

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

A Research Study Commissioned by The Office of LGBTQ Affairs

*June 2022*



**LGBTQ**  
Office of LGBTQ Affairs  
Division of Equity & Social Justice

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*The County of Santa Clara, Office of LGBTQ Affairs would like to thank the 234 TGNB community members who participated in this research, and the Community Marketing & Insights research team: Kimberly Balsam, Nat Bricker, Roger Mohr Jr., Darcy Oryall, David Paisley, Thomas Roth, Heather Torch, and Lu Xun.*

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 1 Executive Summary



**LGBTQ**

Office of LGBTQ Affairs  
Division of Equity & Social Justice

## Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

# *Executive Summary • About the Research*

Transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender expansive (TGNB) populations experience high levels of stigma and discrimination in the United States relative to their cisgender (i.e., non-TGNB) peers. One important area in which stigma and discrimination impact TGNB people is in employment. Anti-TGNB bias, binary gendered expectations, and lack of affirming policies can influence all aspects of job and career development for TGNB people and can severely limit the opportunities that TGNB people have to pursue meaningful and financially stable career paths. This may be compounded further for TGNB people who have other marginalized identities related to race, ethnicity, immigration status, disability, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, and age.

The sparse existing data on TGNB employment typically comes from large national surveys, yet locally-specific factors may be particularly relevant in understanding the employment experiences of TGNB people. As the sixth most populous county in California, Santa Clara County has a population of 1.9 million people according to the 2020 census. The county is well-known for being home to Silicon Valley and is one of the most affluent counties in the entire United States. However, Santa Clara County also has unique characteristics such as wide income inequality, large immigrant and non-English speaking communities, and regional differences between urban and rural parts of the county. While the broader Bay Area is generally known for acceptance and visibility of LGBTQ+ populations, these factors have been lower in Santa Clara County than in neighboring counties such as San Francisco and Alameda.

This report is funded by the County of Santa Clara, Office of LGBTQ Affairs and conducted by Community Marketing & Insights (CMI). The project utilized an online survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews to examine the lived experience of TGNB adults who live and/or work in Santa Clara County. It explores the range of barriers and problems that TGNB community members face in their jobs and career paths as well as positive employment experiences, goals, and suggestions for supporting the local TGNB community in reaching their full employment potential.

A total of 234 TGNB people living or working in Santa Clara County participated in the research.

- The age range of participants was 18 to 70.
- Only 44% of participants were employed full-time and 12% were unemployed.
- Participants represented the many racial and ethnic groups living in the county, including Asian/Pacific Islander (25%), Black (11%), Latinx (24%), and White (38%). Overall, 62% of participants identified as BIPOC.
- The majority of participants lived in Santa Clara County (86%), with 14% in neighboring counties but working in Santa Clara County.
- There was representation across the county, with just under half (47%) living in San Jose.
- About half (46%) of participants had a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Individual income was quite low relative to education level; 42% of participants had an income under \$25K and 35% were between 25K and 75K.
- Seventy percent (70%) of participants reported struggling or barely making enough to get by.

## Executive Summary • Key Findings

### Impressions of Santa Clara County

- Participants perceive Santa Clara County as less TGNB-affirming than San Francisco and the East Bay, but much better than other parts of the country.
- Only 38% of participants viewed the County of Santa Clara as being responsive to the needs of the TGNB community. Many participants were not aware of the programs that do exist for TGNB people in the county.
- Forty-three percent (43%) of participants reported difficulty finding work in their field in Santa Clara County, and 76% of those participants attributed this difficulty to their TGNB identity.
- Participants expressed concerns about Santa Clara County including the high cost of living and housing, lack of a visible and organized TGNB community, and less support for TGNB people in the rural parts of the county.

### TGNB Employment Discrimination

- Workplace discrimination against TGNB people living and working in Santa Clara County is common. In this study, 70% said they had experienced anti-TGNB discrimination or were not sure. During the interviews and focus groups, many participants expressed that they suspected discrimination, but there was no way to prove it.
- Discrimination experiences included not being offered jobs, being paid less than cisgender coworkers, being retaliated against for reporting anti-TGNB discrimination, being denied a promotion or pay raise, and being denied time off for gender-affirming care.
- Over 80% of participants have experienced microaggressions at work by coworkers and supervisors, including misgendering verbally and in written communications. Some participants also experienced verbal, sexual, and online harassment at work as well as being physically attacked due to their TGNB identity.
- Despite widespread experiences of discrimination and harassment in the workplace, only about a quarter (24%) of participants made a report to a supervisor, manager, and/or HR department.
- Participants who did make a report often had negative experiences, including retaliation and HR personnel who were not well-equipped to work effectively with TGNB employees.
- Participants noted that anti-discrimination laws and policies are often not well understood by employers and lamented the lack of a clear system for reporting discrimination in the workplace.
- Many participants discussed their TGNB identity with only a few people in the workplace, and about half (47%) were concerned that they may get fired if they openly discussed it at work.
- BIPOC participants experience discrimination based on race/ethnicity as well as gender identity. Nearly half (48%) of all BIPOC participants and 69% of Black participants experienced racial discrimination in the past five years. BIPOC participants were also more likely to have difficulty finding employment due to their TGNB identity.
- Participants described anti-TGNB discrimination when applying for jobs. Twenty-five percent (25%) have been told directly that they would not be hired because they are TGNB, and 27% said that they are frequently rejected by potential employers without explanation, even when they are clearly qualified.
- The vast majority of participants indicated that their TGNB identity has influenced their choice of a career or job path.
- A large majority of participants (79%) reported being diagnosed with a mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime. This finding mirrors national statistics; however, it is important to note that these problems are not inherent to being a TGNB person, but instead are due to the negative impact of living and working with stigma, discrimination, and rejection on a daily basis, which includes the workplace.

## Executive Summary • Key Findings

- Nationally and in Santa Clara County, TGNB people report higher rates of disabilities and learning difficulties, which may be related to the ongoing impact of stigma and discrimination. In the current study, almost half (43%) of participants reported having a disability or learning difficulty. The most commonly reported disabilities were cognitive and learning disabilities. Many participants also reported experiences of discrimination based on their disability status.

### Looking for a Job

- Participants described several TGNB-specific barriers to looking for a job in their chosen field, such as having to explain their prior work history when it is associated with a deadname, having to educate hiring managers about TGNB issues, and wondering how much they should disclose about their TGNB identity in the hiring process.
- Anti-TGNB experiences in the hiring process were commonplace, with more than half of participants experiencing microaggressions and/or misgendering in job interviews.
- Nearly all (94%) participants have filled out job applications that did not include gender options beyond “male” and “female” and 64% avoided applying for some jobs because of concerns that they would not be accepted as a TGNB person.
- Lack of recognition of lived experience as a job qualification among employers was one of the most frustrating parts of the job-seeking process for many participants, who often had barriers to obtaining college or graduate degrees and may have non-traditional work histories due to anti-TGNB experiences and transition. Participants wished for employers to be more flexible with education and work history requirements to acknowledge and affirm their lived experiences.
- Participants’ top priorities in searching for a job are a friendly environment, gender identity anti-discrimination policies, professional respect, being able to present as their gender identity, health insurance, salary level, and being in their desired field of work.

### Affirming Work Environments

- Despite many negative experiences related to TGNB identity, most participants (65%) indicated being very or somewhat satisfied with their current or most recent job. On average, participants had higher satisfaction with their current job than with their previous one, indicating that they actively sought more affirming workplaces.
- Participants highlighted some of their positive workplace experiences and gave suggestions to employers on how to be more TGNB-affirming. The word often used was “supportive,” which includes policies and benefits, but also a workplace that is openly and publicly supportive of TGNB people rather than simply being tolerant.
- Participants noted that supportive workplace environments recognize the unique concerns of TGNB employees yet, at the same time, do not make a big deal of a person's gender identity or expression. This includes having supportive supervisors who serve as role models for being TGNB-affirming, attention to pronouns, access to all-gender restrooms, DEI trainings that include TGNB topics, and ERGs or other groups for LGBTQ+ employees.
- The majority of participants (80%) have transitioned socially, medically, and/or legally while employed. Supportive workplaces have policies in place to assist employees who are transitioning and healthcare coverage that includes gender-affirming medical services.
- Participants reported that their current job lacks many of the above components of a truly supportive workplace.

### Self-Employment

- Seventeen percent (17%) of participants work for themselves. Many of these participants do short-term gig work, which they see as the best option when encountering discrimination in hiring and the workplace. When asked about future career goals, 25% of participants wished to start or expand their own businesses.

## Executive Summary • Recommendations

### Additional Findings

- Technology companies play a prominent role in Santa Clara County. Many participants wished to be employed in this sector but perceived barriers to doing so. Those who have worked in the tech field reported both negative and positive experiences. Tech companies tend to have more robust and inclusive HR practices and gender-affirming medical insurance, yet they are still dominated by cisgender male cultural norms, which can lead to a lack of inclusion in social and team-building aspects of work.
- Retail and customer service jobs have particular considerations for TGNB employees given the high level of interaction that employees have with customers and clients. Even when a company has inclusive policies and supportive coworkers, interactions with clients and customers typically fall outside of the company's or employee's control. The employee may be exposed to microaggressions, abusive language, or even the potential for physical harm from clients or customers.

