all children
all families

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion: Adoption Exchanges

All Children – All Families promotes LGBTQ inclusive policies and affirming practices among child welfare agencies and formally recognizes those innovative agencies that are leading the field.

At the core of this work are the Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion listed below. The benchmarks are organized into seven main areas of inclusive policies and affirming practices that organizations should implement to best serve LGBTQ children, youth and families. For more information and resources on each benchmark, visit *hrc.org/acaf-benchmarks*.

Non-Discrimination

Staff Training

Rolling Out the Welcome Mat

Adoption Exchange Best Practices

Sustainability & Capacity Building

Leadership & Innovation

Requirements by Tier of Recognition

Participating agencies that meet specific benchmark requirements will be recognized in one of three tiers: Building a Foundation for Inclusion; A Solid Foundation for Inclusion; and Innovative Inclusion.

The requirements for each tier are indicated in this document in the following way:

- Building Foundation for Inclusion: **Policy and practice areas in blue bold text**.
- Solid Foundation for Inclusion: All policy and practice areas, except italicized text.
- Innovative Inclusion: *All policy and practice areas including italicized text. (Note: While multiple examples of innovations are listed in practice areas 3-7, agencies must demonstrate only one in each area to meet the Innovative Tier*

1. Non-Discrimination

Establishing written non-discrimination policies to protect LGBTQ clients and employees from discrimination is an important first step in building an organization's foundation for LGBTQ inclusion. The non-discrimination benchmarks focus on these three policies:

a) **Agency's client non-discrimination policy is inclusive of "sexual orientation," "gender identity," and "gender expression" and communicated to staff and clients.**
b) **Agency's employment non-discrimination policy is inclusive of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity."**
c) Agency's contract language includes explicit LGBTQ non-discrimination standards.

2. Staff Training

LGBTQ staff training is a core component of an organization's efforts to create a culture that is inclusive and affirming of everyone, regardless of their SOGIE. Staff training alone is not sufficient to achieve longstanding cultural change; however, when connected to policy changes, it can help give staff the skills and knowledge needed to translate policy into practice. The staff training benchmark has two components and the specific requirements for each depend on which Tier of Recognition an agency is striving to achieve:

a) **Agency meets minimum participation requirements for All Children - All Families Webinar Series.**

b) Agency completes an Ongoing Training Plan detailing the ways in which LGBTQ topics are integrated into its ongoing staff training efforts. *This plan must meet minimum training length requirements for Innovative Tier.*

3. Rolling Out the Welcome Mat

"Rolling out the welcome mat" for LGBTQ children, youth and families means moving an organization beyond non-discrimination and taking concrete action to send the explicit message "You are welcome here." These benchmarks focus on agency forms and other paperwork, visual cues within the agency and external messaging (e.g., website, brochures and social media).

All agency-controlled forms and internal documents use LGBTQ-inclusive language, including:

a) **Agency forms use gender-neutral language (e.g., "Parent 1" and "Parent 2" rather than "Mother" and "Father") where applicable.**

b) Agency forms provide the opportunity to indicate a gender other than "Male" or "Female."

c) Agency forms provide the opportunity to indicate a preferred/chosen name that is different than a person's legal name.

d) *Agency forms provide the opportunity to indicate the pronouns (e.g., she/her, he/him, they/them) by which a person would like to be addressed.*

e) *Agency demonstrates other innovation in LGBTQ inclusion in forms and paperwork.*

Agency consistently communicates its commitment to LGBTQ inclusion externally, including:

f) **Agency displays visual cues throughout common areas to communicate support and inclusion of LGBTQ clients and their families.**

g) Agency's external communications (website, printed materials, etc.) explicitly and consistently reflect its commitment to working with and welcoming LGBTQ clients and their families.

h) *Agency uses social media to communicate its commitment to working with and welcoming LGBTQ clients and their families.*

i) *Agency demonstrates other innovation in its LGBTQ-inclusive external communications.*

4. Adoption Exchange Best Practices

Adoption Exchanges should implement the following key practices to ensure that their services are LGBTQ inclusive and affirming. Each practice below is required for the Solid Tier. If any of the services do not apply to an Adoption Exchange's practices, there is an opportunity to indicate "Not Applicable" in the Agency Self-Assessment.

a) Adoption Exchange provides staff guidance on handling SOGIE-related disclosures in child-centered recruitment.

b) Adoption Exchange advocates for LGBTQ-inclusive and affirming practices in child welfare systems (both generally and case-specific).

c) Adoption Exchange provides LGBTQ-inclusive post-permanency/ongoing support and education to families.

d) Adoption Exchange's public education/information sharing resources are inclusive of LGBTQ-specific topics.

e) Adoption Exchange provides other LGBTQ-inclusive services.

5. Sustainability & Capacity Building

Transforming an organization's culture to ensure all stakeholders are welcomed and affirmed regardless of their SOGIE is hard work that takes years. Staff turnover, competing priorities and limited resources are among the many challenges that can get in the way of sustainable change. These policy and practice areas focus on the strategies that help support and build internal capacity for long-term and sustainable LGBTQ inclusion efforts.

a) Agency's leadership supports LGBTQ inclusion efforts (e.g., leadership "buy in" is clear through board/senior leadership communications on the importance of the work and action to hold stakeholders accountable). (Note: Participation in an Executive Briefing by at least one senior leader is required of all ACAF participants. See Staff Training for more).

b) Agency takes a team-based approach to its LGBTQ inclusion efforts (e.g., a LGBTQ committee is formed and leading policy and practice review and changes).

c) *Agency has an LGBTQ staff advocate who is identified to all staff and clients and is charged with resource collection and dissemination, advocacy, support and intervention specifically for LGBTQ clients.*

d) *Agency builds relationships with and engages local LGBTQ experts in its LGBTQ inclusion efforts.*

e) *Agency has formalized its process for SOGIE data collection from youth and/or adult clients, including the collection, tracking and analysis of the data for quality improvement work.*

f) *Agency conducts LGBTQ-specific client feedback surveys to measure the impact of its LGBTQ inclusion efforts on the experiences of children, youth and families served.*

g) *Agency conducts LGBTQ-specific staff surveys to measure current agency climate and the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to LGBTQ inclusion.*

h) *Agency has developed LGBTQ expertise among its internal staff trainers through a training of trainers or other effort.*

i) *Agency has implemented policies and benefits to recruit and retain LGBTQ employees (e.g., inclusive health insurance benefits, gender transition guidelines, and targeted staff hiring and recruitment efforts).*

j) *Agency demonstrates other innovative practice(s) to ensure LGBTQ inclusion efforts are sustainable.*

7. Leadership & Innovation

Organizations that have established a solid foundation for LGBTQ inclusion within their own walls can lead the broader child welfare community forward in this area by sharing their lessons learned. This practice area focuses on the ways in which agencies can serve as leaders on the local, state, and national levels.

a) *Agency serves as a leader in LGBTQ-inclusive practice among its partner agencies (e.g., organizing trainings or events, leading an LGBTQ taskforce, etc.).*

b) *Agency has participated in LGBTQ-related public education events (e.g., panel discussion at a university, radio or television appearances, etc.).*

c) *Agency has engaged in pro-LGBTQ public policy advocacy (e.g., submitting written or oral testimony related to legislation, writing an op ed, participating in a lobby day, etc.).*

d) *Agency demonstrates other innovative forms of leadership.*