addition to targeting immigrants, people of color, the poor, and many other marginalized groups with harmful policies and rhetoric. The Trump administration issued executive orders targeting LGBTQ

people, issued policy changes from various departments, and removed important information about LGBTQ people from government websites (HRC n.d. a). Now, in 2021, there is a more supportive presidential administration, including President Biden being the first to mention transgender people in his acceptance speech (Lang 2020). Despite promise at the federal level, there are a record number of anti-transgender bills moving through state legislatures (Krishnakumar 2021). Prominent figures, including famous authors (Gilchrist 2020), argue against the rights and humanity of LGBTQ people, particularly the transgender community. We have a lot of work to ensure justice for LGBTQ people, and without that work we risk moving further backwards.

#### *Diversity and Inclusion at Museums and other Cultural Institutions*

Museums in the U.S. seem to be ahead of public gardens as a whole when it comes to addressing diversity and inclusion. Some of this is related to museums more commonly showcasing people and cultures. Along with that comes reckoning with mistakes of the past, including appropriating things of importance from non-white peoples, and presenting biased views of non-white cultures (Simpson 2009). The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) created a Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) committee in 2017 and they have put together various resources for DEAI in the museum field<sup>2</sup>. What's more, the AAM created an LGBTQ+ Alliance that predates the DEAI task force, having published their first *Welcoming Guidelines for Museums* (which I cover in Chapter 3) in 2016<sup>3</sup>. Public gardens can build from the work of museums as we seek to address LGBTQ inclusion in our field.

### *Diversity and Inclusion at Public Gardens*

The focus on diversity and inclusion in public gardens starts with individual gardens. Gardens' D&I practices and policies vary widely, with some gardens having D&I principles in their mission and founding, while others have limited or no D&I principles. Most fall somewhere in between, particularly given recent US events around police brutality against the Black community pushing the conversation forward. Some have just started having conversations about D&I; some have formed committees or have events planned; and some have been implementing changes to make their gardens more inclusive.

The American Public Gardens Association (the Association), the primary professional organization for public gardens in North America, is relatively early in its own focus on D&I. A few years ago, they formed an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) committee and began working on resources for gardens to implement IDEA principles. In 2019, the Association centered IDEA in its annual conference. While these conversations are still in early stages, with progress and setbacks as any major effort goes, the Association leadership and so many of the community are committed to advancing IDEA principles. According to the Association website, "The American Public Gardens Association's IDEA Committee is dedicated to finding, evaluating and creating diversity resources for the Association through an equitable, diverse, accessible, and inclusive culture where the contributions of all community members are valued, respected and appreciated" (American Public Gardens Association n.d.).

In addition to the 2019 Conference, the IDEA Committee has done some work in advancing D&I in public gardens. There are various resources on the Association website by member gardens that the IDEA committee promotes, though at the time of publishing this toolkit the resources were not yet fully consolidated in one location. Such resources can be found by browsing the Association website<sup>4</sup>. In October 2020, the IDEA committee created a discussion forum for IDEA within public gardens, accessible to members of the Association, and the committee is exploring other ways of promoting already existing and new resources. Members of the Association can access the forum by logging in to the Communities page<sup>5</sup> and navigating to the IDEA forum.

## CHAPTER 2: WHY LGBTQ INCLUSION MATTERS TO PUBLIC GARDENS

### *Diversity and Inclusion Broadly*

Many leaders and researchers recognize the value of diversity. Cheruvelil et al. (2014) demonstrate the value of a diverse team when collaborating on research, particularly when coupled with teaching and practicing interpersonal skills. They point to communication, problem solving, and creativity as key research outcomes supported by diversity (32). Kassam (2009) uses his human ecological lens to frame the value of human diversity. According to Kassam, “human ecology describes the relationship between people and their environment” (65). The human ecological lens demonstrates the deep connections between the biological and the cultural. It includes four aspects: diversity and perception, relations, context, and phronesis. Diversity is “the foundation of sensory perception and is the basis of knowledge” (69). To Kassam “the notion of diversity asserts a pluralistic world – an earth made up of relations between many interacting things. Conservation of diversity is not just an ideal to strive for, but a practical necessity. In fact, in the twenty-first century it is urgent for the survival of humanity and all life on this planet.” Relations include social systems and connections to other organisms and the nonliving environment (69-70). Our experience is subjective, based on environment, and our relations depend on context (72-73). Phronesis is practical wisdom, including facts and practical knowledge rooted in actions (75). All four aspects of the human ecological lens are intimately linked, and they all connect to why LGBTQ inclusion matters to public gardens and beyond.

Gardens hold many missions, including educating people about plants, maintaining connections to the environment, preserving biodiversity, and serving as cultural centers (Rakow and Lee 2015). The very name “public gardens” emphasizes that gardens must reach everyone rather than selecting a closed-off population. The public includes LGBTQ people. Estimates of the number of LGBTQ people vary, but a 2012 study estimates that 3.4% of the U.S. population identifies as LGBT (Heckman 2019). With discrimination, a continued lack of representation of LGBTQ people, and challenges like the AIDS crisis that killed many gay men in the 80s and 90s, I suspect the number would be higher in a more welcoming culture. Further, our genders and sexualities reach across other aspects of diversity, including culture, race, age, ability, and more. With LGBTQ people being part of the public, with there being so many of us, and with us existing in every culture, gardens have a duty to include us in their public mission. Part of that duty includes confronting and combatting the ongoing discrimination LGBTQ people face.

### *Discrimination*

LGBTQ people face discrimination and exclusion across the U.S. and beyond. The situation is more dire for transgender people, and in particular transgender women of color (James et al. 2016). According to the 2015 Transgender Survey, 29% of respondents lived in poverty versus 12% of the general US population (12), 54% of trans K-12 students had been verbally harassed for their gender (11), and 30% of respondents had been mistreated in the workplace because of their gender (12). For

LGBTQ adults broadly, 52% of the LGBTQ population live in states that allow employment discrimination against LGBTQ people, while 56% of the population live in states that do not prohibit discrimination against trans people<sup>6</sup>. Given these somber statistics, LGBTQ inclusion, particularly trans inclusion, is very important. Speaking personally with various public garden professionals, I have heard that public gardens are generally welcoming of gay men, particularly white men, but there are many other people in the LGBTQ community who may feel less welcome. While I could not find specific numbers work about LGBTQ inclusion in public gardens, there is some work regarding LGBTQ inclusion in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), though data is still too scarce (Freeman 2018). Sansone and Carpenter (2020) found that gay men are 12% less likely to hold a STEM degree than straight men.

Beyond more passive forms of discrimination, many politicians overtly target LGBTQ people and rights. The recent Trump administration undid many of the advances of the prior Obama administration by pushing legal briefs and executive orders supporting employers who wish to discriminate against LGBTQ employees, rescinding guidance by the Obama administration saying that Title IX protects transgender people, and removing LGBTQ resources and guidance from many federal websites, among many other issues. Even though the new administration is undoing those changes, anti-LGBTQ bills have been winding through state legislatures in record numbers, particularly targeting trans youth. These continued attacks against LGBTQ people illustrate the importance of building further acceptance and belonging for the LGBTQ community within the United States so rights cannot be so easily



removed. But, in addition to a moral imperative, increasing LGBTQ inclusion in public gardens will also make gardens stronger.

### *Skills and contributions*

LGBTQ diversity offers important perspectives that are critical for survival in the face of climate change and other challenges humans have created. Those perspectives are intimately shaped by our relationships with each other and our environments--we create chosen families and intentional communities and connect across other differences. Our relations and very existence is shaped by our context – by our history, by social and political realities, by where we live, and so much more. All of these lead to unique ways of knowing that can help public gardens be more inclusive. We have the knowledge and experience to build relationships and coalitions, to empathize with others who suffer and who love, and to re-imagine the world in ways necessary to avoid the worst that climate change could bring. Multiple authors, from Stryker (1994) to Heckman (2019), recognize the value of LGBTQ diversity in securing the future of humanity.