### Recommendations

- Based on input from TGNB community members in Santa Clara County, the study identified recommendations for supporting TGNB employment experiences, both when looking for a job and while in the workplace. These are divided into recommendations for actions to be taken by the County of Santa Clara as a government entity; actions to be taken by entities within Santa Clara County such as nonprofits, schools, and supportive agencies; and recommendations for actions to be taken by local companies and employers in Santa Clara County.
- Recommendations for the County of Santa Clara as a government entity include expanded TGNB outreach staffing and budget, ensuring that all county services are TGNB inclusive, ensuring that all public spaces and resources in the county are TGNB-affirming, publishing and disseminating a county-wide gender inclusion policy and TGNB employment bill of rights, emphasis on racial and ethnic cultural competency within county programs, and improving the county's internal TGNB employment practices.
- Recommendations for employment programs by entities within the county include specific job training, TGNB employment workshops, mentoring programs, self-employment workshops and professional career counseling, TGNB education and training for employers, TGNB-affirming employment program audits, and local TGNB-affirming employer directories.
- TGNB community members would also benefit from employment-related aid programs that ensure basic needs are met and ensure TGNB-affirming medical care access for all.
- While the County of Santa Clara and local nonprofits can play an important role in supporting TGNB community members to thrive in the workplace, these actions can only go so far. The findings of this report led to numerous recommendations specifically to be implemented by employers and companies to create TGNB-affirming workplaces. These recommendations are drawn from participants' own experiences as well as their explicit requests and ideas. The report recommends that all employers in Santa Clara County, large and small, complete a TGNB employment self-audit. The report also developed a TGNB Affirming Workplace Checklist that includes general recommendations as well as recommendations for the hiring process and supporting employees on the job.
- BIPOC TGNB participants were the most adversely impacted by lack of access to basic needs, demonstrating the effects of multiple marginalization. Importantly, when TGNB participants were asked about programs to improve their employment prospects, BIPOC participants indicated the greatest utilization of these programs. All the recommendations discussed in this report should keep this in mind. It will be important that all TGNB employment programs emphasize racial and ethnic cultural competency.

Details about the recommendations and additional recommendations are on pages 70 to 78.

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 2

# Research Methodology and Participant Profile





# Goals of the Research

The research project, funded by the County of Santa Clara, Office of LGBTQ Affairs and conducted by Community Marketing & Insights (CMI), utilized a mix of methodologies to examine the lived experience of employment for TGNB community members in Santa Clara County. The methods of data collection included an online survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender expansive (TGNB) individuals across the demographic range and different employment sectors.

The project explores the range of barriers and problems that TGNB community members face in their jobs and career paths, including discrimination in hiring and the workplace, lack of visibility, and anti-TGNB stigma. It also focuses on TGNB-affirming experiences in employment and the future career goals for TGNB community members, with an eye toward ideas and suggestions to support the local TGNB community in reaching their full employment potential.

The specific research goals of the project were as follows:

- Understand the lived experience of discrimination for TGNB residents and employees in Santa Clara County, including experiences during career development and goal-setting, seeking and securing employment, and once employed in the workplace
- Explore what accommodations, policies, and practices in the hiring process and in the workplace can help TGNB community members thrive in the workplace
- Understand how employment discrimination affects the mental and physical health of TGNB community members
- Explore the perceptions of TGNB community members regarding the actual real-life barriers to increased job opportunities and income

- Give the community opportunity for input into solutions and policies working towards reducing discrimination and increasing job opportunities throughout Santa Clara County
- Understand where participants hope to be economically in 5 and 10 years from today, and explore ideas on how to achieve these education, employment, and income goals
- Explore TGNB community members' perceptions of the interplay between employment and other life goals
- Solicit community-based narratives and tips to overcome obstacles to seeking employment and advancing in the workplace

The project explored a range of topic areas from TGNB individuals' perspectives, including but not limited to educational and career histories; experiences as a job seeker; experiences as an employee; essential qualities desired in a potential employer; current attitudes, awareness, and opinions about the County of Santa Clara as a government entity; and participants' opinions of Santa Clara County as a place to live and work.

The report's primary purpose is to provide insights and recommendations that will improve employment prospects and experiences for TGNB residents and employees in Santa Clara County. Insights and recommendations focus on the hiring process, workplace experiences, combatting discrimination, and potential policies and programs. The report is designed to be helpful for the entire community, including government entities, small and large employers, and TGNB community members in the county.

The report could not have been developed without the input from 234 transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender expansive participants living and working in Santa Clara County. We are very grateful for their time and their contributions.

# Research Project Background

Transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and gender expansive (TGNB) populations experience high levels of stigma and discrimination in the United States relative to their cisgender (i.e., non-TGNB) peers. Nationally, stigma and discrimination occur at multiple levels, ranging from harmful laws and policies to interpersonal rejection and everyday microaggressions. One important area in which stigma and discrimination impact TGNB people is in the area of employment. Nationally, anti-TGNB bias, binary gendered expectations, and lack of affirming policies can influence all aspects of job and career development for TGNB people. This can dramatically influence all aspects of job and career development for TGNB people over their lifespans and can severely limit the opportunities that TGNB people have to pursue meaningful and financially stable career paths.

Importantly, stigma and discrimination in the workplace also contribute to income inequality and health disparities among TGNB people. This may be compounded further for TGNB people who have other marginalized identities related to race, ethnicity, immigration status, disability, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, and age.

To date, there have been few research studies regarding TGNB adults' lived experiences with employment. Existing data typically comes from large, national surveys. However, geographic region plays an important role in understanding employment, given that geographic regions vary according to employment sectors, resources, supports, and cost of living. Further, the extent of stigma and discrimination faced by TGNB and other LGBTQ+ populations varies according to geographic factors such as urbanity, political climate, visibility of LGBTQ+ communities, and local and regional laws and policies. Thus, in order to promote equity and well-being for TGNB people, it is important for local governments to understand both general and locally-specific experiences of TGNB people seeking and maintaining employment.

Locally-specific factors may be particularly salient in understanding the employment experiences of TGNB people in Santa Clara County. As the sixth most populous county in California, Santa Clara County has a population of 1.9 million people according to the 2020 census. The county is well known for being home to Silicon Valley, the economic center of technological innovation in the US. Because of the prominence of the tech industry, Santa Clara County is the most affluent county on the West Coast and is one of the most affluent in the entire United States.

However, Santa Clara County has unique characteristics such as wide income inequality, large immigrant and non-English speaking communities, and regional differences between urban and rural parts of the county. It is also embedded in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, a large urban region in which individuals may live and work across county lines.

With respect to LGBTQ+ and TGNB populations, the Bay Area is known for having accepting attitudes and policies regarding sexual orientation and gender identity as well as large, visible LGBTQ+ and TGNB communities. However, it is important to note that historically, this acceptance and visibility has been lower in Santa Clara County than in neighboring counties such as San Francisco and Alameda. Despite the region's reputation, anti-TGNB bias is present in Santa Clara County and the entire Bay Area and still plays a role in the employment trajectories of TGNB community members.

Given all of these unique factors in the county, it is particularly important to understand TGNB people's employment experiences in Santa Clara County and to understand how these experiences are shaped by other intersecting factors.

# Methodology, Inclusion Criteria, and Recruitment

**Inclusion Criteria:** The study included participants aged 18 or older who identify as TGNB and who live and/or work in Santa Clara County. Gender identity is a spectrum and is fluid, and individuals may identify with a range of identities. The current study focused on participants who self-identified as being under the transgender and/or nonbinary “umbrella,” including but not limited to those who identify as trans men, trans women, nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, gender nonconforming, agender, bigender, intersex, and other identities other than cisgender.

**Recruitment of Participants:** Recruitment strategies attempted to encourage participation from a diverse cross section of TGNB individuals living and working in the county. Participants were recruited between November 2021 and April 2022. Recruitment resources included the panels, email lists, and social media of CMI and the County of Santa Clara Office of LGBTQ Affairs. Paid ads were placed on Facebook, Instagram, Craigslist, and the Bay Area Reporter. Research staff developed a list of over 100 local nonprofit agencies and health providers known to work with LGBTQ+ clients. These providers were asked to distribute information about the study. Community members participating in the research were asked to reach out to their local networks to encourage further participation.

**Outreach Materials:** Outreach materials developed to encourage participation in the research were translated and made available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Chinese.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:** The researchers assured participants of confidentiality in the entire study process, including quantitative and qualitative components. Personally identifiable information was separated from their responses.

**Incentives:** Participants were paid a \$20 e-card incentive for completing the survey and a \$75 e-card for completing an in-depth interview or focus group.

**Screener:** Potential participants were administered a short 3-minute screener to help determine if they were eligible for the research. This screener was first reviewed by staff, and qualifying participants were invited to take the full survey. Typical reasons why some participants were disqualified were that they did not live or work in Santa Clara County, or they did not identify as TGNB.

**Survey:** The full online survey took participants approximately 20 minutes to complete. The screener and full survey were translated into English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Chinese. Survey responses were predominantly collected online. However, nine participants elected to complete the survey on paper. At the end of the survey, participants were given the option to leave an email address to participate in individual interviews or focus groups. Participant incentives were fulfilled through a separate payment process.

**Individual Interviews:** Thirty in-depth individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length and were conducted via Zoom. Participants were recruited from the pool of survey respondents who expressed interest in additional opportunities to contribute to the project. Twenty-five of the interviews were with TGNB individuals who discussed their own personal employment experiences, and five were with TGNB individuals who have leadership and/or professional experience working with TGNB communities in Santa Clara County.

**Focus Groups:** Six virtual focus groups were conducted on Zoom, with 25 TGNB community members participating. Participants were recruited from survey respondents who expressed interest in continuing in the research.

## Limitations of the Research

Although this report includes comprehensive information from 234 research participants, there are some limitations to the data that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results.

It is important to note that participants were recruited via advertisements and outreach rather than through population-based or household sampling. Thus, participants with more exposure to social media, online platforms, and social service agencies were more likely to see the promotions. This may have resulted in underrepresentation of unhoused individuals, older community members, and those with low computer literacy skills.

Additionally, outreach was targeted to LGBTQ+-focused social media and LGBTQ+-supportive social service agencies; thus, TGNB people who are less out and less connected to other LGBTQ+ people were less likely to see the advertisements and have their voices included in this report.

The sample included fewer people over the age of 50, and thus results may not be generalizable to older TGNB adults.

Relatedly, the compensation for participants may have been more of a motivating factor for those with lower incomes and/or who are currently

students; results may be less generalizable to those who are more established in higher-paying careers.

