

Out In The Workplace:

Tips for Navigating the Internship and Job

Search

And Beyond



VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY

| Career Center

DEAN OF
Students

| Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, & Intersex Life

Introduction

As you delve into the internship and career search as a junior or senior (or as a sophomore or freshman-good for you!), you begin to realize that there are a plethora of considerations that you need to acknowledge. This advice goes for everyone. Now, as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI+) student, you may realize that you have some specific considerations in relation to your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. For the most part, university life has been a supportive environment, with a wonderful LGBTQI+ resource center, active student groups, and university-backed non-discrimination policies. However, the workplace can be quite different, in terms of the openness of and support for LGBTQI+ employees. The ***Out In The Workplace: Tips for Navigating the Internship and Job Search And Beyond*** guide is designed to answer some of the questions that may be floating through your mind and to direct you to more resources.

If you need additional support, please do not hesitate to reach out to [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Life at Vanderbilt University](#) or the [Vanderbilt Career Center](#).

COMING OUT

How important is it for me to be “out”?

The extent to which you incorporate your sexuality and gender in different aspects of your life is an individual decision. For some individuals, their sexual orientation and gender identity is a huge part of who they are. Others may view their sexuality and gender as only a small part of what defines them as a person. Consider the following questions:

- Are most of your friends, peers and support networks LGBT?
- Are you active in any LGBT organizations?
- Do you enjoy going to LGBT events?
- Do most of your friends and family members know that you are LGBT?
- If you have a partner, are they out in most situations?

Based on how you answered the above questions, consider how out you want to be in your job search and once you are employed.

- For many people, their sexual orientation is such an integral part of their identity that to remain closeted in the workplace would seem false. If that is your truth, you'll want to target LGBT friendly companies.
- Others, however, might prefer to maintain separation between their personal and professional lives, only sharing information about their orientation with close friends. If that is true to you, you may choose to lean toward LGBT friendly organizations but keep your other options open too.

Remember, no matter what your decision, it is *yours* to make...and you can always change it in the future.

At what point should I come “out” to an employer?

It is important to know that you do NOT have to disclose at any point in the process. This decision is entirely up to you and how comfortable you feel disclosing your sexual orientation, sex, or gender expression. If you do choose to disclose, there are generally three opportunities to “come out” to an employer.

1. On your resume
2. In an interview
3. After you start working for the organization

What should I put on my resume?

Whether you choose to disclose your sexual orientation or gender identity on your resume depends on how comfortable you feel with potential employer having this information. Consider your audience and determine ahead of time how out you want to be perceived. Some individuals may choose to use their resume as a way to screen out non-supportive employers, and therefore may explicitly list their experience with LGBT related organizations. Others may prefer to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity once they are hired, if they choose to do so at all.

If you are applying for a "gay" job (e.g., lobbyist for the NGLTF), then the LGBT experiences can be an obvious advantage. But what about other types of jobs? The *skills* you developed as a result of participation in LGBTQI+ organizations are likely to be of interest to many employers, although the organizations in which you participated may be viewed with less enthusiasm by some. To help evaluate the policies and climates of various organizations and industries, conduct a bit of research prior to writing your resume.

One strategy is to simply omit any reference to LGBTQI+ organizations or activities. Some recruiters, even gay ones, have said that such information can be extraneous, especially if social activities are summarized rather than skills and achievements.

If you do choose to include LGBT-related information on your resume, be certain to put the emphasis on accomplishments that are relevant to employers. Highlight leadership, budgeting, event planning, public speaking and organizational skills. While highlighting skills, you might "downplay" the nature of the organization in which you developed those skills.

Some questions to consider:

- Is the company you are interested in an LGBTQI+ friendly organization?
- Do you feel comfortable disclosing that you are a member of an LGBTQI+ organization?
- Do you include previous work experiences (internships, etc.) that occurred at LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations?
- How do you list your achievements from an LGBTQI+ organization on your resume?