LGBTQ people are often excluded, discriminated against, and ignored. Thus, we create communities where we can meet and support each other. Even in places where we experience less discrimination, we need community in order to find each other for love, to seek advice for issues including medical transition, and to support those who are trying to figure out their genders and sexualities. This process of creating chosen families and intentional communities is invaluable for forging

connections outside of queer spaces as well. Sbicca (2012) in “Eco-queer movement(s)” points to multiple examples in recent history where LGBTQ people have formed communities not only where they form relationships with each other, but with the land and other organisms on it. As LGBTQ people exist across cultures, we can help create connections through our shared experience with gender and sexuality (Heckman 2019). Heckman argues that “queer people possess a unique social potential and position that could be leveraged to build empathy and knowledge bridges related to an array of challenges facing the contemporary world.” LGBTQ people have significant “social capital,” which refers to the strength of relationships we have. Being at the intersections of many identities increases our social capital. He also points to our ability to empathize and make nuanced decisions that affect others, derived from facing discrimination and having intersectional identities, as important to helping build coalitions. At the end, he makes a lofty claim that he has “a cosmic suspicion that queer people are nature’s intervention, a plea for humanity to save itself from itself.” While I would not say LGBTQ people are alone in this role, we have immense capacity to help build connections and re-envision the world as we face the immense, human-created challenges before us.

Brady et al. (2019) focus on the strengths the queer community brings to climate justice. They point out the vulnerability of many in the LGBTQ community, with poverty, homelessness, and violence being ever-increasing dangers in the wake of climate change. But this reality means we are on the front lines to understand and tackle the issues climate change brings to our communities. Further, the authors point

to the queer community's resilience, interdependence, and resistance as key strengths. We need these skills as climate change disrupts food security, reduces land area, and otherwise destabilizes what systems are in place. They emphasize that queer liberation and climate justice are intimately linked and must center those who are most vulnerable if we want true climate justice.

While trans people deal with some of the same challenges as other LGBTQ people, we also have some unique experiences and, by extension, commonly have certain skills that are valuable to public gardens. Twenty-five years ago, noted transgender scholar and activist Susan Stryker (1994) wrote about rage that stemmed from the gross mistreatment, violence, and erasure that trans people have faced. To her, this rage was important for changing the world and challenging the structures that disenfranchise trans people. Just as structures challenge trans people, systems and structures are changing Earth's climate and threatening everyone's ways of life. We, as people in industrialized nations, have to make major changes to our ways of life if we want any hope of curbing the threat of a warming planet. In a 2019 interview Stryker emphasized trans folks' ability to change and adapt because of having to transition between genders and live in a culture that often challenges our very existence (Sanders 2019). Sanders says of Stryker's work, "Transness, by Stryker's logic, exists as a metaphor for our profound capacity to remake ourselves and the world around us into a more livable reality." She goes on to quote Stryker, who was speaking hypothetically to others facing climate change, "Look, I know that combating climate change means we need to have a really different relationship to

consumption and pleasure, and movements and relationality. You know what? As a trans person, I got you.”” The transgender community navigates radical shifts in how we interact with the world as we work to legitimize our gender and how the broader culture responds to that deviance from cultural expectations. With public gardens needing to take a central role in educating about and responding to climate change, trans people are uniquely situated to teaching others how to fundamentally change how they live and learn to survive.

### CHAPTER 3: EXISTING RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ INCLUSION

The LGBTQ movement in the United States is many decades old, with the first LGBTQ rights organization started in 1924 (CNN 2020). In that time, people have developed many different resources to help others become more LGBTQ inclusive. While none so far have specifically targeted public gardens, here I have compiled useful tools made for organizations to become more welcoming to LGBTQ people. Some tools broadly apply to businesses and not-for-profit organizations, while a few are geared toward the museum field (including public gardens). These resources were compiled after speaking with staff at public gardens and museums to see what they have used, in addition to filling in gaps with further research. I have prioritized freely available resources, though I also mention paid consulting and training resources.

In addition to sharing the location of the resource itself, I share my analysis of it, including potential strengths and weaknesses in applying the information to public gardens. Please note that I do not necessarily endorse everything the organizations who produced these documents do, and in fact I have reservations about the actions of several. Regardless, these documents can serve as a valuable starting point for making a public garden more inclusive of LGBTQ people.

#### The Human Rights Campaign's *Corporate Equality Index*<sup>7</sup>

Representative from multiple organizations I interviewed mentioned the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and their Corporate Equality Index (CEI) as they explored developing LGBTQ inclusion policies and recommendations.

The HRC is the largest LGBTQ advocacy group in the US, with 289 employees and 6,867 volunteers in 2017 (IRS 2017). Each year since 2002, the HRC has published the CEI, a 100-point system for evaluating a corporation's LGBTQ policies. The CEI is split into four major sections analyzing different parts of an employer's inclusivity, with the first three sections providing between 30 to 40 points for full workforce protections, inclusive benefits, and an inclusive culture. The fourth section addresses an employer's potential anti-LGBTQ actions outside of the first three sections, which can cause a workplace to lose up to 25 points for such offenses. In 2020, 1,059 "major businesses" (not explicitly defined in the report) filled out the CEI survey and were included in the CEI report, including 359 Fortune 500 businesses (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2020). Six hundred and eighty-six of those businesses earned a perfect score of 100% in the CEI, meaning that they fulfilled all of the criteria set forth in the CEI. The HRC also analyzes Fortune 500 companies that do not fill out the CEI, and gives some perspective on companies that choose not to actively support the LGBTQ community.

The CEI is a useful resource for public gardens to examine their workplace policies and to compare themselves to currently used LGBTQ inclusion practices at businesses. Gardens can implement the policies listed within the CEI, with some customization as appropriate to the specific garden. The CEI has already greatly contributed to improved workplace policies for LGBTQ people in the for-profit sector, and many non-profits have drawn from its recommendations. It also provides some examples for how some businesses have implemented each criterion of the Index.

While the CEI is useful for any employer, many of the policies are easier to implement for larger organization than for smaller ones. Additionally, some of the aspects of the CEI are more geared toward for-profit organizations than non-for-profit ones, like public gardens. The CEI also focuses on “what” to do versus “how” to do. It will take some effort on the garden’s part to adequately implement workplace policies. Finally, policy is a starting point rather than an ending point. Inclusive policies are necessary, but further education and efforts are needed to create an inclusive workplace culture. Regardless, by implementing and adapting policies the HRC evaluates in the CEI, gardens can make their workplace more welcoming of LGBTQ employees.

#### *Analysis of the HRC CEI Guidelines*

The Corporate Equality Index has four major criteria with sub-criteria in most of the sections. Here I list the criteria and discuss their importance to and/or challenges for public gardens.

##### 1. Workplace protections

Non-discrimination policies and practices are the barest minimum for any organization. It is essential to have a non-discrimination policy that specifically prohibits types of discrimination (e.g., race, gender, veteran status) to protect employees and to make potential employees aware that the organization pays attention to their identities and concerns (and such a policy should specifically include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression). Policy alone is not enough, and

must be enforced. There must be a way for any violations of such policy to be addressed in an effective and timely manner. Note that local, state, federal, or other regulations may already require LGBTQ protections—the organization should have policies and procedures in place regardless because it sends a stronger message and does not depend on changing political climate for protecting employees.

## 2. Inclusive benefits

The CEI requires that all benefits be inclusive of LGBTQ employees, both for sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. It spells out both soft benefits and medical benefits. For example, if an employee is able to receive flexible hours to care for an ill different-gender spouse, an employee with a same-gender partner should have access to that same benefit. The CEI also requires benefits both for same-gender spouses and domestic partners. Even though marriage is currently legal for same-sex partners in the U.S. (after the 2015 Supreme Court case *Obergefell v Hodges*) a new Supreme Court decision could overrule that decision. Further, people have many potential reasons not to get married, regardless of gender, and by allowing domestic partner benefits an employer can be inclusive of a wider range of family types without worrying about legal definitions of marriage.