Although outreach was done throughout the county, nearly half of participants lived in San Jose, so results may be less generalizable to TGNB people in rural areas.

Additionally, while outreach and survey materials were offered in multiple languages, the majority of participants were fluent in English, so the report may not fully capture the lived experience of immigrants and others who are monolingual in other languages.

The research was conducted in 2021/22, during a time in which COVID-19 limited many in-person activities in the county. This influenced the sample by limiting or excluding some outreach strategies that may have otherwise yielded a larger and more diverse sample.

Finally, the quotes and examples in the report are drawn from focus groups and interviews, which were conducted with a sub-group of survey participants who elected to do so. Individuals who are less comfortable talking openly about TGNB-related topics may therefore be less represented in the qualitative data.

### About TGNB Voices

Sections in the report labeled “*TGNB Voices*” include direct quotes from interview and focus group participants. *TGNB Voices* was used in the report to illustrate the lived experiences of TGNB individuals living and working in Santa Clara County.

Participants in the qualitative research were informed that quotes may be used in a public report. They were also informed that every effort would be made to present their statements in a way that did not disclose their personal identity. Because the Santa Clara County TGNB community is relatively small, quotes do not include demographic data, which might risk identifying a participant. Some quotes were slightly changed to delete potentially identifying information. Quotes are presented in *italics* in this report.

# Overview of the TGNB Research Participants

The 234 research participants included adults who live and/or work in Santa Clara County who identify as trans women, trans men, nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, gender nonconforming, agender, bigender, intersex, and other identities other than cisgender.

## Age

The age range was 18 to 70. The participants trended younger than the county's general population, which is expected for a study of TGNB community members.

- Gen Z (18-25) 32%
- Younger Millennial (26-33) 31%
- Older Millennial (34-41) 20%
- Gen X + Boomers (42+) 17%

## Gender Identity

For the purposes of reporting, participants were grouped into three broad gender identity umbrellas. The wide spectrum of participants' gender identities is discussed later in the report.

- Transgender only 31%
- Nonbinary only 31%
- Transgender and nonbinary 38%

## Employment

Only 44% of the participants were employed full-time, with a high percentage unemployed.

- Employed Full-time 44%
- Employed Part-time 24%
- Self-employed 17%
- Unemployed & looking 12%
- Other not employed 8%

## Education and Individual Income

Almost half (46%) of the participants had a bachelor's degree or higher. Individual income was quite low given the education level: 42% of participants had an individual income under \$25,000; 35% between \$25,000 and \$75,000; and 23% over \$75,000.

## Residence

Participants included TGNB residents of Santa Clara County (86%) and residents of neighboring counties who work in Santa Clara County (14%). There was representation across the county, with just under half of the participants living in San Jose.

- San Jose 47%
- Santa Clara 9%
- Sunnyvale 6%
- Palo Alto 5%
- Mountain View 5%
- Gilroy/Morgan Hill 5%
- Campbell/Cupertino 4%
- Milpitas 3%
- Other Areas 2%
- Other Bay Area 14%

## Race and Ethnicity

Participants represented the many racial and ethnic groups living within Santa Clara County. Multiple selections were allowed. In total, 62% of participants were BIPOC.

- Asian/Pacific Islander 25%
- Black 11%
- Latinx 24%
- Middle Eastern 2%
- Native American 8%
- White/Non-Hispanic 38%
- Two or more ethnicities 14%
- Other 2%

*Multiple selections allowed*

This page is designed to give a brief overview of the research participants. More information is explored for many of these demographic groups later in the report.

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 3

# Understanding Santa Clara County's TGNB Community



**LGBTQ**

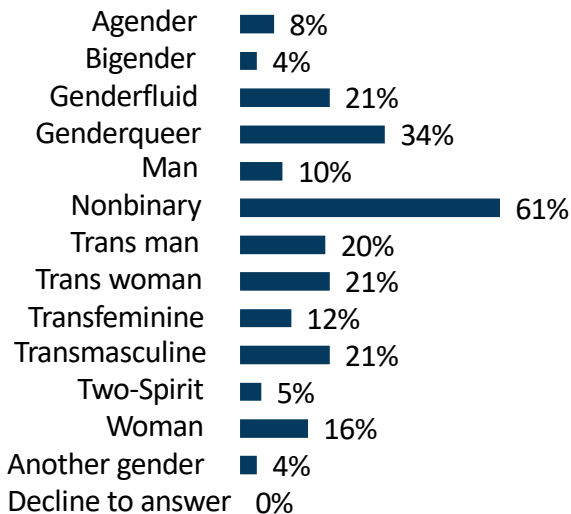
Office of LGBTQ Affairs  
Division of Equity & Social Justice

# The Spectrum of Gender Identity

Gender identity is a spectrum that transcends the binary of man and woman, and there are many gender identities represented under the TGNB umbrella. It is important to distinguish gender identity (one’s internal sense of their gender) from gender expression (how one expresses their gender outwardly) and note that one’s gender identity may not align with their gender expression. Thus, one cannot make assumptions about a person’s gender identity, expression, or pronouns without asking. Additionally, gender identity is complex, nuanced, and may be fluid over time, so many TGNB individuals use multiple labels to describe their genders. Of note, most participants checked two or more boxes among the selections for many of the questions below.

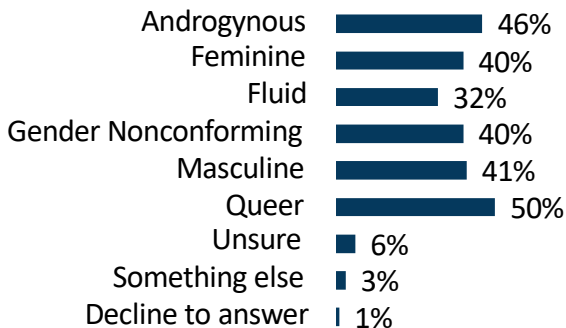
## How would you describe your gender identity?

*Please select all that apply.*



## How would you describe your gender expression?

*Please select all that apply.*



## Which pronouns do you use?

*Please select all that apply.*

- She / Her / Hers .....41%
- He / Him / His .....36%
- They / Them / Theirs .....60%
- I change my pronoun use depending on the situation ....23%
- Other pronouns .....6%

Including: Ey / Em / Eir  
Ne / Nim / Nir  
Ze / Hir / Hirs  
Ze / Zir / Zirs  
Xe / Xem / Xyrs

## Do you consider yourself to be any of the following?

*Please select all that apply.*

- Transgender ..... 69%
- Nonbinary ..... 69%
- Intersex ..... 6%

*Depending on the response, participants were grouped as follows.*

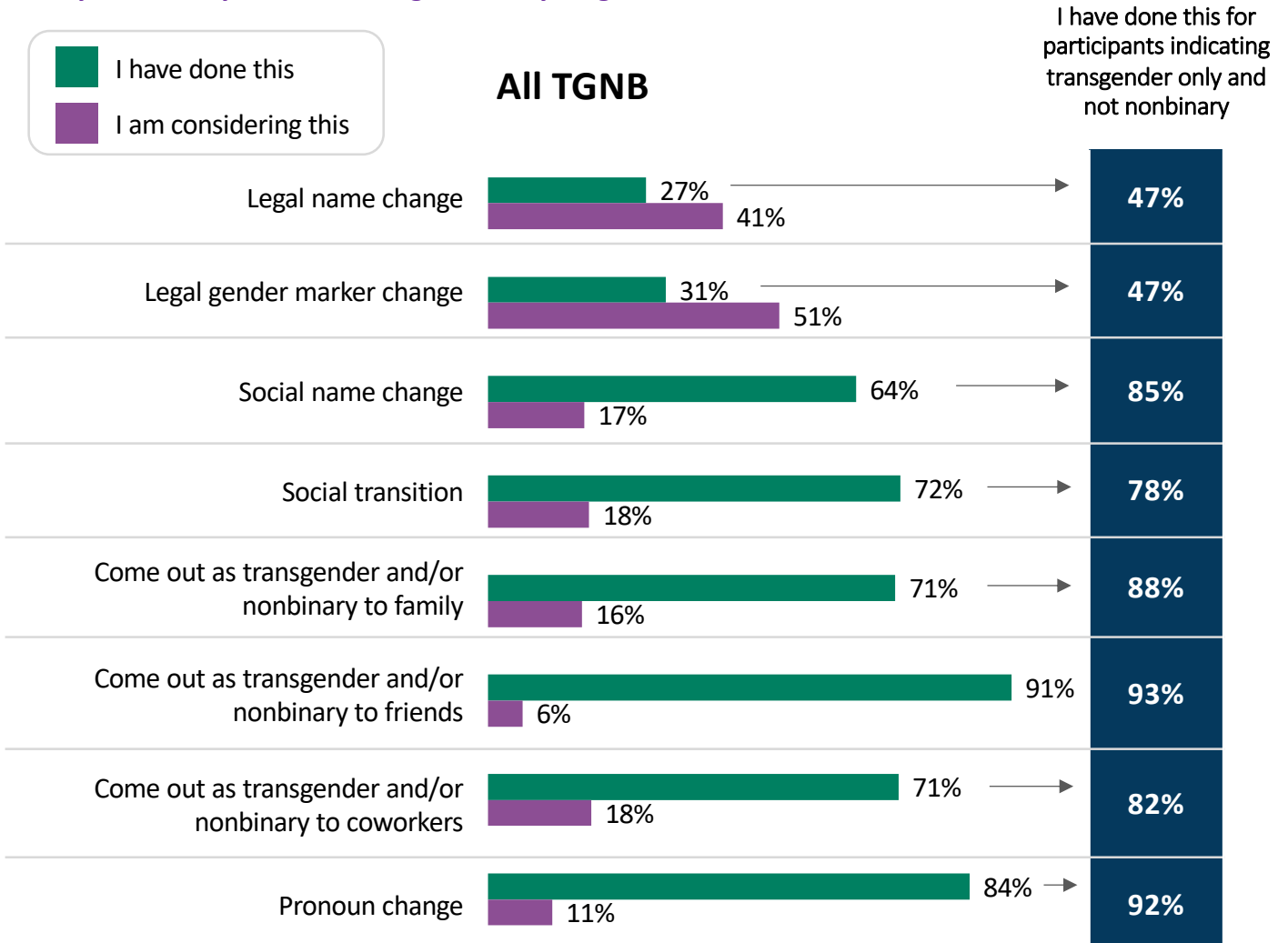
- Marked transgender only .....31%
- Marked nonbinary only .....31%
- Marked transgender and nonbinary .... 38%