Wording LGBTQ experience on your resume:

Depending on how comfortable you are disclosing your sexual orientation/gender identity, here are some suggested wordings to use:

Comfortable disclosing	Not comfortable disclosing*
"President, Vanderbilt Lambda Association"	"President, Diversity Student Group"
"Outstanding Ally to the LGBTQ Community Award Recipient"	"Lavender Graduation Award Recipient"
"OUT in Front: LGBTQI Conference Organizer"	"Campus Conference Organizer"

*Be prepared to answer questions in interview when using more vague terms, such as President of Diversity Student Group. Your level of disclosure in answering is up to you, but it's important to anticipate the types of questions you might be asked in an interview and practice your answers.

Consider scheduling a coaching appointment at the Career Center to have a broader conversation about the question of whether and how to disclose on your resume.

How can I come "out" in an interview?

Remember that it is your decision if you are comfortable enough to be “out” in your interview. It is a personal decision, and the interview should be focused on your skill-set anyway, not your sexual orientation or gender identity. That said, the interview is a great time to get some clarification about how supportive the company is to the LGBTQI+ community if that is something that is important to you.

Questions you can ask an employer in an interview:

- Would you say that your company has a diverse employee base?
- Does your organization have an LGBTQ support or social group?
- Will my partner be covered by my health insurance?
- How has your company handled sexual and gender discrimination in the past? ?

Interviewing Strategies

Preparing for interviews is critical. As with writing a resume, you should think ahead of time about how out you are ultimately willing to be during the interview process. Be sure to do diligent research on the company and gather information about the organizations policies and climate. Then you can make the decision about coming out or not. Because an interview is a process of evaluating you, and because you rarely know the attitudes of an interviewer ahead of time, you do run the risk of encountering someone whom might evaluate you negatively (consciously or unconsciously), regardless of company policies.

Depending on the strategies you have used to present LGBT-related activities on your resume, you might have already given the interviewer some indications that you are bisexual, gay, or lesbian. If that is the case, you should be prepared to talk about how your experiences have developed desirable leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills. You do not want to be caught off guard, appearing unprepared or even embarrassed about your background. An interviewer might ask, "I see you were president of Lambda for two years. Can you tell me what kind of organization it is?" If you have decided to be out, you can respond with a simple description. If you have chosen not to come out yet, you may want to refer to it as an anti-discrimination organization and then focus on the achievements as a result of your work. If you have excluded "identity-related" experiences from your resume, then you might not even mention them during the interview; your focus could be mainly on those experiences already highlighted.

How can I come “out” on the job?

Coming out on the job is an ongoing process and there's no one right way to do it. Even if you disclose your sexual orientation or gender identity on your resume or in an interview, that information will not necessarily be passed on to your coworkers or supervisor. When considering coming out on the job:

- Assess your readiness.
- Assess the work-climate.
- Perform at your best - focus first on the job at hand and establish yourself as a professional.
- Conduct a trial run - chose someone you think you can trust to be accepting, and come out to that person first.

- Have no expectations - if you hope for the best but don't expect a specific reaction, you will probably be better positioned to respond to whatever happens.