One of the largest points of focus of this section is health care benefits, particularly for transgender employees. Should your garden provide health insurance to its employees, it is very important to work with the healthcare vendor to ensure that the policy completely covers care for transgender employees, including routine care and



care related to medical transgender-related transition. Routine care should not be limited by legal sex or gender, and instead should be based on a patient's needs. Transgender people of any gender may need mammograms for breast cancer screening, transgender women may need prostate exams, transgender men may need access to fertility and reproductive care, and more. Some health insurance policies historically included overt exclusion of transition-related care. These exclusions are mostly illegal in the United States, per the National Center for Transgender Equality, "Federal and state law prohibits most public and private health plans from discriminating against you because you are transgender. **This means, with few exceptions, that it is illegal discrimination for your health insurance plan to refuse to cover medically necessary transition-related care**" (bolding theirs) (NCTE 2020). Regardless of legality, organizations should seek to make their benefits as inclusive as possible for transgender employees. The CEI specifically calls for clear communication of inclusive policies. "Plan documentation must be readily available to employees and must clearly communicate inclusive insurance options to employees and their eligible dependents" (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2020, 30). The HRC specifically mentions the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care for reference<sup>8</sup>. If a garden cannot work with a current health insurance provider to provide transgender-inclusive healthcare policies, it is necessary to find other vendors. Note that, should the garden have the option, being more inclusive of criteria and related procedures is better than following the bare minimum care as specified by WPATH. Some transgender advocates consider the

WPATH to be much too restrictive. If possible, policies that follow informed consent procedures for transition-related care are a viable and more inclusive alternative. Such a model is discussed by Cavanaugh et al. in their article “Informed Consent in the Medical Care of Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Patients” (2016). As they discuss, excessive barriers to transition-related care can cause challenges for transgender people who require that care. Also, a model that prioritizes the transgender patient’s wishes allows for better care. While it is beyond the scope of this toolkit to delve deeper into specific medical concerns, I strongly recommend reaching out to transgender healthcare advocates while evaluating and selecting healthcare policies.

3. “Supporting an Inclusive Culture and Corporate Social Responsibility”
  - a. “Three LGBTQ Internal Training and Education Best Practices”
  - b. “Employee group –or– Diversity Council”
  - c. “Three Distinct Efforts of Outreach or Engagement to Broader LGBTQ Community”
  - d. “LGBTQ Corporate Social Responsibility”

This set of criteria is important for creating an LGBTQ-inclusive culture, as it goes beyond policy and actually includes action steps (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2020, 30-31). It is also potentially difficult for smaller employers, who usually have limited resources for employee training and engagement, to implement these criteria. Gardens should provide LGBTQ inclusion training, with specific topics

and level depending on the needs of their employees. The level of need and available resources will determine whether such a plan is aspirational or should be immediately prioritized.

Many larger businesses and organizations have identity-specific employee groups commonly known as an Employee Resource Group (ERG), including for LGBTQ Employees. These groups are sometimes just for people with the identities represented by the group, while others include allies. For LGBTQ groups, allies are included in part to increase support and in part to make a space safer for LGBTQ employees who aren't necessarily out (that is, open to others about being LGBTQ). In groups meant just for LGBTQ employees, typically the membership is private to maintain confidentiality. ERGs can be spaces for employees to come together to form community, to address challenges, and to make recommendations to the employer. For more information about LGBTQ ERGs, the Human Rights Campaign has additional resources<sup>9</sup>.

Unfortunately, many gardens are too small for maintaining separate employee resource groups. Some gardens that are part of larger organizations, such as governments (e.g., the Smithsonian) or universities (e.g., Cornell) have ERGs available to all of their employees. As an alternative to an ERG, the HRC requires a diversity council. Many public gardens have formed diversity committees, where members evaluate the culture and needs of the garden regarding diversity and inclusion. Such a committee should make sure to include LGBTQ issues in its work.

#### 4. “Responsible Citizenship”

This particular category exists to address an organization’s anti-LGBTQ practices that may not be addressed by other aspects of the CEI. The most public examples of this include organizations that donate to anti-LGBTQ organizations and hate groups and may include vocally anti-LGBTQ leaders and efforts at undermining LGBTQ inclusion. This criterion could very well apply to gardens and other organizations. For example, having vocally anti-LGBTQ members of the board or other leadership reflects poorly on an organization and can create a hostile environment for LGBTQ people. Additionally, it is unacceptable for leadership in various organizations to block or even retaliate against efforts to improve diversity and inclusion by employees.

#### The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) LGBTQ+ Alliance

The AAM LGBTQ+ Alliance (sometimes referred to as the LGBTQ Alliance) focuses on expanding “diversity, equity, inclusion and inquiry with particular respect to sexual orientation and gender identity within museums” (LGBTQ Alliance 2019a, 4). They serve as a community for LGBTQ and allied museum professionals as well as addressing challenges within the museum field. To date they have published multiple documents aimed at expanding LGBTQ inclusion in the museum field.

In 2018, the AAM LGBTQ+ Alliance formed a transgender task force to address issues specific to trans people in the museum field. As they state in an introductory letter in their “Guides to Gender Transition in the Museum Field,” the existing LGBTQ+ Alliance was not doing enough work to address transgender issues

despite focusing on LGBTQ issues (2019b, 1). This is a recurring issue in LGBTQ activism, where organizations and advocates prioritize addressing issues pertaining to sexual orientation at the expense of addressing transphobia. It is very important to address, and given the current political climate and advances as I describe briefly in chapter 1, priority must be on addressing issues that transgender people face. Through the task force in 2018, the LGBTQ+ Alliance created three excellent guides for transgender inclusion in the museum field that I will address later in this section.

I had the opportunity to speak with a member of the AAM's LGBTQ+ Alliance, and he offered some background and advice for addressing LGBTQ inclusion in gardens and other museums.

He said people seeking LGBTQ inclusion should start by joining and/or building their communities. The work often cannot be done alone and there are usually others dealing with the same issues. Look toward the local LGBTQ chamber of commerce, local chapters of professional organizations, and other civic and professional groups focused on LGBTQ inclusion. On chambers of commerce, he noted that the for-profit world often moves more quickly than nonprofits, meaning we might look to them for advances in diversity and inclusion.

D&I principles generally cannot be imposed—they must be intimately worked into an organization including coalition-building and a change in culture. Also recognize that the work often reaches across communities, with everyone's different identities intersecting, and that diversity and inclusion is certainly not uniquely LGBTQ. This work is slow, and works much better when there are partners in the struggle. He also

emphasized that this work cannot be done with logic and common sense alone, but must include emotions and feelings. Finally, he mentioned the importance of getting boards to support diversity and inclusion to truly create change in an organization.

The American Alliance of Museums LGBTQ+ Alliance “Welcoming Guidelines for Museums”<sup>10</sup>

The AAM LGBTQ+ Alliance’s “Welcoming Guidelines for Museums” (hereafter referred to as the Welcoming Guidelines) specifically reference the AAM’s Core Standards for Museums<sup>11</sup>, which are standards that cover all aspects of a museum’s operation. These standards include several broad categories: public trust and accountability, mission and planning, leadership and organizational structure, collections stewardship, education and interpretation, financial stability, and facilities and risk management.