*All participants who marked intersex also marked either nonbinary or transgender.*

# Coming Out and Transition

Coming out refers to sharing one’s gender identity with others and may include sharing one’s gender identity label(s), chosen name, and pronouns. Transition refers to social, legal, and medical aspects of affirming one’s gender that is different from sex assigned at birth. Both of these experiences are often non-linear and uniquely experienced by each individual. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that TGNB community members may be in different stages of coming out or transition. The majority of the study participants had come out to family, friends, and coworkers and had transitioned socially (e.g., name and pronoun changes). About a quarter of our total participants had also completed a legal name change. Those who specifically identify as transgender were more likely to have engaged in all of the following gender-affirming processes relative to the overall participant group. It should also be noted that a research project like this is most likely to attract participants who are at least partially “out.” Community members who are not out or are first questioning their gender identities may not feel comfortable participating in this type of study. These data should be interpreted with this in mind, and it should be assumed that these percentages overestimate the true proportion of TGNB community members who have engaged in these gender affirmation steps.

## Have you done any of the following to affirm your gender?



Note: Medical transition is discussed later in the report.



# Out in the Workplace

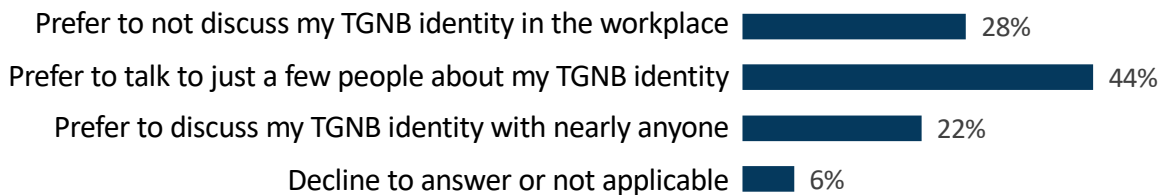
Participants in this study are largely out about their gender identity in their workplaces. However, most prefer to talk about their identity to only a few people or not to discuss their identity in the workplace. Many participants had concerns that prevented them from sharing their TGNB identity at work. For example, about half (47%) are concerned that they may get fired if they openly discuss their TGNB identity.

**To what extent are you out about your TGNB identity at your current job (or last job if you are currently unemployed)?**

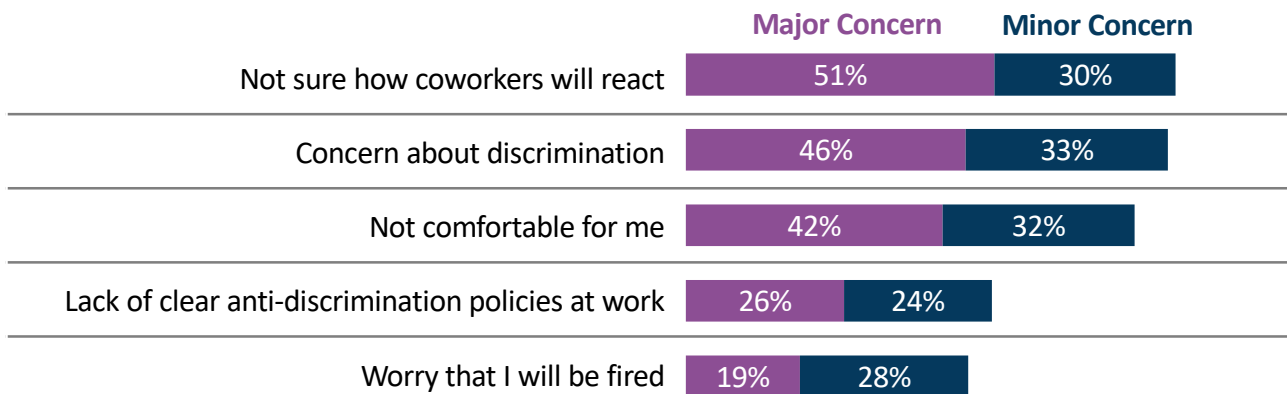
Out to My Coworkers or Peers		Out to My Supervisors or Managers	
55%	<b>Out to all or most</b>	53%	
24%	<b>Out to a few</b>	15%	
15%	<b>Not out</b>	22%	
7%	<b>Not applicable*</b>	10%	

*\*Examples: Work alone or work for self*

**To what extent do you prefer to talk about your TGNB identity in the workplace?**



**Which of the following factors might get in the way of you sharing your TGNB identity at work?**



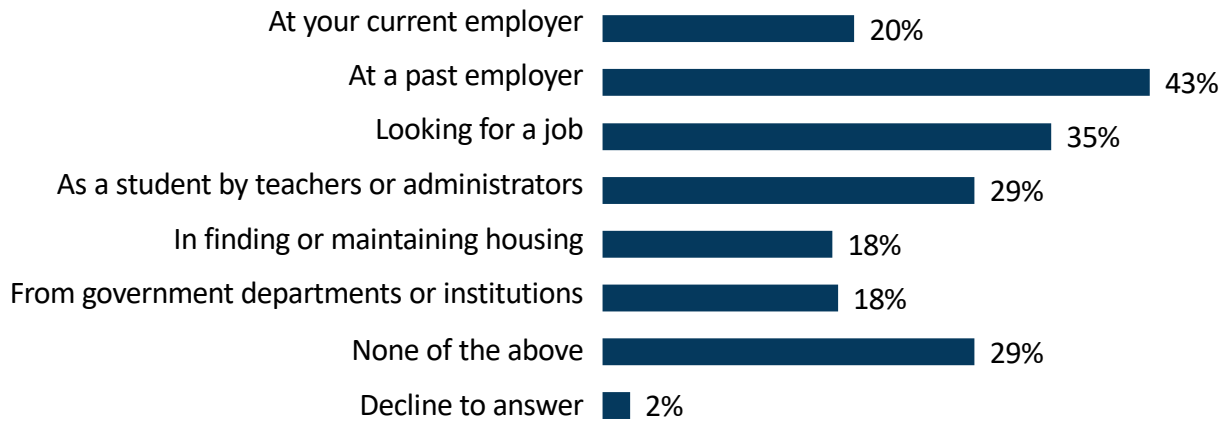
*No concern and not applicable were additional response options*

# Gender and Race / Ethnicity Discrimination

The majority of participants reported recent experiences of discrimination. In the overall sample, 69% experienced some type of discrimination due to their gender, gender identity, or gender expression in the past five years. BIPOC participants face compounded discrimination due to both their race/ethnicity and their gender identity, with 48% of all BIPOC participants and 69% of Black participants indicating some type of discrimination based on race or ethnicity in the past five years.

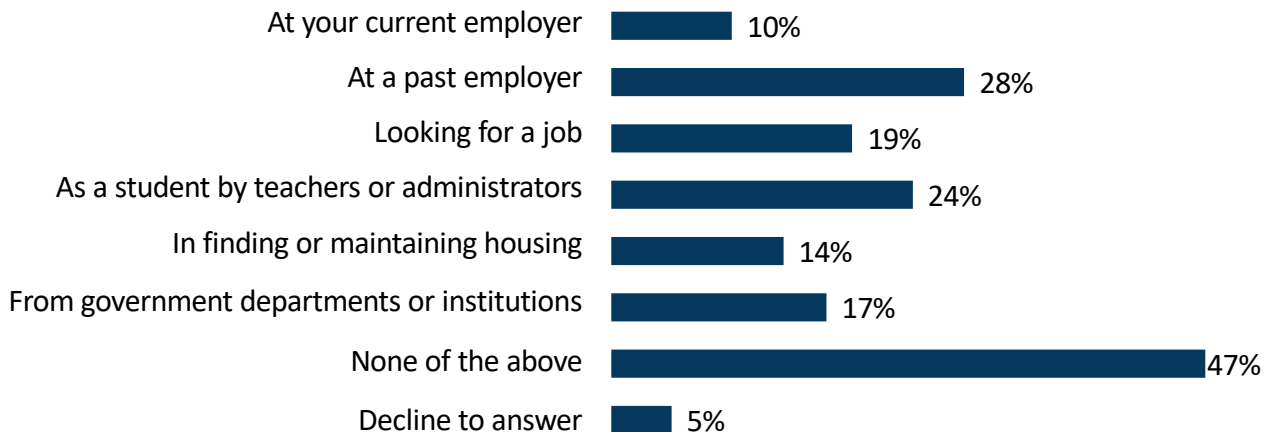
**In the past five years, have you experienced discrimination due to your gender, gender identity, or gender expression in any of the following ways?** *Please select all that apply.*

## Gender Identity Discrimination Among All TGNB Participants



**In the past five years, have you experienced discrimination due to your race or ethnicity in any of the following ways?** *Please select all that apply.*