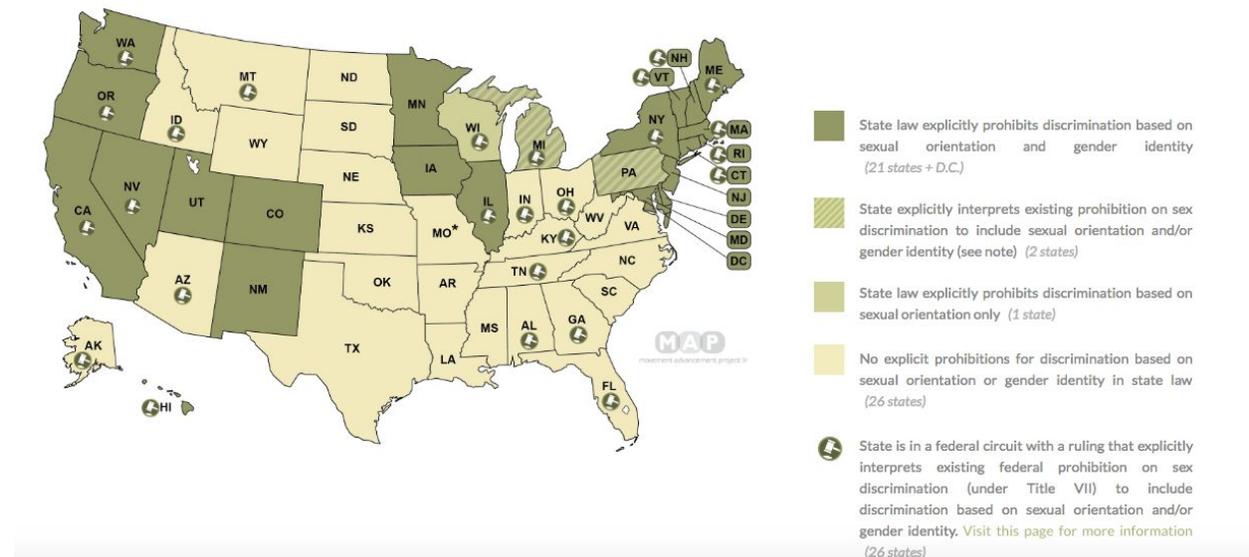
In the end, your level of disclosure is your decision and should be what is most comfortable for you.

LEGALITY

Does federal law prohibit discrimination on the basis of LGBTQI+ identities?

Sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression are not protected classes under federal law in the same way race, sex, religion, national origin, age, and disability are. In states without laws prohibiting such discrimination, employees and applicants can be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Do state laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of LGBTQI+ identities?



21 states and the District of Columbia have anti-discrimination laws in place to protect against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in the workplace. 2 states explicitly interprets existing prohibition on sex discrimination to include sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and 1 state explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation only. Unfortunately, this means that 26 states have no explicit prohibitions for discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in state law.

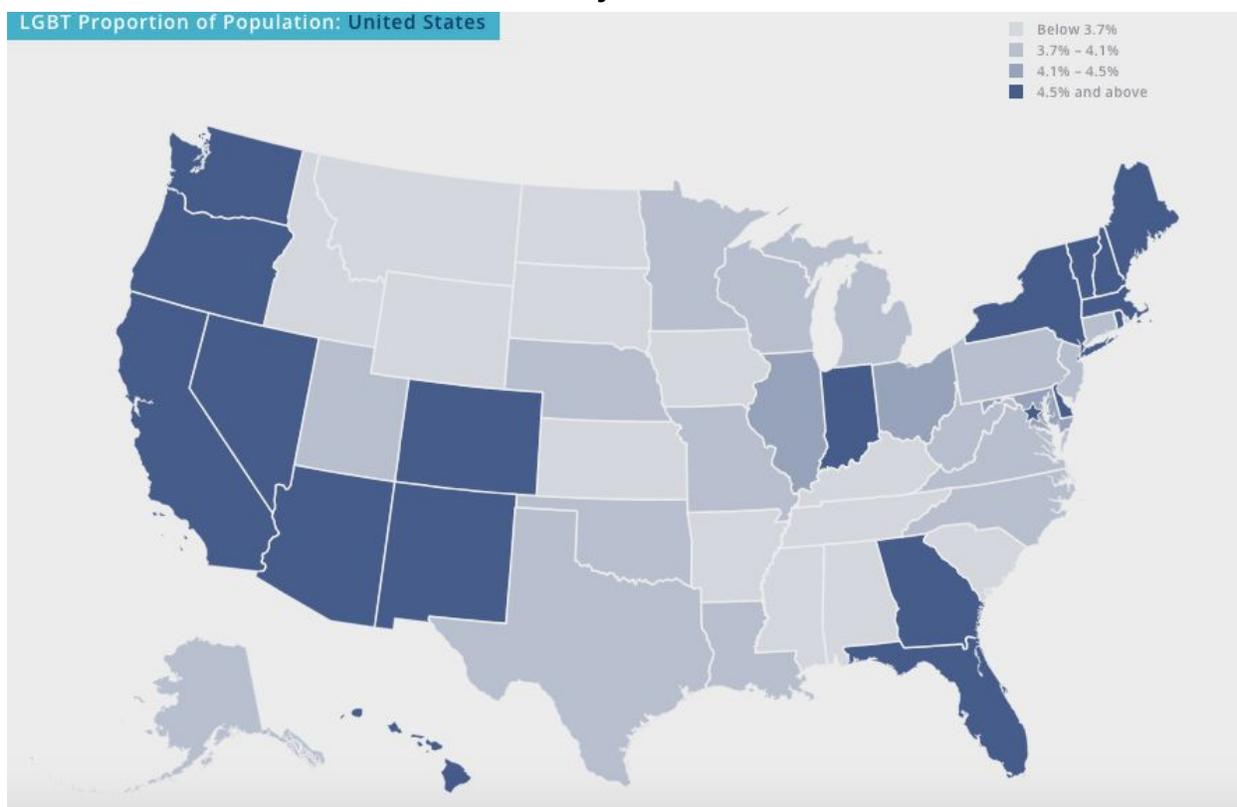
Visit Movement Advancement Project's [website](#) to find more maps that show the anti-discrimination laws for housing, public accommodations, credit, and state employees.