The LGBTQ+ Alliance went through the Core Standards and found every aspect of them where LGBTQ inclusion can apply to a museum’s operation. The LGBTQ+ Alliance has made two versions of the Welcoming Guidelines, first in 2016 and updated in May 2019. It is essentially a checklist, and while not every point will apply to all institutions, it contains valuable considerations for how to implement LGBTQ inclusion at all levels of a museum’s operation. As they state, “The Welcoming Guidelines are envisioned as a checklist /assessment tool that can be applied by individual LGBTQ museum professionals and allies as a resource to effect

change at institutions that serve LGBTQ persons and families” (7). They emphasize that museums are workplaces as well as cultural institutions.

The Welcoming Guidelines are broad rather than deep, telling museums *what* to do but not necessarily *how*. It is up to each institution to decide if and how the individual guidelines apply and how to incorporate them. The Welcoming Guidelines also repeat many of their ideas across the different sections. For example, a non-discrimination and non-harassment policy comes up multiple times because it applies to guest experience, employee experience, education, and more. It serves as a reminder of the power and importance of certain actions museums can take for LGBTQ inclusion, as well as emphasizing that such actions need to reach as broadly as possible. As museums of living collections (plants), many aspects of the Welcoming Guidelines are relevant and important for public gardens. While not all sections apply equally to all institutions, the Welcoming Guidelines are meant to be made relevant to your garden or museum.

Below I highlight a few aspects of the Welcoming Guidelines and point out areas where I think many gardens could act.

*Section A. “Public Trust and Accountability.”*

“The effectiveness of a museum is directly related to the public’s perception of its integrity. In order for LGBTQ persons to trust, attend and support museums generally, we need to see that institutions exhibit and obey ethical standards for making choices that are respectful to LGBTQ individuals, families and interests.” (13)

This section emphasizes ways that museums should cater to their communities, support the public, and comply with law. The LGBTQ+ Alliance highlights LGBTQ people as being part of museum audiences. For example, they emphasize inviting all kinds of family structures to family events, rather than limiting these to heterosexual couples with children. The Alliance also emphasizes that, in committing to public accountability, museums must make an extra effort to be welcoming to LGBTQ people given the historical exclusion that we have faced. They finally emphasize developing and adhering to strong non-discrimination and active inclusion efforts.

*Section C. "Leadership and Org Structure."*

This section emphasizes addressing a museum's culture and diversity at all levels, including advice to actively recruit LGBTQ employees and to continue supporting them from orientation to committees to employee training. As they explain, leadership is expected to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, including LGBTQ people and concerns (18).

*Section D. "Collections Stewardship."*

(D2): Gardens need to make sure to respect LGBTQ peoples' families and identities when they consider accepting collections. This includes recognizing same-gender partners, even if they were not married, and honoring any requests for a transgender donor's name and pronouns change. As the *Welcoming Guidelines* states, "Museums may receive requests from transgender figures, donors and the families or estates of trans individuals to update the names and/or pronouns associated with



materials in their collections” (22). While changing such details may take time and money, it is essential to honor such requests.

Section D.3 is, in my opinion, one of the most important parts of the Welcoming Guidelines. The standard states that “The museum’s collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards” (22). The LGBTQ+ Alliance emphasizes education about LGBTQ people as part of that standard. LGBTQ stories are too often left out of museums and broader history or cultural education. Gardens often educate about cultures, art, and important horticultural figures. It is very important to thoroughly research and include information about LGBTQ people when relevant and done in a respectful manner.

*Section E. “Education and Interpretation.”*

The LGBTQ+ Alliance emphasizes in this section the LGBTQ community as an audience for museums. Museums need to ensure that policies, outreach, and interpretation recognize the needs of LGBTQ people, including feeling safe and welcomed. They highlight the importance of breaking down stereotypes and misinformation when relevant in education and interpretation, providing safe spaces for visitors (with the example of drop-in programs for LGBTQ adolescents), and making sure that LGBTQ education is treated with the same respect as other topics. LGBTQ inclusion should not be an afterthought, but “woven into the fabric of the museum’s productions values” (49).

*Section G. “Facilities and Risk Management”*

This section points out many details that could make a space more welcoming to LGBTQ guests. They include having gender-inclusive bathrooms accessible to visitors, staff, and volunteers, as well as ensuring signage doesn't focus on heteronormative ideas. For example, do not always depict families as a man, a woman, and some number of children. LGBTQ inclusion should be one consideration among many for how signage and facilities are made to be welcoming and accessible.

The American Alliance of Museums LGBTQ+ Alliance Guides to Gender Transition and Transgender in the Museum Field<sup>10</sup>

The AAM LGBTQ+ Alliance, particularly the Transgender Task Force, has created three guides aimed at transgender museum employees, their HR/leadership, and their coworkers. They are titled, respectively, *A Transitioning Professional's Guide to: Gender Transition and Transgender Inclusion in the Museum Field*, *An Institution's Guide To: Gender Transition and Transgender Inclusion in the Museum Field*, and *A Coworker's Guide to: Gender Transition and Transgender Inclusion in the Museum Field*. Each of the guides broadly covers the same topic, but is well-catered to its specific audience and addresses the needs that the audience would be most likely to have.

These guides are invaluable for gardens seeking to improve transgender inclusion. In addition to recognizing museums as workplaces, the guides include advice and policy considerations for interacting with visitors. Often, trans employees in front-line positions must deal with ignorant or even hostile guests, and having

strategies and policies in place for addressing concerns is vital. I highly recommend institutions follow the LGBTQ+ Alliance's advice with these three guides. They should make the *Transitioning Professional's Guide* available to employees and particularly emphasize it when an employee discusses transitioning. Leadership and HR should be familiar with *An Institution's Guide* and use it to create policy for helping transgender employees, particularly referencing it when working with an employee who is transgender. Finally, they should make *A Coworker's Guide* available to all employees and emphasize its importance, particularly when one of their colleagues is transitioning.

*A Transitioning Professional's Guide* (LGBTQ Alliance 2019d)

The *Transitioning Professional's Guide* is geared toward employees who are transgender and, to a lesser extent, to leadership and HR. It begins by giving considerations for when and how a trans museum employee might come out at work. It includes answers to common questions, considerations for museums of different sizes (400+ employees, 100-399 employees, and smaller), and strategies for coming out (including building a support network and working with HR). It, along with the other two guides, provided sample institutional guidelines and transition plans at the end. Institutional guidelines are essentially best practices for museums to broadly follow, while transition plans are catered to an individual transitioning employee. The document covers many important considerations for transgender employees, and

should be provided to any trans employees who have questions or concerns about coming out or transitioning at work (in addition to working with them personally).

*An Institution's Guide* (LGBTQ Alliance 2019c)

The *Institution's Guide* is geared toward leadership and HR within a museum, including sharing introductory information about transgender people and what they experience. It also includes ways institutions can make themselves trans-inclusive, from their language to their policies. One of its chapters is about creating a workplace transition plan for employees in order to address their specific needs and situation (11). The document also provides a list of organizations where leaders can learn more about transgender inclusion (16). Leaders and HR should incorporate the general recommendations from the *Institution's Guide* into their policies and practices, and should reference the guide when seeking to help an employee develop a transition plan.

*A Coworker's Guide* (LGBTQ Alliance 2019b)

The final guide begins by emphasizing how to be an ally to transgender colleagues, making a workplace more trans-inclusive. It also devotes a large portion of the guide to common questions a coworker may have. It is important to know that transgender people often spend a lot of time and energy fielding questions about their experience and gender, including addressing questions or comments that are inappropriate. This guide takes some of the burden off of the trans employee and helps

guide coworkers to appropriate topics and questions. While it might represent a lot of information for someone unfamiliar with transgender people and concerns, the *Coworker's Guide* is invaluable for giving a transgender employee's colleagues a starting place for understanding how to respect and understand transgender people.

### Consultants

Diversity consultants can prove valuable for identifying and addressing specific diversity and inclusion needs for an organization. I strongly suggest making sure any diversity-related consultant is knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues, and in particular transgender issues. Here I provide one example of a transgender-focused consulting company and information that I gained from a presentation I attended.