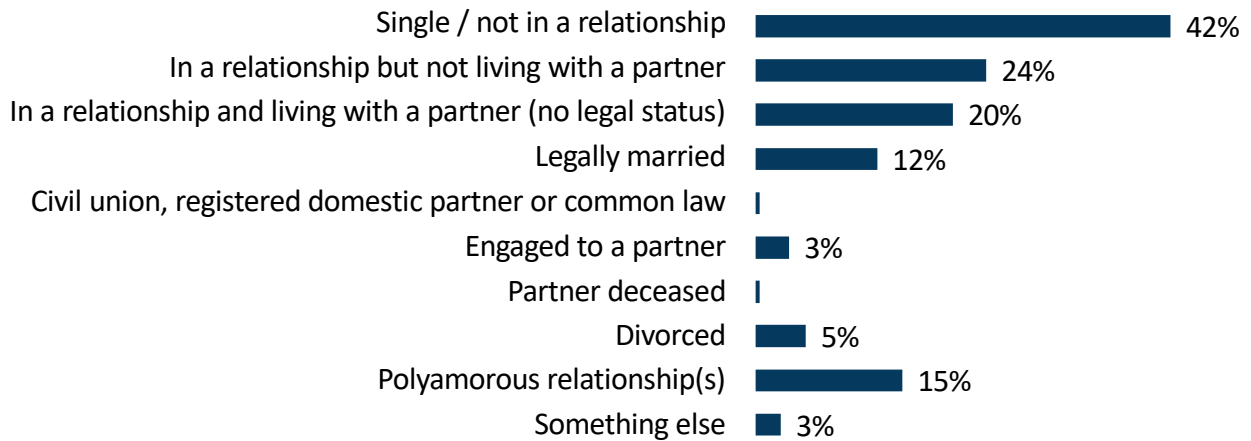
## Race / Ethnicity Discrimination Among BIPOC Participants



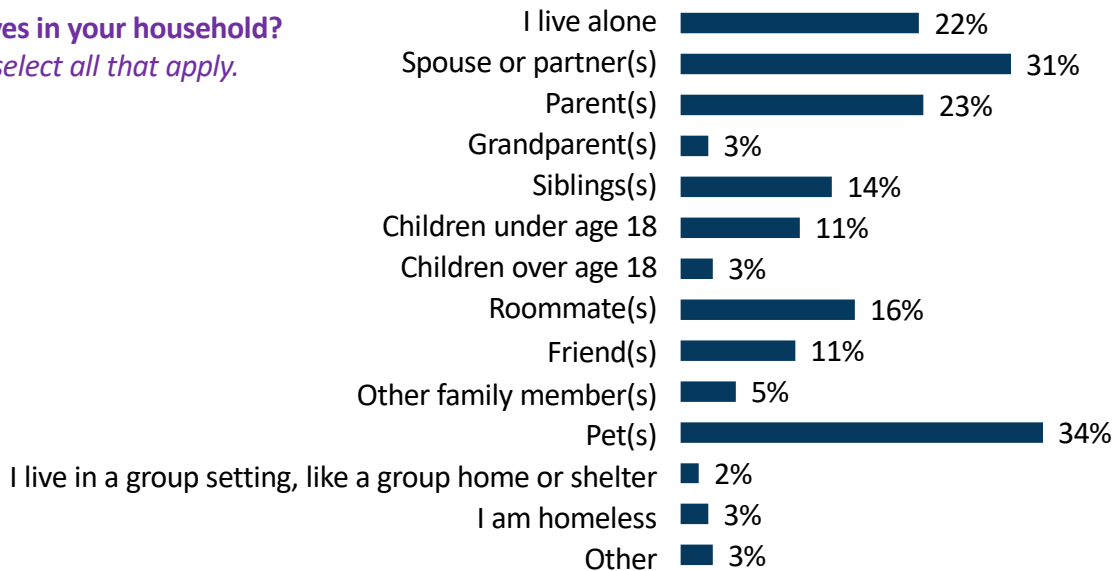
# Relationships, Children, and Households

Romantic relationships and living arrangements were quite varied among participants. Relatively few (22%) reported living alone. Many participants indicated that they would like to live alone (or just with a partner), but housing costs in Santa Clara County made that impossible. About a quarter (23%) of participants reported living with their parents, and many of these young people stated that it is sometimes stressful because their parents do not fully accept them for being TGNB. The majority of participants (92%) do not have children. This is likely partially due to the younger age of the participants.

**Which of the following best describes your current relationship status? Please select all that apply.**



**Who lives in your household? Please select all that apply.**



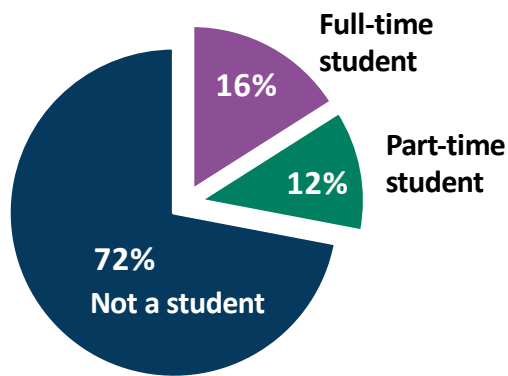
**Do you have children or grandchildren? Please select all that apply.**

- No .....92%
- Decline to answer.....1%
- Yes, I have children under age 18 ..... 6%
- Yes, I have children aged 18 or over ... 2%
- Yes, I have grandchildren ..... 1%

# Educational Experiences and Attainment

The overall sample was relatively highly educated, with 80% of participants pursuing some form of post-high school education. Almost half (46%) of the participants had a bachelor's degree or higher, with 17% earning a graduate degree. About a third of participants reported dropping out of college at some point in the past. It is important to contextualize this in terms of financial barriers and pausing education to pursue transition. Given that the majority of participants pursued higher education, there is also an expectedly high percentage who have student loans. Notably, the majority of participants (58%) with student loans reported that they struggle to make student loan payments, and another 17% said that they were not sure if they would struggle to make payments due to temporary loan deferments. Overall, these data demonstrate TGNB community members' high commitment to education and self-improvement, including financial motivation to obtain high-quality job placements, while at the same time contending with socioeconomic and gender-based barriers.

## Are you currently a student?



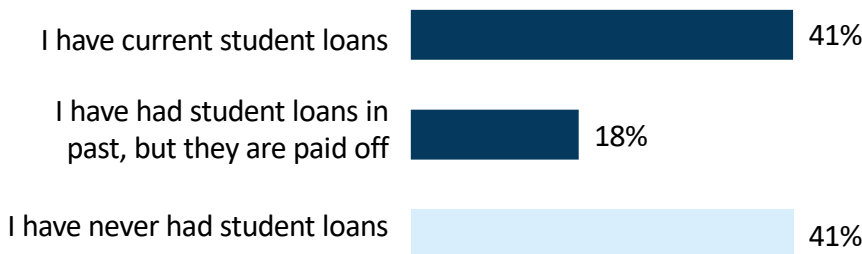
## What is the highest level of education you have attained?

- Less than a High School diploma or GED .....5%
- High School diploma or GED .....15%
- Some college .....25%
- Associate's Degree or Professional Certification .....9%  
(post-High School)
- Bachelor's Degree .....29%
- Master's Degree .....13%
- Doctoral degree .....4%

## At any time did you drop out of high school or college?

- Indicated dropping out of high school .....12%
- Indicated dropping out of college or university.....34%

## What is your personal history with taking out student loans?

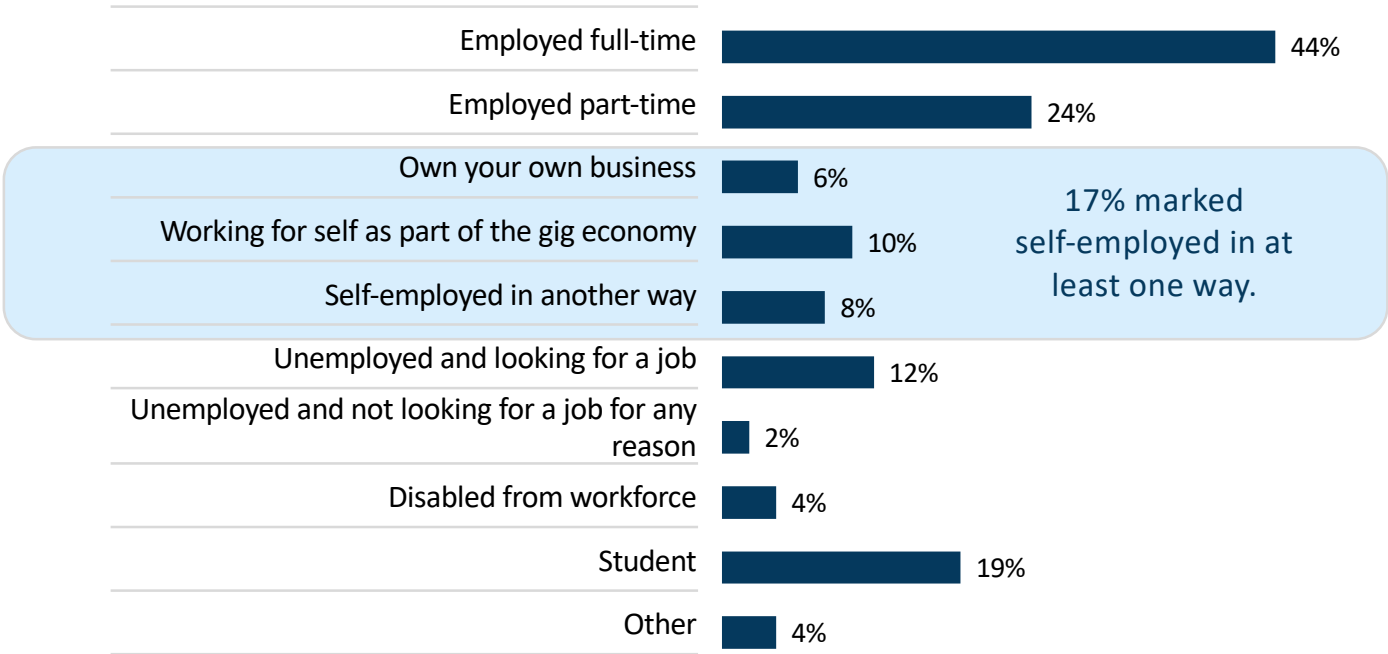


Among those with current student loans, **58% struggle** to make payments.