However, many employers have their own non-discrimination policies (See the COMPANIES section for more information.)

Do employers have to offer spousal and/or family benefits to LGBTQ employees?

Many employers subsidize all or a large portion of health, dental, vision, and other benefits for spouses and families of married employees. With the federal recognition of same-sex marriage, employers that extend benefits to spouses and families of their employees must extend the same benefits to same-sex couples. Additionally, some states have domestic partnership laws which provide the basis for some companies to provide equivalent benefits to unmarried couples who meet the state's requirements for partnerships or civil unions.

Which states are the most LGBTQ+ friendly?



This [map](#) shows the percentage of each state population that identifies as LGBTQ+.

COMPANIES

What is an LGBTQ+ friendly organization?

An LGBTQ+ friendly organization is one that protects lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals from discrimination in their organization. Many of these companies also help organize LGBTQ support groups and social events for the LGBTQ individuals who work for them. These employers may have their own non-discrimination policies, even if the state they are in does not.

How to identify companies that are LGBTQ+ friendly

The best research tool to identify which companies are LGBTQ-friendly is the [Corporate Equality Index](#), released each year by the Human Rights Campaign. This report assesses companies

based upon a number of criteria, including: Equal employment opportunity policy, employment benefits (including transgender-inclusive medical coverage), organizational LGBT competency (trainings, resources, or accountability measures), and public commitment to LGBT support.

Browse the following website to find lists of LGBTQI+ friendly companies:

- [*A list of the Human Rights Campaign's best places to work.*](#)
- [*The Capital Area Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce*](#) – their website contains a business member directory to help you identify LGBT-friendly companies in the District of Columbia.

What to look for when researching organization policies and climates for individual companies?

- Look up organizations' LGBT employee groups, non-discrimination policies and domestic partnership benefits. You can often find these policies in the "Careers", "Jobs," "About Us" or "Diversity" sections of their sites. If you cannot find a company's policy or the language is unclear, consider calling the company and asking for a copy of the policy in writing.
- Make sure that the policy explicitly names "gender identity or expression" (or "gender identity") and "sexual orientation" as protected classes in their non-discrimination policy.
- Contact the employee group and talk to current staff about the organizational climate and get to know what is it *really* like to work there?
- If your job search takes you to unfamiliar geographic regions, try to find out if the future work site is located in a state, county, city or community that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. (See the LEGALITY section for more information.)
- Search for regional or municipal workplace groups for LGBT individuals, even if there may not be one for a particular organization; these types of associations are invaluable for networking.
- In the absence of employee groups, contact bookstores, gay-owned businesses, and the like, to learn more about the region you are targeting. Take advantage of the LGBT networks that are widely accessible through Gay Yellow Pages, online, and so forth.
- Contact the KC Potter Center for opportunities to connect with alumni who are willing to provide advice and information to current students.