#### *Transformation Journeys Worldwide (Claiborne 2020)*

In January of 2020, I attended the National LGBTQ Task Force's Creating Change Conference, the largest LGBTQ activist conference in the US<sup>12</sup>. At the conference, I attended a session led by the Atlanta-based Transformation Journeys Worldwide<sup>13</sup>, a business focused on transgender inclusion training. They offered suggestions for how businesses can support transgender employees. Many of their suggestions overlap with those I discussed above, but they also presented several additional transgender-specific recommendations. I am drawing on the part of the presentation given by Gabrielle Claiborne, who focused on workplace policies. My goals of drawing upon her presentation are to re-emphasize details from earlier listed

resources, to cover additional recommendations, and to provide examples of how your garden may have specific needs regarding LGBTQ inclusion that need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Claiborne provided a variety of workplace policies and practices to support transgender employees. She discussed the difference between gender transition guidelines, general policy that is available to all employees, and an individual transition plan, a confidential plan made by working with the specific employee. The above guides by the American Alliance of Museums LGBTQ+ alliance go into more details about such policies and plans. In addition to policies unique to trans employees, Claiborne advised against gendered workplace policies. For example, uniform/attire policies should not specify “men” or “women,” but may specify certain appropriate attire broadly. She also suggested avoiding third person gendered pronouns in employee policies or documents, instead using second-person pronouns in order to better accommodate non-binary employees. For example, instead of saying “An employee should discuss with his or her supervisor...” a policy might read, “You should discuss with your supervisor...” Claiborne emphasized that policies should not single out transgender employees (aside from specifying gender identity and expression nondiscrimination policy), but should instead be applicable to all employees.

Claiborne also discussed health insurance benefits, including making sure there are procedures in place for services that “don’t match binary marker expectations and ‘X’ gender markers.” Some states<sup>14</sup> now allow non-binary people to get an “X” gender

marker on their ID instead of “F” or “M,” which means that systems that rely on binary “male” and “female” designations will fail those non-binary people. Also, as I discussed earlier, medical care should be tied on a patient’s needs and not to their legal sex/gender.

In addition to healthcare access, transgender employees can face barriers navigating other job-related systems. Information Technology systems should accommodate an employee’s legal sex/gender, including the possibility of an “X” marker; they should allow for a listing a preferred name in case someone has not been able to legally change their name; and systems should avoid separating employees based on gender (for example, gender-segregated mailing lists). The “X” gender designation can also affect issues for travel, as most airlines don’t offer official support for it and may require contacting them directly to make travel reservations. To address these potential challenges, Claiborne stressed that there needs to be an avenue of support for transgender employees should they face healthcare, travel, or other job- and benefit-related issues. She recommended designating an individual to support transgender employees. That may be more challenging in a smaller organization, but a challenge that gardens should think of how to address.

## CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

Gardens pursuing LGBTQ inclusion can learn the most from other gardens which have already started doing inclusion work. I spoke to representatives from four different gardens across the U. S., including personally working with Cornell Botanic Gardens. In this section I will share lessons that the gardens have learned in their continued journey to incorporate inclusion and diversity, particularly LGBTQ inclusion, in their work. The gardens I interviewed and worked with are at different stages of their diversity and inclusion work, but have in common a commitment to improving and/or doing specific outreach to the LGBTQ community. Denver Botanic Gardens includes LGBTQ diversity in their diversity and inclusion framework, but haven't done any specific LGBTQ outreach. Vizcaya and Cornell Botanic Gardens have done some LGBTQ inclusion work and are working to expand their efforts. Finally, Queens Botanical Garden has done significant work on LGBTQ inclusion, including transgender inclusion, and is working to improve even further.

### Denver Botanic Gardens<sup>15</sup>

Denver Botanic Gardens has locations in Denver, Colorado (York Street) and Littleton, Colorado (Chatfield Farms). The garden's mission is as follows: "The mission of Denver Botanic Gardens is to connect people with plants, especially plants from the Rocky Mountain region and similar regions around the world, providing delight and enlightenment to everyone." (Denver Botanic Gardens n.d.). Denver Botanic Gardens is a relatively large garden, with 24 acres in Denver plus 700 acres at



their Chatfield farms location, among others. They have 260 staff and originally projected a \$27 million budget for the year. In 2019 they had 1.4 million visitors.

I selected Denver Botanic Gardens for a case study because my faculty advisor, familiar with the garden, suggested them as a great example of a garden that has done important diversity and inclusion work. Unlike the other gardens in my case study, I was not specifically aware of LGBTQ-specific inclusion efforts by the garden. As I discovered, while they don't seem to have specific LGBTQ efforts, sexual orientation and gender identity factor into their diversity and inclusion efforts at large. I spoke with the CEO of the garden, Brian Vogt, in May 2020.

### *Leadership*

Denver Botanic Gardens' first step in addressing diversity and inclusion was for leadership staff and board members to come together and form a D&I committee. They had difficult conversations around "what is diversity?" and topics such as race. After repeated meetings, they became more comfortable having D&I conversations. Now, 40% of their board includes ethnic minorities and it includes multiple LGBTQ community members. They are conscious about the board's diversity, prioritizing, for example, replacing a leaving LGBTQ board member with another member of the LGBTQ community. It is also diverse socio-economically instead of purely prioritizing wealthy donors. According to Vogt, the garden's diversity and inclusion efforts have not hurt their fundraising efforts.

### *Programming and other efforts*

In addition to ensuring that leadership promotes and reflects diversity and inclusion, Denver Botanic Gardens does a few additional things to promote inclusion, including LGBTQ inclusion. They put together a group for the LGBTQ Pride march, and similarly their staff participates in other cultural festivals like Cinco de Mayo. Also, they invite community groups to give a platform for diverse art and performances and they pay those groups for their work. While it can be challenging for gardens to find funding, it is often even more challenging for cultural groups to find funding. Vogt feels that if they are worthy of being invited to the garden, they are worthy of being paid for it.

### *Challenges*

Vogt recognizes that the garden still has work to do for inclusion. Their staff, particularly in some departments (research, conservation, and horticulture) is disproportionately white, though horticulture does have LGBTQ staff members. He pointed that the lack of diversity is reflected in higher education and its inaccessibility for many. Specifically for LGBTQ inclusion, there can be challenges with employees not wanting to be identified as LGBTQ or issues with challenging stereotypes.

### *Additional suggestions*

The final piece of advice that Vogt shared was to “be comfortable being uncomfortable.” You have to be able to have difficult conversations, and as you do those conversations will become easier and, hopefully, more productive over time.

### Vizcaya Museum and Gardens<sup>16</sup>

Vizcaya is located in Miami, Florida. Their mission: “Preserving Vizcaya’s cultural and environmental resources to engage people in connecting with the past, understanding the present and shaping the future.” (Vizcaya n.d.)

I selected Vizcaya for a case study because a former colleague who worked there discussed with me some of the LGBTQ inclusion efforts, including transgender inclusion, that the museum and garden has undertaken. I spoke with two members of Vizcaya’s Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion committee in May 2020.

Vizcaya was originally an estate in a very immigrant-heavy area. They focus on both their historical legacy and their relevance today, including addressing diversity and inclusion. The estate’s initial landscape architect was openly gay and many of the estate staff were immigrants, and both of these communities remain important audiences for the garden. The organization has been in something of a transition, going from being managed by the county to self-managed in 2018. In 2019 they started a diversity committee after focusing on D&I in their strategic plan. Their leadership, including the executive director, is very forward-thinking and supportive of D&I issues, and there is open LGBTQ representation in staff leadership.

