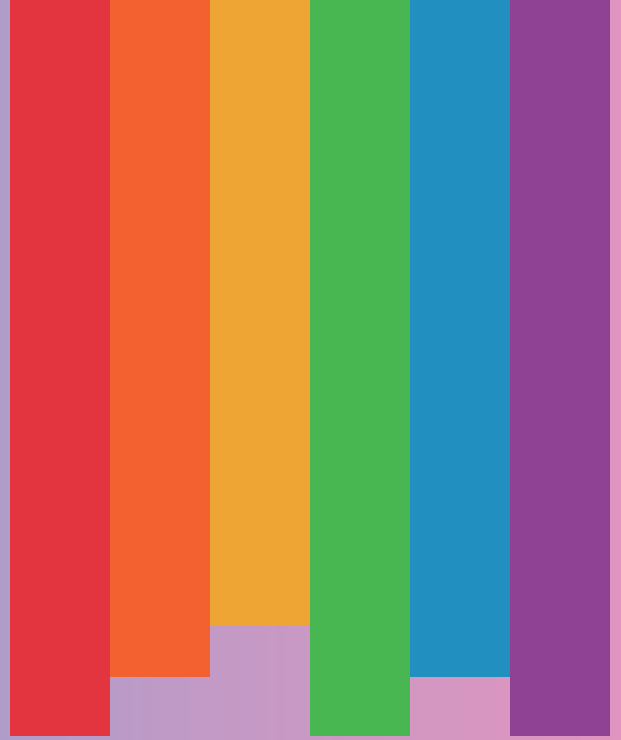


RAISING THE BAR FOR 2SLGBTQ+ YOUTH



Implementing 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion: A Tipsheet for Change Champions in the Youth-Serving Sector

Developed by Wisdom2Action in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Planned Parenthood Toronto, the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, the Child Welfare League of Canada and Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

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INTRODUCTION

2SLGBTQ+ young people deserve access to inclusive and affirming community, health, education and social services across the youth-serving sector. This tip-sheet is geared towards leaders and champions in the youth-serving sector, particularly managers and organizational leadership teams, to support the implementation of 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion in their organizations.

The intention of this resource is to support organizations, wherever they are on their journey, to undertake comprehensive and holistic efforts to embed 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion throughout their organization and organizational culture. The steps laid out are intended to support both organizations already undertaking this work and organizations newly exploring 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. This resource is intended to provide a flexible structure that organizations can draw upon to inform their work on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.



It is crucial to understand that there is no cookie cutter approach to 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. This work must be ongoing. No organization will ever achieve perfection on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, because the needs and realities of 2SLGBTQ+ communities are always evolving, as are organizations. 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion must also engage critically with the distinct realities of diverse 2SLGBTQ+ communities. For example, the needs of cisgender 2SLGBTQ+ young people are often quite distinct from those of trans and gender diverse young people. Similarly, the needs of Black, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ people of colour are often quite distinct from those of white 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Efforts towards 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion must be undertaken alongside broader efforts to address systems of oppression and how such systems intersect with homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia to particularly impact the young people at the intersection of numerous forms of oppression.

Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ communities requires an ongoing commitment to review, refine and evolve our efforts towards inclusion and equity.

CONDUCT PRELIMINARY STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING ON 2SLGBTQ+ INCLUSION

Prior to undertaking comprehensive efforts to embed 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion as a core practice within your organization, which requires active and affirming engagement with 2SLGBTQ+ communities, organizations should undertake preliminary staff and organizational capacity building. Preliminary capacity building should include introductory training on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion for staff members, and preliminary efforts to ensure the organization is able to provide an inclusive environment for 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Initial steps organizations should consider taking include:

- Normalizing the introduction of pronouns in staff meetings, with service-users and while connecting with partners.
- Ensuring the availability of gender-neutral washrooms in your space.
- Having processes to ensure respect for chosen names rather than legal names.

Undertaking preliminary actions to embed 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion in your organization is a crucial step to ensure that engagement with 2SLGBTQ+ communities is undertaken with an awareness of the systematic oppression experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ communities and an understanding of how to ensure meaningful and non-tokenizing engagement that entrenches the safety of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals as a central commitment.



ENGAGE 2SLGBTQ+ YOUTH AND ORGANIZATIONS

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2SLGBTQ+ inclusion cannot take place without meaningful engagement with 2SLGBTQ+ young people and 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations. 2SLGBTQ+ communities have distinct needs and experiences across different identities, cultures and geographic locations. Connecting with local 2SLGBTQ+ communities is integral to understanding the particular realities of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in your region. Organizations must ensure their efforts to engage 2SLGBTQ+ youth are undertaken with care and compassion, without tokenizing 2SLGBTQ+ young people.

