

From the Master Brewers DEI Committee

Gender Inclusive Workspace

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The brewing industry is at a critical moment regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The industry continues to evolve with individuals of varying backgrounds, identities, and more, so it has become a moral imperative and strategic business move to develop strategies to create a gender-inclusive workplace. Fostering an environment where all employees, regardless of gender identity, can feel valued, respected, and empowered to bring their best selves to work.

Despite incredible efforts and strides by the brewing industry in recent years to promote diversity, gender inclusivity remains an area where progress is slow. With nearly half of LGBTQIA+ employees in the broader workforce reporting instances of unfair treatment (UCLA, 2021), brewing up change is going to require proactive steps to ensure inclusivity at every level, from production to leadership.

The DEI Committee has put together actionable insights to help breweries build a gender-inclusive workplace with policy improvements, environment changes, education initiatives, and opportunities for progress.

Education

A significant first step in fostering awareness and empathy of gender inclusivity is to begin with education through workshops, training, and hiring policies.

Workshops and Training

Firstly, employees should be informed about the importance of gender diversity and inclusion. This can be done through educational workshops that focus on gender identity, expression, and the challenges faced by diverse employees.¹ Covering topics like pronouns, the difference between gender identity and expression, and how to create a supportive and respectful workplace. These issues may be unfamiliar to many in the brewing industry, considering how cisgender men have traditionally dominated the field, so providing training on unconscious bias ([see DEI Perspective on unconscious bias](#)) can help reduce stereotypes and improve attitudes. Unconscious bias training can empower employees to better understand and challenge their biases when making decisions like hiring, promoting, and overall team dynamics.²

Hiring and Promotion Practices

DEI is more than just checking boxes; it is about creating a truly inclusive culture. Hiring practices should focus on equal representation of all genders at every level, from production to management. Gender diverse teams are proven to enhance creativity, problem-solving, innovation, and more, which is critical to the overall success of a brewery and ultimately, the industry. It is part of a larger strategy that should include mentorship programs, leadership development, and methods for career advancement that make it accessible to everyone, regardless of gender identity.

If cost is the issue, many organizations, including the Brewers Association, MBAA, Pink Boots Society, and Michael Jackson Foundation, offer scholarships and/or mentorship programs.

Environment

A supportive space is more than language; it is updating facilities and activities that flow beyond Pride month.

Facilities

A gender-inclusive workplace needs to ensure that the physical environment supports all employees, such as with gender-neutral restrooms and ensuring toiletry needs for all are accommodated (e.g., pads, tampons, etc.). Many employees, especially transgender and non-binary individuals, have reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable using restrooms that do not align with their gender identity. According to a report by the Human Rights Campaign, ensuring that gender-neutral bathrooms are an option is a simple and impactful way to help employees feel included and respected in their identity.

Language and Representation

Simple practices like using correct names and pronouns can significantly enhance a sense of belonging.³ Encouraging everyone to adopt inclusive language with pronoun training beyond verbal conversations to all communications, like emails and marketing materials, can make a difference! Marketing and branding should reflect the diversity of the brewery and its goals. Representation in

leadership, advertisements, and public communications should help reinforce this inclusive culture by showing that the company values diversity and is committed to curating a gender inclusive space.⁴

Inclusive Spaces and Activities

Beyond the facility, the taproom should be home to activities that reflect inclusivity goals. Offering events and activities that include and support gender diversity or gender-neutral events that promote teamwork and belonging.⁵ It is also essential to actively engage with the broader LGBTQIA+ community (beyond Pride month) to create a sense of shared purpose and support beyond the brewery's walls.

Rainbow washing: A performative display of support for the LGBTQIA+ communities. A typical example is the use of rainbow imagery during Pride Month, but no long-term changes to accommodate queer employees or customers year-round. This can include marketing campaigns, temporary logo changes, or merchandise launches that co-opt queer identity for profit while lacking internal policy changes. Honest inclusion requires more than visibility: it demands structural commitment to action and accountability for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Policies

Limiting harassment and discrimination while addressing gender disparities and hiring practices that are common in the workplace are excellent guidelines for establishing and/or updating company policies.⁶

Anti-Discrimination and Harassment

Any workplace that considers itself gender-inclusive has a robust anti-discrimination and harassment policy that explicitly includes gender identity and expression. Policies focused on addressing discrimination can do more than diversity policies alone.⁷ Provide clear guidelines and make accessible to all employees on handling gender-related complaints and ensure accountability for individuals who violate these policies.

Parental Leave and Benefits

Parental leave policies should apply equally to all employees regardless of gender. These policies encourage shared caregiving responsibilities and promote gender equality in the workplace.⁸ In addition, when choosing a company healthcare policy, benefits should include equal coverage options for gender-affirming treatments and surgeries regardless of gender.⁹ This is an excellent way to demonstrate that the brewery supports all employees in pursuing full gender identity and expression.

Hiring Practices and Advancement Opportunities

A simple way to achieve gender inclusivity and that hiring is free of bias, is to remove any gendered language from job descriptions and promote equal opportunities to all candidates. Opportunities for advancement should be equally accessible to gender-diverse employees, ensuring no one is overlooked, including scheduling considerations for sickness, religious observances, vacation, etc. In brewing, positions that require physical labor can be accommodated by building a team accessibility structure that isn't just applicable for a gender diverse workforce, but also one to consider physical ability, limitations, and prevention of bodily injury.¹⁰

Feedback

Assessing Effectiveness

Continuous improvement is a goal in all aspects of brewing, and gender inclusivity is no exception. There needs to be ongoing feedback and assessment. Regularly surveying employees on how they are benefited and impacted by policies and practices can help improve the overall experience relating to discrimination, inclusion, and the effectiveness of diversity training.

Adjusting and Improving

Feedback should be utilized to adjust policies and practices to create an environment that better meets the needs of gender-diverse employees. If discomfort is reported about specific policies or practices, there should be a concerted effort to review and modify them. The goal is to continuously adapt and improve to foster a culture where all employees feel valued and included.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

For long-term success, a culture of continuous improvement is essential. Revisiting DEI strategies, implementing new and improved practices, and staying up-to-date on industry trends and methods are ways to ensure the workplace remains inclusive and welcoming for all gender identities.¹¹

Practical Applications for Gender Inclusivity

Gender inclusivity is an ongoing journey for a brewery committed to improving the employee experience at all levels, from leadership to staff. Some practical steps that can be taken immediately to foster an inclusive environment:

- **Adopt clear anti-discrimination policies** that protect all gender identities and expressions.¹²
- **Provide a gender-neutral restroom** to ensure employees feel safe.

- **Promote gender inclusive language** by encouraging the use of correct names and pronouns.
- **Offer gender-neutral dress codes** to ensure equality.¹³
- **Create flexible parental leave policies** to embrace all forms of caregiving.
- **Evaluate policies regularly** and adjust based on feedback to ensure inclusivity.
- **Provide education and training** on unconscious bias, diversity, and inclusion for empathy and understanding.¹⁴

In taking these simple actions, breweries can create an inclusive workplace where everyone, regardless of gender identity or expression, can thrive. In the long term, this will improve employee engagement and retention and strengthen the brewery's reputation and position in the industry, attracting diverse talent and customers.

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