### *Diversity and inclusion initiatives*

Vizcaya has taken many different steps to ensuring diversity and inclusion, including for the LGBTQ community. They have staff include their pronouns in email signatures (that is, the third person gendered pronouns that employees use, such as he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, etc.), which required education and buy-in. They have gender-neutral bathrooms for staff and guests. They are currently planning mandatory, staff-wide training on diversity, gender, white privilege, and other relevant diversity and inclusion topics. They draw on local organizations and employees with connections and skillsets, including one staff member who volunteers with an organization that supports trans youth. Vizcaya does targeted outreach for visitors, volunteers, and staff to reflect the populations they want to serve. Finally, while they focus on education and getting people on board, Vizcaya is willing to let staff leave if they continue not to support the organization's values. They make sure they move forward even if not everyone is on board.

### *Challenges*

Vizcaya has faced several challenges to their diversity and inclusion initiatives, including management transition, hurricanes, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These have delayed implementation, but they are still committed and moving forward. It has also taken more time and effort to introduce people to new ideas than initially hoped. Diversity and inclusion work is challenging, and a leader and champion must understand that it takes time and emotional labor to succeed. In particular, teaching

about transgender issues was a challenge, and they are still working toward further transgender inclusion. Finally, their current financial crunch has caused priorities to shift and certain efforts to be pushed back. Overall, they view their efforts as a marathon rather than a sprint.

### *Additional suggestions*

When asked what further suggestions they have for other gardens seeking to improve their LGBTQ inclusion, the Vizcaya staff offered the following advice: Listen to those from marginalized communities about issues that concern them. Commit to constantly learning. Vizcaya has found the Miami Beach Tourist and Convention Center to be helpful, and similar organizations may be useful for other gardens. Diversity and inclusion efforts take time and commitment, so you should start as soon as possible. Being meaningfully inclusive is a philosophy. You must include diversity and inclusion in your organization's mission and structure to fully embrace it. Finally, make sure to budget for diversity and inclusion efforts. If you don't recognize early on that implementing changes takes funding, you will quickly hit a barrier.

### Cornell Botanic Gardens (Cornell University)<sup>17</sup>

Cornell Botanic Gardens has 150 acres of cultivated land and another 3450 acres of natural areas that it manages. It has 37 staff and, on average years, has 8-10 summer interns and close to 200 volunteers. Cornell Botanic Gardens centers

biocultural diversity (the intersection of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity) in their work, including working with the Gayogohó:nq' (Cayuga Nation), the indigenous people who lived first on the land where Cornell is located. For example, Stephen Henhawk, a Cayuga historian, taught a Cayuga language class and for it planted a traditional Cayuga garden at Cornell Botanic Gardens (Hovis 2019). Their mission is “inspiring people—through cultivation, conservation, and education—to understand, appreciate, and nurture plants and the cultures they sustain.” (Cornell Botanic Gardens n.d.)

I worked with Cornell Botanic Gardens staff to organize a couple of events geared at the LGBTQ community in the spring and summer 2020. In addition, for several years before graduate school I was a staff member at Cornell, and was part of the Cornell LGBTQ Colleague Network Group, Cornell’s LGBTQ Employee Resource Group, where I interacted with some Cornell Botanic Gardens staff. This means I am familiar with Cornell University’s diversity and inclusion efforts, particularly as it relates to LGBTQ employees. Finally, I also spoke to several Botanic Gardens staff members, including education and outreach staff, about the garden’s diversity and inclusion efforts between 2019 and 2020. The garden was in early stages of D&I work at the time.

### *Programming*

I helped organize two virtual slideshow tours of Cornell Botanic Gardens geared toward the LGBTQ community. Originally these events were planned to be

walking tours held in-person during the spring and summer 2020, however the COVID-19 pandemic caused us to move the events to a virtual format. Before the pandemic disrupted plans, the spring event was to be in partnership with the Cornell University LGBT Resource Center, QGrads (Cornell's LGBTQ Graduate Student organization), and Nature Rx (an organization focused on getting people outdoors to promote wellbeing), and several other campus partners. We were planning a guided tour focused on early spring wildflowers followed by a reception/social where people could come together in the gardens. There was a lot of enthusiasm from all interested parties, and people agreed that getting students into the gardens while catering an event for the LGBTQ community was a promising idea. The summer event was to be focused on Cornell employees and the broader Ithaca LGBTQ community, including an open house where people could represent their organizations, meet other LGBTQ people and allies, and explore the gardens.

Due to the pandemic, the events ended up being converted to virtual slideshow tours highlighting the major areas of the Botanic Gardens. The tours included information about LGBTQ figures, including Sir Cedric Morris, an artist and iris breeder who was queer. We finished the spring event with a chance for people to talk about their interactions with the gardens. While the events did not happen as originally planned, they showed that there was interest from the LGBTQ community in programming at Cornell Botanic Gardens and from the Botanic Gardens staff in reaching the LGBTQ community. We also helped forge partnerships that can continue in the future.

### *Employees*

Cornell has an LGBTQ Employee Resource Group known as the LGBTQ Colleague Network Group (CNG). Cornell's CNGs encourage only people with identities relevant to the mission of the group, such as being LGBTQ or questioning, to attend the meetings and get-togethers. The LGBTQ CNG gathers monthly over lunch for faculty and staff (mostly staff) to talk about particular topics, to share their experiences, and to meet other LGBTQ colleagues. As a smaller garden that is part of a larger institution, Cornell Botanic Gardens has additional resources from the university in supporting its inclusion efforts. If the gardens were independent, there may not be enough staff for an employee resource group, for example. For more information about Employee Resource Groups, see the previous chapter and related resources in the appendix.

### *Challenges*

The primary challenge I observed and heard about from Cornell Botanic gardens is that they have not yet devoted the time and resources to broadly addressing diversity and inclusion. As with many smaller gardens, it is difficult to add more to most staff members' plates. However, as the garden continues to update their strategic plan, they have committed to making diversity and inclusion a central part of their work. The largest hurdle often seems to be recognizing where to start the work.



### *Additional Suggestions*

It was surprising just how many connections and opportunities there already were for LGBTQ programming at Cornell Botanic Gardens. For example, staff at Cornell Botanic Gardens already worked with staff from the LGBT Resource Center through Nature Rx. For university gardens like at Cornell, students are both a key audience and invaluable for forging connections and organizing events. They, along with other units within the university, can aid with time, funding, advertising, and other logistical needs. Plus, forging and maintaining those connections helps create a stronger and larger LGBTQ community. Additionally, it is important to take the plunge and commit the time and resources to diversity and inclusion work. Without that commitment, the work won't get done. Finally, by centering aspects of D&I in their mission (and by following that mission), Cornell Botanic Gardens has made great strides even with limited resources. Other gardens should examine their own missions and audiences to recognize ways they can incorporate D&I into their daily work.

### Queens Botanical Garden<sup>18</sup>

Queens Botanical Garden (QBG) is located in Queens, New York City, New York. Its mission is as follows: “Queens Botanical Garden... is an urban oasis where people, plants, and cultures are celebrated through inspiring gardens, innovative educational programs, and real-world applications of environmental stewardship.”

(Queens Botanical Garden n.d.) QBG is comprised of 39 acres and, before the

COVID-19 pandemic, the garden had 31 full-time staff, 30-40 part-time staff year-round, 20-30 seasonal staff, and a very large volunteer program.

I selected QBG for a case study because a colleague who was familiar with the garden shared that QBG had, in recent years, taken considerable steps in improving LGBTQ inclusion. In particular, they had expanded their transgender inclusion policies following the transition of an employee. I spoke to an HR representative and an LGBTQ employee who does LGBTQ programming at QBG.

Two events in the last few years have made Queens Botanical Garden (QBG) particularly relevant to my toolkit. In 2015, the city of New York began an initiative to “promote and cultivate diversity among the leadership, staffs, and audiences of cultural organizations in New York City” (City of New York n.d.). Queens Botanical Garden, being a grantee of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, was included in this initiative. They, along with other cultural organizations in the city, were required to develop improved diversity and inclusion efforts. While QBG always included diversity and inclusion in its work, this mandate prompted them to look deeper to assess their diversity and inclusion efforts, in addition to the work they did to support their transitioning employee and future trans employees.