If the company that I want to apply to is not LGBTQI+ friendly, what should I consider before applying?

There are many employers that are inclusive of LGBTQ employees, but there are still many who are not. When deciding which company is best for you, consider what it would mean to you to work for a company that supports their LGBTQ workers. Here are some questions to help you reflect :

- Will I insist on working for a company that I know is LGBTQ-friendly?
- Will I consider companies that imply being LGBTQ-friendly?
- Would I work for a company that does not have any formal considerations for their LGBTQ employees?
- What does working for a diverse company mean to me?

What are some additional considerations before choosing an employer?

- Does the organization provide same-sex partner benefits?
- Is there an LGBTQ employee resource group?
- Does the organization have at least one gender-neutral restroom?
- Does the organization sponsor or participate in activities or events that support the LGBTQ community?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRANS PEOPLE

Is it alright to use my chosen name on a resume or cover letter?

Resumes and cover letters are not legal documents. You are not required to list your legal name on either document. Think of using alternative naming options. For example:

Legal Name	Naming option 1 (Chosen name)	Naming option 2 (First initial & chosen name)
Alexandra Hoya	Jack Hoya	A. Jack Hoya

One of the biggest challenges TGNC individuals face during the job search is deciding what name to put on their resume. If they list their name and their appearance doesn't match in the eyes of the interviewer, it can create an uncomfortable situation..

Will I have to use my legal name at any point in the job search?

Unless you have made legal arrangements to change your name, unfortunately, you will need to provide your legal name for background checks, social security documents and insurance forms. However, most organizations will allow you to use your preferred name for company contact information, email, and phone directory. Human resource professionals are bound by confidentiality and can be a good source of information.

How should I dress for an interview?

When it comes to dressing for an interview, it is important that you present yourself in fashion that is consistent with the position for which you are applying. Dress both professionally and in a way that you feel best expresses your gender identity. Remember to ask if there is a preferred dress code or one that is necessary for safety concerns.

Most importantly, dress in a manner that is comfortable for you.

Should I disclose my identities ?

This is a personal decision. Neither option is wrong; it is important to make whatever choice is best for you. When making the decision to disclose your identities in the workplace it is important to consider the questions your co-workers and supervisors may have for you. How comfortable you are with possibly answering personal questions about your identities may help you make a decision about disclosing.

JOB BOARDS

Are there specific job boards for the LGBTQI+ community?

Yes! There are job boards that are specific to the LGBTQI+ community.

Check out the list below:

- [ProGayJobs.com](#) - the premier job board for anyone in the LGBT community seeking employment
- [LGBTConnect](#) - an LGBT job board for anyone seeking LGBT-friendly employers
- [Out & Equal](#) - an LGBT workplace advocacy group designed to connect the LGBT community through resources, events, and support groups
- [Out for Work](#) - an organization aimed at aiding LGBT students transition to the workplace
- [Out Professionals](#) - the nation's largest LGBT networking organization
- [Pink Jobs](#)- a list of LGBT friendly job vacancies
- [Out Professional Network](#) - an organization with the goal to provide the LGBT community with a trusted professional network, which pairs members with employers who are serious about building a diverse workforce to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse customer base
- [Out & Equal Workplace Advocates](#)- an organization dedicated to achieving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer workplace equality
- [TJOBANK](#)- a job board that aggregates LGBT friendly job postings of progressive employers into a one stop shop

And check out this LGBTQI+ focused internships:

- [National LGBTQ Task Force](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [The Center: The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center](#)

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