2SLGBTQ+ youth and organizations are the best experts in 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. Building authentic and reciprocal relationships with 2SLGBTQ+ youth and organizations helps ensure that your organization is headed in the right direction. Strengthening these relationships builds trust with 2SLGBTQ+ communities, which in turn helps 2SLGBTQ+ young people become more aware of your services, and more likely to trust you to provide inclusive and affirming services. Strong engagement with 2SLGBTQ+ youth and organizations also ensures accountability. Meaningful community engagement builds the trust necessary for hard conversations, and helps ensure that your organization is able to identify and learn from mistakes.

Meaningful engagement with 2SLGBTQ+ communities should include:

- Creating a 2SLGBTQ+ advisory committee with representation from both 2SLGBTQ+ youth and 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations to guide your efforts on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.
- Ensuring 2SLGBTQ+ young people and community members are adequately compensated for their time and expertise while working with your organization.
- Inviting 2SLGBTQ+ youth and members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities to join your board of directors.
- Participating meaningfully in local 2SLGBTQ+ community events.
- Joining local 2SLGBTQ+ networks and similar local bodies committed to improving health and well-being for 2SLGBTQ+ communities.
- Offering space and other resources that may be difficult for 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations to procure to local 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations and groups.
- Exploring opportunities to co-host programs and services.

CONDUCT A 2SLGBTQ+ INCLUSION AUDIT

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One of the first steps to 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion is to assess the present state of inclusion within your organization. A 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion audit is an opportunity to explore strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to improve 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion within your organization. A 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion audit should be led by 2SLGBTQ+ young people and 2SLGBTQ+ community partners, with the fulsome support of organizational leadership teams. The audit team should consider the following:

- Conducting a review of all organizational policies and procedures to identify gaps pertaining to 2SLGBTQ+ communities. This should include revising policies and procedures that may unintentionally reinforce heterosexism and cissexism, and introducing new policies and procedures specific to 2SLGBTQ+ young people. Examples of additional policies to introduce include:
 - Explicit 2SLGBTQ+ anti-discrimination policies.
 - Affirmative hiring policies inclusive of 2SLGBTQ+ communities.
 - Policies pertaining to privacy and confidentiality that explicitly include how to navigate issues of legal names, pronouns and 2SLGBTQ+ identity disclosure.
 - Policies to ensure 2SLGBTQ+ communities are able to utilize the gendered washroom of their choosing.
 - Policies to ensure staff and service-users are addressed with the correct pronoun(s) and that expectations are set within the organization pertaining to respecting pronouns.
 - Policies to ensure trans and gender diverse youth are not required to disclose legal names — except for situations where legal systems require such information — and to entrench chosen name practices seamlessly across the organization.
 - Procedures to support staff who are, or come out as, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community within the workplace.
 - Review staff hiring packages and associated benefits to ensure that benefits are open to members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities, and that the available benefits cover health needs specific to 2SLGBTQ+ communities, such as funds to support access to transition-related services.
 - Additional policies and procedures as determined by members of the 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion audit committee.
- Circulating an anonymous survey to staff members to identify their comfort working with 2SLGBTQ+ communities, the areas where they are confident, and the areas wherein they would value additional education. Include an opportunity for staff to provide feedback on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion within the organization.
- Engaging in a review of all physical spaces where the organization provides programs and services, to identify physical barriers for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and explore opportunities to visibly demonstrate a commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.
- Working with members of the audit advisory committee to simulate the experience of an individual accessing services. Allow members of the advisory committee to complete an intake process and otherwise access your services, and to identify unforeseen gaps and barriers for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.
- Bringing together all of the findings of the 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion audit into a report highlighting strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to improve 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion within your organization.

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CREATE A 2SLGBTQ+ INCLUSION STRATEGY

Utilizing the findings of your 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion audit, and in consultation with the audit advisory committee, develop a strategy to embed 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion in your organization and organizational culture. Identify clear deliverables on a short, medium and long-term basis. Ensure that sufficient financial and staff resources are allocated to implement the 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion strategy.

A 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion strategy is a necessary component to creating a 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive organization. All too often, the burden for 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion is placed upon individual staff members through informal efforts to improve organizational capacity to include and affirm members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Creating a formal strategy with clear deliverables ensures that 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion efforts are intentional, supported by organizational leadership, and provided with sufficient resources to enact necessary changes.

A 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion Strategy should include the following:

- Plans for strengthening relationships with local 2SLGBTQ+ communities and community organizations.
- Plans for ensuring 2SLGBTQ+ young people are meaningfully engaged in the organization's work and have various opportunities both to provide insights on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion and to weigh in on broader issues relevant to the organization's work.
- Comprehensive and ongoing training on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion for staff at all levels of the organization.
- Amendments to existing policies and procedures to ensure 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion is reflected in all aspects of the organization.
- Introduction of new policies and procedures specific to 2SLGBTQ+ communities to entrench 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.
- Exploring the possibility of introducing programming specific to 2SLGBTQ+ young people.
- Processes to identify and support internal staff champions to continue to lead organizational culture change on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.
- Plans for internally and externally communicating your commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.
- Mechanisms for evaluating progress on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.

PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE AND ONGOING 2SLGBTQ+ INCLUSION TRAINING

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Ensure your staff have access to ongoing training and education on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion as a key component of professional development. Provide access to both introductory training opportunities, as well as advanced, role-specific training on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. Organizations often rely on short, one-hour workshops to build the capacity of their staff teams on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. While valuable, these short and introductory training sessions cannot equip staff with sufficient knowledge to meaningfully embed 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion in their practice. Introductory training must be the first of many steps to build the capacity of staff members to support 2SLGBTQ+ young people.

Organizations should ensure all staff, including front-line workers, administrative support staff, managers and others, receive comprehensive 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion training. Training should be gradual and recurring, with ongoing opportunities for staff to strengthen their capacity for 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, and develop greater expertise over time.

Training opportunities should be tailored to the particular needs of your organization, with targeted training offered to staff working in different roles and providing different kinds of services. For example, service providers working in housing supports and homeless shelters will have particular training needs that will differ significantly from those of service providers providing counselling services or child welfare services.

Organizations should ensure 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion training is:

- Curtailed to their specific organizational and staff needs, as identified through the 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion audit.
- Delivered by members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities with experience and expertise in 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. Organizations should ensure that individuals providing training are compensated for their time and expertise.
- Based on a facilitated approach that ensures meaningful discussion and active engagement. Discussion-based approaches are essential to ensure staff members have access to the information they need.
- Strength-based and anti-oppressive, to ensure 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion efforts go hand in hand with broader efforts to address issues such as racism, sexism, ableism and other forms of oppression that shape the lives of youth, 2SLGBTQ+ and otherwise.
- Ongoing, with recurring training sessions to ensure staff members have meaningfully applied concepts learned in previous sessions, and have opportunities to further strengthen their knowledge base.

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EXPLORE THE PROVISION OF 2SLGBTQ+ SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH 2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Connect with local 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations and 2SLGBTQ+ youth to identify gaps in existing programs and services specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ young people. While ensuring all services and programs offered by your organization are 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive is absolutely necessary, organizations should also consider introducing programs and services specific to 2SLGBTQ+ communities, given the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Prior to introducing new programs and services, organizations should connect with local 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations and 2SLGBTQ+ youth to identify existing gaps within the broader youth-serving sector. Organizations should explore the possibility of creating new programs and services in partnership with 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations, and ensure new programs and services are co-designed alongside 2SLGBTQ+ young people.

Prior to introducing new programs and services, organizations should undertake a review of existing literature pertaining to 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion to identify best practices.

Programs and services organizations may want to consider introducing include:

- Youth groups and drop-in programs.
- Mental health and counselling programs.
- Cultural support programs.
- Sexual health clinics.
- Supports for families with 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth.
- Affordable or no-cost legal programs to help trans and gender diverse youth change their legal names and gender markers.
- Peer support programs.
- Other programs and services to be identified through consultation with local 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Organizations should also explore opportunities to share their resources and expertise with 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations, for example, by offering in-kind access to meeting space, access to technology, or other resources that are often less available to small, community-based 2SLGBTQ+ organizations.

EVALUATE, MEASURE AND REFINE 2SLGBTQ+ INCLUSION EFFORTS

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Evaluating, measuring and refining your work is crucial to successful implementation of 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion throughout your organization. Without effective and comprehensive evaluation and measurement efforts, your organization will be unable to effectively identify successes and areas that need additional work. Effective evaluation and measurement provides the crucial data necessary to refine and strengthen 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion efforts. You should consider introducing the following mechanisms to ensure fulsome evaluation and measurement:

- Annual anonymous all-staff surveys to better understand staff capacity on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion and gaps in current knowledge and skills.
- Repeated audits by the 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion audit advisory committee to continue to identify new gaps and opportunities.
- Evaluation forms following all training opportunities provided to staff members.
- Point-in-time surveys for service-users to better understand their experiences accessing services, and to identify gaps and opportunities.
- Client satisfaction surveys for all service-users with questions specific to gender and sexuality.
- Gender and sexuality demographic questions implemented within existing client evaluation forms, where appropriate.
- Exit surveys for staff and 2SLGBTQ+ community members engaged in your organization to identify gaps and opportunities pertaining to 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion.

CONCLUSION

2SLGBTQ+ inclusion is not about checking a box, or introducing the perfect set of policies and procedures. It is not about a one-time workshop, but an ongoing journey, rife with mistakes and missteps, to help organizations do justice by, for and with 2SLGBTQ+ young people. Journeys towards inclusive and affirming care are not easy, nor should they be. Despite our best efforts, some young people will inevitably fall through the cracks, or will not receive the affirming and inclusive care they deserve. Nonetheless, it is our responsibility as youth-serving organizations to do all we can to provide 2SLGBTQ+ youth with the best quality of evidence-based, inclusive and affirming services possible.