### *Staff*

QBG is in a diverse area of New York City, with many different cultures and languages, which has contributed to their previous diversity and inclusion efforts. More recently, Queens Botanical Garden has made numerous efforts to specifically

improve LGBTQ inclusion among garden staff. They added pronouns to email signatures which the staff members I interviewed pointed out helps even beyond transgender inclusion. Including pronouns in email signatures helps people respect the gender of trans people, of people with names that cross genders, and of people of different cultures whose names may not be familiar to someone. Additionally, they have pronoun pins for staff to help with interactions with guests as well as other staff. During onboarding, they emphasize including pronouns in introductions. They try to recruit and train diverse instructors and staff, including posting to LGBTQ job boards and social media groups. They also have plans to hire a diversity and inclusion consultant as they continue their journey.

#### *Programming and visitor services*

In addition to including pronouns in introductions with visitors, QBG has adjusted their programming specifically for improving LGBTQ visitor experiences. They updated their bathroom signage to be more welcoming of trans and gender non-conforming visitors. For more information about gender-inclusive bathroom practices in the workplace, please see the Society for Human Resource Management<sup>20</sup>.

QBG holds LGBTQ-focused events, including a series of events for Queens Pride (an annual parade and festival to promote LGBTQ awareness and advocacy<sup>21</sup>) the first week of June; drag story hour three times a year (where drag performers read books, usually to children); and tours focused specifically offered to the LGBTQ community. The garden also displays the rainbow flag during pride month, has had

plant displays in pride colors for pride month, and has had staff teams march in the Queens Pride march. They are also seeking to further improve, asking for input from the local LGBTQ community, looking to partner with local organizations, and exploring programming ideas from the broader staff. The Pride month programming worked well both for visitor interest as well as making LGBTQ staff feel like QBG was a place they wanted to work.

### *Barriers*

Despite their success, QBG has faced barriers in their D&I efforts. They found it challenging to collect data, particularly anonymous data, on visitor diversity. They also had challenges with funding for diversity initiatives, and told me that they recognized that unpaid internships limited diversity. For example, studies have found that unpaid internships exacerbate gender, racial, and economic equity<sup>19</sup>. They also were unable to pay the fees to post job descriptions in as many diversity-related job boards as would have been ideal. Being a nonprofit organization, the lack of resources required prioritizing some initiatives and postponing others.

Educating people and addressing concerns can be challenging, and they are still working on how to address, for example, a visitor who expresses an anti-LGBTQ sentiment or makes the environment feel unsafe for LGBTQ staff or visitors. The staff I interviewed mentioned that visitors had expressed anti-LGBTQ sentiments before, albeit rarely, and the garden staff needed a standardized way to respond.

### *Additional suggestions*

When asked what further advice they would have for other gardens seeking to improve their LGBTQ inclusion, QBG staff gave several pieces of advice: gardens should build partnerships in the community. Find ways to connect and learn from community members who have experience and skills related to LGBTQ inclusion. Look internally and ask “How can we improve our garden’s inclusion? How can I, as a part of the garden, improve?” Honestly evaluate concerns and challenges. Work with your staff. They often have knowledge and skills, often outside of their job description, to help engage with diversity and inclusion concerns. Further, it is very helpful to make sure staff is on the same page as leadership and anyone else trying to improve diversity and inclusion. Regarding willingness to learn and engage with diversity and inclusion, “People will surprise you,” they told me.

### Connections and key takeaways from the case studies

Several common themes emerged from the case studies, as well as some intriguing actions that more public gardens could attempt and adapt to their organizations.

1. **All of the gardens seek to work with their local LGBTQ communities and their D&I efforts specifically include LGBTQ employees.** They recognize that they cannot do the work alone, and it is by working with the local LGBTQ community that they will do the best job in reaching that audience and making the changes needed for true inclusion.

2. **All of these gardens place culture and diversity central in their work and mission, focusing on the communities around their gardens.** Several of the gardens have specifically done LGBTQ-focused programming, and it is something more gardens should consider, particularly starting with tapping into allied and often larger LGBTQ organizations (such as at Cornell) or focusing on events like LGBTQ Pride (like QBG). Consider putting together a contingent to participate in local LGBTQ pride events, if there is one, prioritizing inviting your LGBTQ employees and volunteers.
3. **Beyond general LGBTQ inclusion more gardens need to particularly consider transgender inclusion,** such as QBG, which worked with its trans employee and sought outside resources in ensuring their garden was as welcoming and supportive as possible.
4. Finally, **more gardens need to emphasize D&I at all levels including board representation** the way Denver Botanic Gardens does, including intersectional consideration of income, race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The fight for LGBTQ justice is ongoing, with advances and setbacks. Despite victories at many levels, transgender people find themselves particular targets for discrimination and hatred today, and the broader LGBTQ community continues to face oppression and violence. Public gardens have a duty to serve the public interest as places of education and connection to nature, and must play an ever-larger role in helping the public address and respond to climate change. As part of the public, the LGBTQ community cannot be forgotten in public gardens' work. Further, LGBTQ people have particular skills and experience to offer public gardens, especially in the face of climate change. We have often learned to be resourceful, to be resilient, and to build connections and communities. The broader public can look to the LGBTQ community, particularly transgender people, for help in re-imagining ways of living necessary to combat climate change and adapt to a changing world, just as queer and trans people have navigated drastic change and re-imagined gender and sexuality already.

There are many tools and strategies for improving LGBTQ inclusion. Organizations have created resources to learn from and use, like the Corporate Equality Index that gardens can use to improve their workplace policies. The AAM LGBTQ+ Alliance's guides for navigating gender transition for museum employees can further help trans employees, their managers, and their coworkers understand and facilitate an often difficult process. Public gardens can look to the LGBTQ+ Alliance's Welcoming Guidelines to see how LGBTQ inclusion intersects with public

gardens' operation on all levels. Then, as public gardens move from addressing broader concerns to specific diversity and inclusion issues at their respective locations, they can draw upon the expertise of LGBTQ-aware consultants and local organizations for guidance and training.

Last, but certainly not least, public gardens should look to each other for examples of how to improve LGBTQ inclusion. Many gardens have implemented strategies to support the LGBTQ community, from simply including LGBTQ concerns in broader D&I efforts to planning specific outreach events aimed at LGBTQ people. These gardens listen to their LGBTQ employees and local LGBTQ communities and address their needs and concerns. They recognize the importance of LGBTQ leadership and empowering the LGBTQ community. Finally, they prioritize D&I in their work, recognizing that they need to do so to best reach and support their key audiences.

The importance of diversity and inclusion at public gardens is becoming increasingly clear. It is vital that LGBTQ inclusion be part of the discussion and that public gardens understand the needs and contributions of the LGBTQ community. I sincerely hope this toolkit can help public gardens accomplish better LGBTQ inclusion regardless of their current stage in the process.



## Summary of Best Practices

Adopt workplace policies and practices that are inclusive of LGBTQ employees

- Have a robust non-discrimination policy and ways to investigate and address potential violations of that policy
- Ensure that all employee benefits include LGBTQ employees and families
- Form an employee resource group or diversity council and give that group weight in improving LGBTQ inclusion
- Solicit feedback from employees and seek to improve workplace culture
- Encourage employees to include their pronouns in email signatures, nametags, etc.
- Have employee training about LGBTQ issues and identities appropriate to the needs of staff
- Seek to recruit LGBTQ employees by making LGBTQ inclusion efforts visible and seeking candidates through job boards and outreach
- Ensure that policies and practices specifically address the needs of those with intersecting axes of oppression, and not just those with the most privilege within the LGBTQ community
- Create facilities, such as restrooms, that are fully welcoming of transgender staff and guests, including having gender-neutral facilities available and policies that invite everyone to use bathrooms that fit their gender
- Support LGBTQ staff in accessing employee benefits, including health coverage for transition-related care, same-gender partner benefits, etc.