# Employment Status

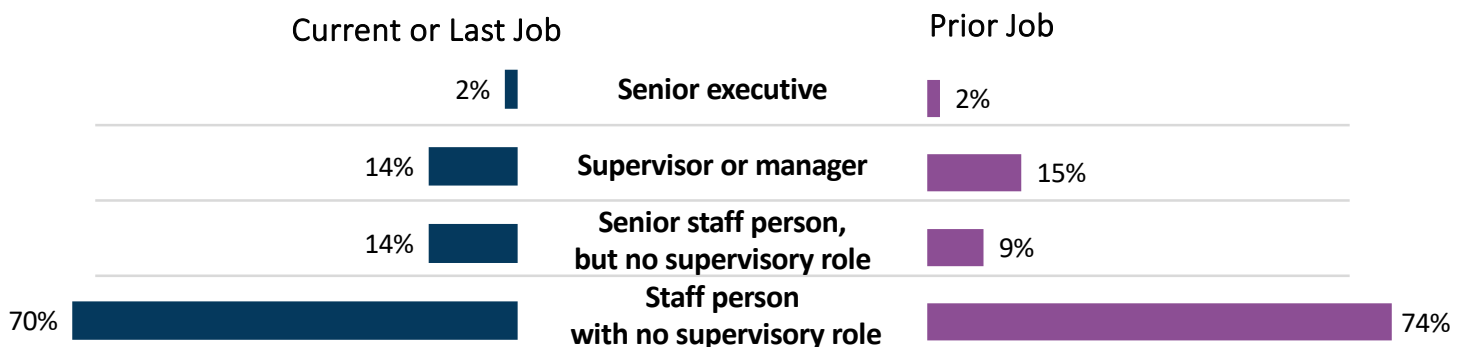
Participants reported a range of different current employment statuses. Forty-four percent (44%) said that they work full-time, and 24% part-time. Seventeen percent (17%) are self-employed in some way. Twelve percent (12%) are currently unemployed and looking for a job. Only 2% of employees considered themselves senior executives. However, 14% were supervisors or managers. Comparing the current job to the past job, we did not see progression of responsibilities at the higher levels.

**What's your current employment status? Please select all that apply.**



Only 1 participant indicated "retired," 1 declined to answer, and 0 indicated "military".

**What role do or did you have with this work or employer? Among FT and PT employees.**



# Unemployment

Unemployment is classified as a time when a person is looking for paid work but not working. Twelve percent (12%) of participants are currently unemployed and looking for a job. Santa Clara County’s general population unemployment rate was less than 3% for this period. Among all participants aged 21 and over, 68% have experienced unemployment in the past ten years. Twenty-nine percent (29%) experienced three or more periods of unemployment. Among those who had experienced employment, 50% had a period of unemployment that lasted six months or more. Employment and unemployment status have important implications on mental health. Seventy-two percent (72%) of full-time employees and 86% of self-employed employees indicated that employment positively impacts their mental health. In comparison, 77% of currently unemployed participants stated that unemployment has a negative impact on their mental health.

## How many times have you experienced a period of unemployment in the past 10 years? (age 21+)



## How long was the longest period of unemployment?

None	32%	3 to 5 times	21%
1 time	22%	5+ times	7%
2 times	18%		

- Less than a month .....1%
- 1 to less than 3 months .....21%
- 3 to less than 6 months .....28%
- 6 to less the 12 months .....20%
- 12 months or more .....30%

## Do you agree with the following statements? Among employed

	All TGNB	Full-Time	Part-Time	Self Employed
Being employed has had a positive impact on my mental health	63%	72%	43%	86%
Anti-TGNB employment discrimination has had a negative impact on my mental health	54%	56%	52%	43%
I stress about money because I do not earn an adequate income from my job	52%	40%	75%	57%

## Do you agree with the following statements? Among unemployed

Being unemployed has had a negative impact on my mental health	77%
Anti-TGNB employment discrimination has had a negative impact on my mental health	65%
Being unemployed causes me stress	92%
I stress about money because I do not have a job	92%

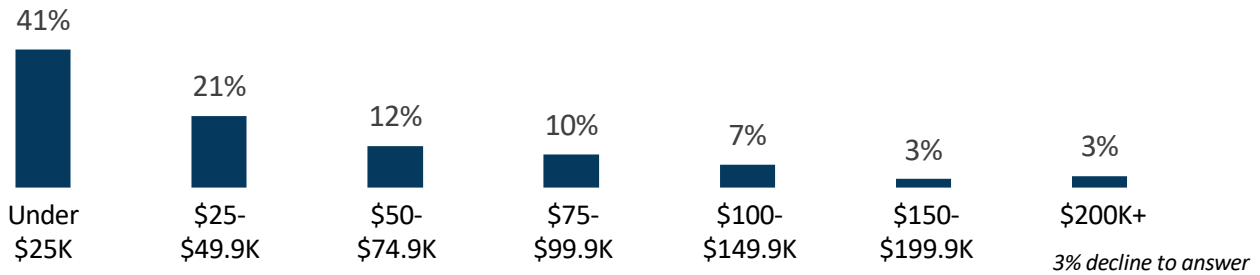
Base: TGNB Participants age 21 or over = 214,  
All employed TGNB Participants = 166  
All TGNB Participants (Unemployed and Looking for Work) = 29

# Income

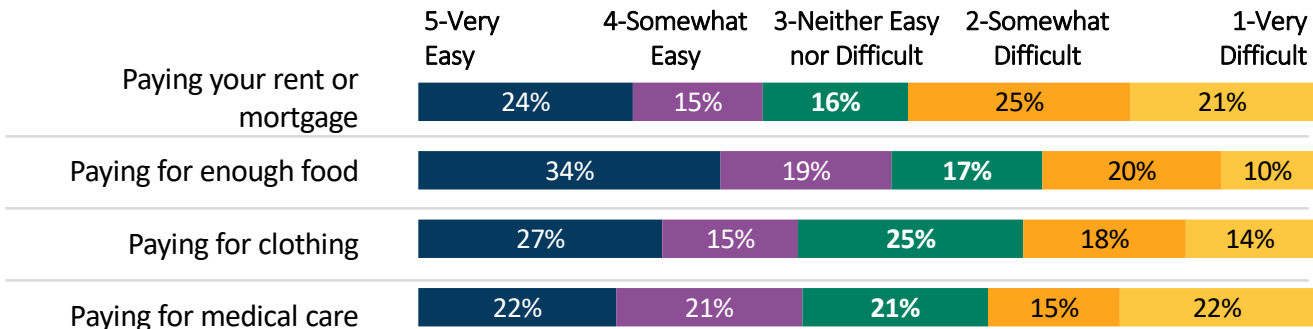
Participants' median individual income was only \$34,000, which is quite low for Santa Clara County. This finding is somewhat influenced by the relatively young overall age of participants. However, considering the high average educational attainment level of participants, these income levels suggest pervasive underemployment. The median household income, which includes income earned by partners, parents, and roommates, was \$79,032, also well below the overall median household income for Santa Clara County. Most participants indicated that they are financially struggling or doing just well enough to get by, with only 30% feeling financially secure. Paying for housing and medical care are the two biggest financial challenges.

## Annual Individual Income

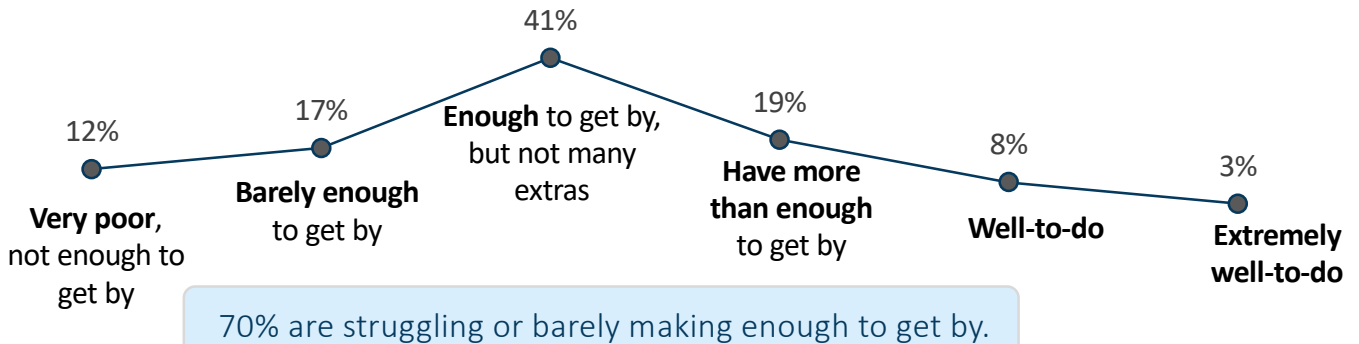
*Including salary, wages, welfare, disability benefits, pension, retirement benefits, food stamps, child support, investments, and any other activity.*