Ensure that garden visitors and programming reflect LGBTQ diversity

- Reach out to the local LGBTQ community to identify needs, interest in the garden, and opportunities for partnership
- Have programming that includes the LGBTQ community, planned in collaboration with the community
- Provide space for the LGBTQ community to put on their own programming, if appropriate to the garden
- Have policies for if and when guests create a hostile environment for LGBTQ people (including other guests and employees)

Leadership

- Recruit and support LGBTQ staff and board leadership
- Empower LGBTQ people, particularly transgender and BIPOC people, to be able to affect change and lead inclusion efforts, including listening to and acting upon their suggestions
- Ensure that a diversity of LGBTQ people contribute to changes and feedback. Ask “whose voice is present?” and “whose voice is missing?” Do further recruiting and outreach to address missing voices.

## GLOSSARY

*Note: While some terms can be used flexibly as adjectives or nouns, try to learn the most common and accepted (by the LGBTQ community) uses of terms. For example, “the gays” or “LGBTs” are not commonly accepted nouns. Instead use them as adjectives like in “gay men” or “the LGBTQ community.” Also note that different members of the LGBTQ community may have different perspectives on these terms. These are how I use the terms in this toolkit. See PFLAG’s website for more LGBTQ-related terminology<sup>1</sup>.*

Aromantic (adj.) – Describes someone who does not experience romantic attraction.

Often described as a spectrum

Asexual (adj.) – Describes someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Often described as a spectrum. Sometimes shortened to “ace.”

Bisexual (adj. or n.) – Refers to someone who is sexually and/or romantically interested in people regardless of gender, but does not necessarily imply equal or constant attraction. Sometimes shortened to “bi.”

BIPOC – Stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color that emphasizes connections and solidarity

Cisgender (adj.) – Describes someone whose gender identity aligns with the gender assigned to them at birth (compared to transgender)

Gay (adj.) – Someone who is interested in people of the same gender. Usually used by people of any gender, but historically sometimes specifically to refer to men

and rarely used to describe the entire LGBTQ community. More inclusive terms (like LGBTQ) are recommended when referring to the broader community.

**Gender (n.)** – A broad term referring to socially constructed roles and behaviors typically associated with certain identities (such as male and female)

**Gender Expression (n.)** – A policy term used to describe the perception of someone’s gender. May include clothing, body characteristics, activities, and more.

**Gender Identity (n.)** – A policy term used to refer to the gender someone identifies with. May be male/man, female/woman, neither/something else, or multiple genders. While the term has legal and policy implications, it is better to simply use “gender” in interpersonal contexts.

**Genderqueer (adj.)** – A non-binary gender identity that refers to someone whose gender falls outside of binary male/female gender.

**Lesbian (adj. or n.)** – Refers to a woman who is attracted to other women.

**LGBTQ/LGBTQ+ (adj.)** – Umbrella terms that often include additional letters describing the community of people whose gender and/or sexuality do not fit social norms.

**Non-binary (nonbinary) (adj.)** – Broad term describing people whose gender does not fit the gender binary of male/female. Sometimes abbreviated “enby”

**Pronouns** – Words used to describe someone other than their name. In this context, usually refers to 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns such as she/her, he/him, they/them, ze/zir,

and others. Sometimes referred to as “preferred pronouns,” but this is a dated term as they are not “preferred,” but essential.

**Queer (adj.)** – A term used by some in the LGBTQ community to mean not-straight or non-cisgender. May be a personal identity, a political identity, or an academic term. Sometimes used broadly to refer to the LGBTQ community, but has also been used historically as a pejorative term so care should be taken before using it this way. Best used to describe someone who self-identifies as queer.

**Sexual Orientation (n.)** – Refers to someone’s sexual or romantic attractions to other people (or lack thereof), typically the gender(s) of people to whom they are attracted

**Transgender (adj.)** – (Shortened “trans”) A broad term that describes having a gender that does not conform to the sex/gender they were assigned at birth. May refer to people who have a binary gender, such as men or women, or people who have a non-binary gender.

**Transition (v.)** – The process of affirming one’s gender identity, typically from being recognized as one gender to another. May include social, legal, and/or medical actions and varies from person to person.

**Transphobia (n.)** – Prejudice, bias, and hatred toward trans people.

**Two-Spirit (adj.)** – A broad term used within some indigenous North American communities to describe some forms of gender and/or sexuality. Specific meanings and identities vary among different cultures.

## APPENDIX

- <sup>1</sup>PFLAG has a robust list of definitions at <https://pflag.org/glossary>
- <sup>2</sup>The American Alliance of Museums resources on D&I can be found at <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/diversity-equity-accessibility-and-inclusion/>
- <sup>3</sup>Information on the AAM LGBTQ+ Alliance can be found at <https://www.aam-us.org/professional-networks/lgbtq-alliance/>
- <sup>4</sup>The American Public Gardens Association's webpage on diversity and inclusion directs to publicly available resources <https://www.publicgardens.org/about-us/IDEA>
- <sup>5</sup>The American Public Gardens Association's communities pages have access to forums on a variety of topics, including IDEA as it relates to public gardens. Accessible to members only. <https://community.publicgardens.org/home>
- <sup>6</sup>The LGBTQ Movement Advancement Project shows the current status of LGBTQ equality across the United States. <http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps>
- <sup>7</sup>The Human Rights Campaign's *Corporate Equality Index* is a valuable tool for evaluating an organization's policies as they relate to LGBTQ employees. For more information see chapter 3. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/corporate-equality-index>
- <sup>8</sup>The World Professional Association for Transgender Health has a list of guidelines for providing healthcare to trans people. <https://www.wpath.org/publications/soc>
- <sup>9</sup>The Human Rights Campaign additional resources for forming Employee Resource Groups: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/establishing-an-employee-resource-group>
- <sup>10</sup>Resources by the AAM LGBTQ+ Alliance, including those discussed in chapter 3, can be found at <https://www.aam-us.org/professional-networks/lgbtq-alliance/resources/>
- <sup>11</sup>The AAM's Core Standards for Museums are directly referenced by the LGBTQ+ Alliance's *Welcoming Guidelines* and can be found at <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/core-standards-for-museums/>
- <sup>12</sup>The National LGBTQ Task Force holds an annual LGBTQ activist conference where many organizations and individuals working toward LGBTQ justice come together. <https://www.thetaskforce.org/creatingchange.html>
- <sup>13</sup>Transformation Journeys Worldwide is a consultation and training organization that focuses on transgender inclusion. I attended a workshop by them at Creating Change in 2020. <https://transformationjourneysww.com/about-us/>
- <sup>14</sup>Lambda Legal provides information on states that allow "X" gender markers on identity documents. Lambda Legal also provides other resources and services regarding LGBTQ legal concerns. <https://www.lambdalegal.org/map/x-markers>
- <sup>15</sup>For more information on Denver Botanic Gardens, visit <https://www.botanicgardens.org/>
- <sup>16</sup>For more information on Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, visit <https://vizcaya.org/>
- <sup>17</sup>For more information on Cornell Botanic Gardens, visit <https://cornellbotanicgardens.org/>
- <sup>18</sup>For more information on Queens Botanical Garden, visit <https://queensbotanical.org/>
- <sup>19</sup>Daniels discusses how unpaid internships undermine D&I efforts at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-unpaid-internships-undermine-diversity-inclusion-daniels-mba-jd>
- <sup>20</sup>The Society of Human Resource Management provides information on The Benefits of Offering Gender Neutral Bathrooms in the Workplace <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/gender-neutral-bathrooms-in-the-workplace.aspx>
- <sup>21</sup>For information on Queens Pride visit <http://www.queenspride.org/howweare>

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