## During this past year, how easy was it for you to meet these basic financial needs?



## How would you characterize your current financial situation?



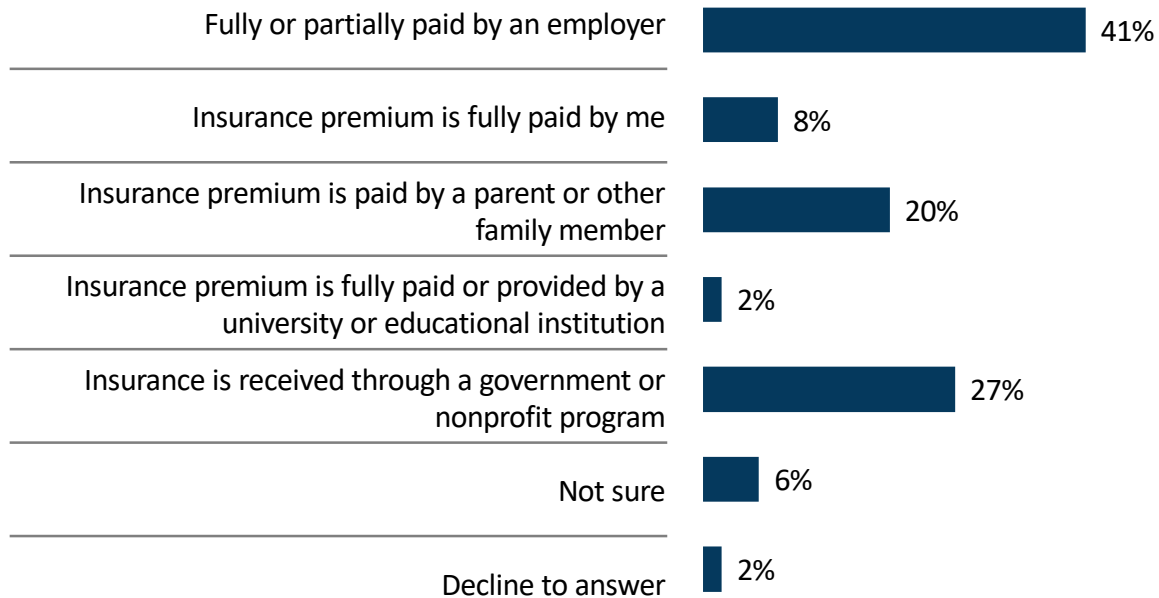
# Health & Insurance Coverage

The majority of participants (84%) reported having some kind of health insurance. Twelve percent (12%) of participants reported having no health insurance, which is higher than the 7% of all Californians without insurance. However, it is particularly noteworthy that only 41% of participants with health insurance reported receiving health insurance through their employer, with the second most common provider of insurance being through government or non-profit programs. This may reflect the fact that participants have relatively high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and self-employment.

## Do you have any kind of health care coverage, including health insurance, prepaid health plans, HMOs, or government plans such as Medicare or Indian Health Service?

- Yes .....84%
- No .....12%
- Not sure .....3%
- Decline to answer .....1%

## How do you receive or who pays for your health insurance? Among answering yes to previous question

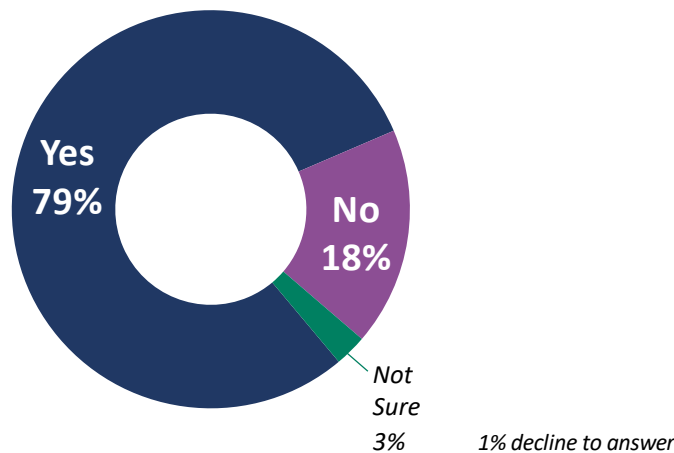




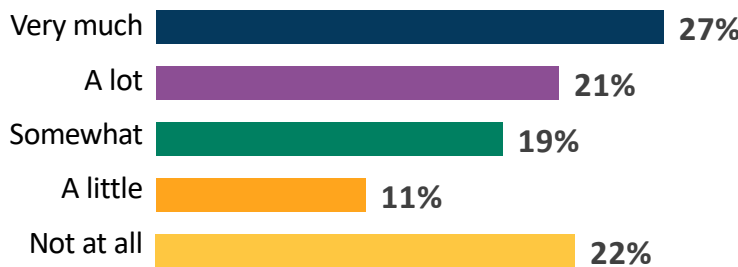
# Mental Health

Mental health problems can influence and be influenced by employment and unemployment. A large majority of participants (79%) reported being diagnosed with a mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime. This finding mirrors national statistics, which document elevated rates of mental health problems among TGNB people. It is important to note that these problems are not inherent to being a TGNB person, but instead are due to the negative impact of living with stigma, discrimination, and rejection on a daily basis. On the other hand, research also shows that access to gender-affirming medical and mental health care and social support can prevent and reduce mental health problems among TGNB people. In this study, a majority (78%) of participants also reported that mental health concerns have interfered with their ability to find or keep a job over the past five years, with nearly half (48%) reporting that mental health concerns interfered a lot or very much. These findings suggest the importance of considering mental health and mental health treatment, as well as social service and community support programs, as integral to supporting TGNB employment.

Have you ever been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar disorder, or another mental health disorder?



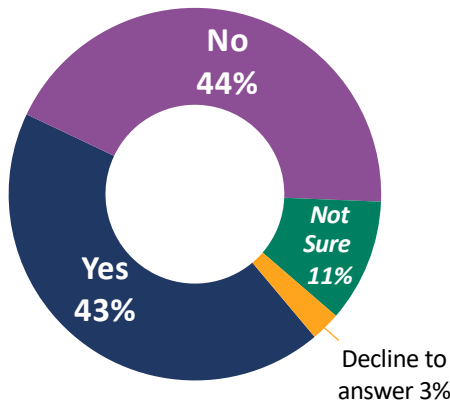
In the past five years, how much have mental health concerns interfered with finding or keeping a job?



# Disability and Learning Difficulties

Disabilities are important factors that can influence and be impacted by employment. Nationally, TGNB people report higher rates of disabilities and learning difficulties, which may be related to the ongoing impact of stigma and discrimination. In the current study, almost half (43%) of participants reported having a disability or learning difficulty, with an additional 11% indicating “unsure.” The most commonly reported disabilities were cognitive and learning disabilities. Many participants also reported experiences of discrimination based on their disability status, including one quarter (25%) who experienced this at a past employer and 10% at their current employer. Disability-based discrimination was also relatively common at school (25%) and while looking for a job (18%).

**Do you have any of types of disability or learning difficulty?**



**In the past five years, have you experienced discrimination due to any type of physical, learning, or mental disability in any of the following ways?**

*Please check any that apply.*

**Among All Participants**

- At a past employer.....25%
- As a student by teachers or administrators.....25%
- Looking for a job.....18%
- From a government departments or institutions ....15%
- In finding or maintaining housing.....11%
- At your current employer .....10%
- None of the above .....54%
- Decline to answer .....3%

**Please indicate the type of disability or learning difficulty, if any (check all that apply)**  
**Among All Participants**

<b>Cognitive difficulty</b> such as having serious difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions	29%
<b>Learning difficulty</b> such as having difficulty understanding written or spoken language, performing calculations, or acquiring new knowledge	16%
<b>Independent living difficulty</b> , because of a physical, mental, or emotional challenge	13%
<b>Self-care difficulty</b> , such as having difficulty bathing or dressing	7%
<b>Ambulatory difficulty</b> , having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs	6%
<b>Hearing difficulty</b> , deaf or having serious difficulty hearing	4%
<b>Vision difficulty</b> , blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses	3%
Other	11%

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 4

# TGNB Impressions of Santa Clara County



# Living in Santa Clara County

Overall, participants rate Santa Clara County as a positive to neutral place to live and work. However, just under half (49%) of participants said that the county is a supportive place to work as a TGNB person. Participants perceive Santa Clara County as less TGNB-affirming than San Francisco and the East Bay but as much better than other parts of the country. Three concerns about the region are:

1. The high cost of living/housing
2. A feeling that the county's LGBTQ+ or TGNB community could be more visible and organized
3. Rural parts of the county are not as TGNB-affirming as San Jose and Silicon Valley

In short, participants regard the county positively, but Santa Clara County can improve.

Based on your experience, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA
<b>Santa Clara County is a supportive place for me to live as a TGNB person</b>	12%	52%	19%	9%	2%	5%
<b>Santa Clara County is a supportive place for me to work as a TGNB person</b>	9%	40%	28%	14%	3%	6%

## TGNB Voices

*In my work experience in the county, there's been an effort to try to get pronouns correct. There have been efforts to try to get more visibility around how to support trans people. I do feel a little bit more supported. However, I think there's just so much more to go. It's not as integrated.*

*I lived in other areas of the Bay Area, and it felt safer to come out as nonbinary, compared to Santa Clara County, because there's more of a culture of checking in about pronouns and being careful about gendered language. There's just a lot more people who are queer and trans; even walking on the streets, there are folks of so many different gender expressions.*

*Santa Clara County is a great place to be if you're queer. It would be great to actually tell the trans people, "Hey, don't worry. Come here and then we can get things sorted out."*

*Santa Clara County's LGBTQ community, to me, at least, feels very fragmented.*

*Many of my clients are located in San Jose, in particular. I think Santa Clara County is no safer or unsafe than anywhere else in the Bay Area.*

*I think that Santa Clara County is just a little bit conservative compared to other parts of the Bay Area.*

*In the East Bay you're going to see a lot more places and businesses with signs up that say "Trans lives matter," and having a trans flag flying or a Pride flag flying. And not just in June. It's always there. You see that more in the East Bay than you do riding through neighborhoods in Santa Clara County for whatever reason that is.*

*I've spent time in San Jose and Mountain View and around the Bay Area. It feels a lot more straight in Santa Clara County compared to San Francisco. I'm sure there are people in my neighborhood who are queer or trans or nonbinary. I've never met any of them. There are a lot of LGBTQ-identifying people in Santa Clara, but it just doesn't seem like there's any culture around it.*

# Impressions of the County of Santa Clara

Participants were asked about their impressions of the County of Santa Clara as a government entity. Participants had a mixed response, primarily related to their level of interaction with county programs. Some were unaware of any of the TGNB-affirming activities of the county or the Office of LGBTQ Affairs. Only 38% said the County of Santa Clara was responsive to the needs of the TGNB community. Participants looking for a job with the county expressed some barriers and challenges in the employment process. Complaints included not being transparent, confusion over legal name vs. chosen name, interviewers not receiving adequate TGNB diversity training (based on the interviewer's words and actions), and the county not giving enough credit to the lived experiences of the applicants.

Based on your experience, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA
The County of Santa Clara is responsive to the needs of the TGNB community	8%	30%	26%	17%	3%	16%
The County of Santa Clara has encouraged an environment that is supportive of TGNB people	9%	39%	21%	13%	4%	13%
A job with the County of Santa Clara would be a supportive place for TGNB employees	11%	31%	20%	10%	3%	25%

## TGNB Voices

*I honestly have no clue on any programs that Santa Clara County currently has or anything they've currently got. Part of that is on me. I haven't done a whole lot of research.*

*I feel like seriously committing to TGNB trainings and access for all employees of the county as well. I've just heard many stories about county employees having no understanding of how to serve trans and gender-diverse people.*

*I'll start by saying I didn't even realize Santa Clara County was even thinking about this until I got targeted for the Instagram ad to do the survey for this study. I looked at the website and I'm like, "Oh, there's a whole LGBTQ entity within the county government," which was really cool to find.*

*Santa Clara County is really making an effort. I've been in San Jose maybe five years, and I have seen them go from doing nothing to doing something. They hold transgender job fairs. The county participates in different diversity trainings. They do a lot. If you're thinking you want to work in government, Santa Clara County is one of the best counties.*

*They could always do better. Santa Clara County did a lot really well really early, just in terms of exposure to LGBTQ+ identities, giving folks with those identities power, letting them shape and change things.*

*I think the Santa Clara County probably cares more than others verbally, but I don't think they are any better at addressing it than any other county. I don't think they have been a total success yet.*

*It is not easy to get a County job. Transgender people have been applying for County jobs for years and not getting the jobs. That creates skepticism of outreach efforts if you're not going to hire me when I apply. I think in the bigger picture the County has good intentions, but it is not really integrated into all of their hiring systems.*

*My sense is that they're not really doing anything. I don't really know of anything that the county has specifically done. I've lived in Santa Clara for over ten years, and this is really the first time I've ever heard of the county doing something specifically for trans people—not even just with employment, but just anything.*

# Cost of Living in Santa Clara County

An important factor to consider in the context of employment among TGNB individuals in Santa Clara County is the high cost of living and housing insecurity in this area. A notable majority of participants (83%) reported that salary is at least “very important” when looking for a job. When asked about future career goals, 82% said they need to earn more money. Additionally, 64% of participants indicated that stable housing would be “very helpful” for achieving their career goals over the next five years. Participants also described the strain of looking for employment when experiencing homelessness: job applications require a home address, but homeless individuals do not have a home address. This creates a cycle in which homeless individuals who are most in need of stable income to meet their basic needs face the most barriers to achieving employment. These obstacles are particularly salient for TGNB individuals who are more likely to experience employment and housing discrimination, putting them at increased risk for homelessness, low income, and less stable employment. Participants reported that a living minimum wage and affordable housing are needed to increase employment stability for TGNB community members.

## How important are the following when looking for a job?

### Salary Level

- Extremely Important .....43%
- Very Important .....40%
- Somewhat Important .....15%
- A Little Important .....2%
- Not Important .....0%

## How helpful would these potential services be to meet your career goals over the next five years?

### Stable Housing

- Very Helpful .....64%
- Somewhat Helpful .....7%
- Not Helpful .....7%
- NA .....21%

## TGNB Voices

*I’m a really super kind of neat person, a really clean person. I’m really fastidious in my van and with my person, so people would look at me and never think I was homeless, unless they saw me sleeping in my car.*

*Affordable housing is difficult in Santa Clara County. Trans and nonbinary are often scared that they’re not going to have housing if they have a non-supportive family. If they get kicked out, they can’t get a job either.*

*Access to housing is a big deal. If you don’t have stable living, you’re not going to be able to hold a stable job and then be able to get to a job, look presentable. There is a housing crisis in the Bay Area, period, but especially for trans folks.*

*Living in Santa Clara County, it is really hard to support yourself as a trans and nonbinary person who maybe needs hormones, maybe you’re saving up for surgery, maybe you need to change your entire wardrobe, maybe you need to pay all your legal fees for your documents.*

*A lot my trans friends left due to the financial strain in the Valley.*

*In the Bay Area housing is not easy to come by. Most people that have housing are holding onto that, no matter where it is.*

*The biggest, in terms of service—and I’m sure that you’ve heard this and know this—is housing. That’s the main thing that’s come up with folks that are in the job hunt that are having to struggle to find housing and a job at the same time.*

*I think one of the resounding conversations that we’re having right now between me and my trans peers is a livable wage for the Bay Area. I hear this all of the time, “I just wish I could make more money because I don’t like living with my family because they don’t understand, they don’t even recognize my gender.”*

# Santa Clara County’s LGBTQ+ Nonprofits

Participants described positive experiences with existing LGBTQ+ nonprofits in the county. Participants also discussed losing connection with these nonprofits due to COVID-19 and expressed a desire to reconnect with them face-to-face when it is possible. Some participants reported that the limited programs to support TGNB employment have been helpful, and they want more emphasis on employment support. Participants envisioned the benefits of peer-led TGNB mentoring programs and employment workshops supporting resume writing, doing practice interviews, or navigating the workplace as a TGNB person. Participants also stated that TGNB individuals should be leading or co-leading the programs to support the TGNB community. The county’s LGBTQ+ and TGNB nonprofits already serve an essential role in fostering community connection; having these nonprofits operate TGNB-specific employment programs will enhance the vital work already being done.

## TGNB Voices

*When I first moved here, I lived in Santa Clara. Now, I just work down there. They had a really big LGBT center that was kind of helpful. I went in there and talked to people and they were all young and they were helpful. They showed me how to just do these things, they helped clean up my resumé.*

*Many trans women struggle to hold on to employment, struggle to get clean, struggle to find safe housing or even a safe place to sleep. I think those types of olive branches or, rather, those ladders that could help people climb up into a more stable position would be amazing, even more than what we have through the Q Corner and through the LGBTQ Office of Affairs and things like that.*

*I used to go to Billy De Frank, and I had good experiences there. I felt supported. I have not been there for years. I stopped going because of COVID. Things are starting to open up, but I feel less motivated to check them out again.*

*I think programs need to be peer-led, like people who are trans working in Santa Clara County sharing about their—almost mentoring, about to go through the process of applications, and how to navigate through working at particular types of workplaces.*

*That’s the bad thing about the pandemic. Many services stopped. It doesn’t look like they’re opening back up anytime soon. I really miss that.*

*I think that the Bay Area and Santa Clara County, in general, is one of the best places to transition or to come out as nonbinary. There’s a ton of support out here. There are tons of resources. There’s definitely a more inclusive attitude. I think that Santa Clara County is doing well.*

*If there are ways that the county can fund more LGBTQ cultural organizations’, nonprofits’ work, that will help some of that cultural building piece. But I think the county can help plant some of the seeds in funding...ensuring that trans, nonbinary, gender-expansive people are centered and leading and/or co-leading these efforts.*

*I love the Billy DeFrank Center. I love the Q Corner stuff...but with COVID they’re not really open right now. I just wish there were more things like that, safe spaces to hang out past 8:00 or 9:00 at night.*

# Finding Employment in the County

Forty-three percent (43%) of participants reported difficulty finding employment in their field in Santa Clara County, with another 15% not being sure. The majority of participants who reported difficulty finding employment stated that they attributed that difficulty to anti-TGNB discrimination. The remainder of this report will discuss the many barriers facing TGNB individuals in their job search and at the workplace, as well as solutions to improve TGNB employment in the county.

Regardless of where you work now, have you had difficulty finding employment in your field in Santa Clara County?



How much do you attribute your difficulty finding work specifically in Santa Clara County to your TGNB identity?

76% of those who have had difficulty finding work in their field attribute it at least a little to their TGNB identity.

## TGNB Voices

*Yeah, it seems like it's easier for trans folks and gender nonconforming folks to find employment in the East Bay than it is in Santa Clara County.*

*During an interview with a company, I was told that the job position was removed. Only later to find out that it was still open and they were still hiring.*

*In Santa Clara County, I have applied to jobs, and I haven't gotten a call back. I don't know if that's related to me being nonbinary, but I will say that there isn't a lot of LGBTQ places specific for us here in Santa Clara County.*

*I was denied for a previous job because they claimed that they "didn't know how to work with someone like me" and that I'd make the other staff members "uncomfortable."*

*I applied for a restaurant job, and the manager actually said they wouldn't give me a job because only men or women worked there.*

*In Santa Clara County, I don't usually waste my time applying for jobs unless I know the employer will be supportive.*

*Many times in this county, I would apply for jobs and submit my resume over the phone. They would invite me in for an in-person interview. Then when I attended the in-person interviews, the interviews were frequently cut short or cancelled all together once people saw me in person.*

*In Santa Clara County, companies say they are trying to address gender diversity in the workplace, but this is really about hiring cisgender women. They completely ignore the existence of genders outside the female/male binary. There is a lack of transgender representation in tech, engineering, and science fields here.*



# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 5

## TGNB

# Discrimination in the Workplace



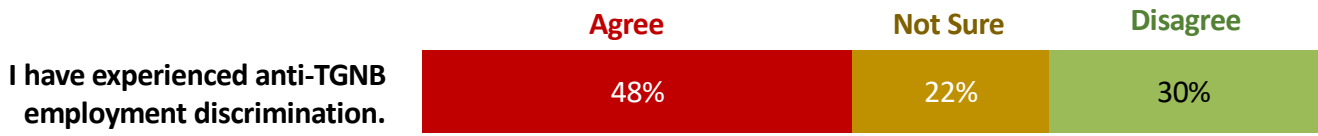
**LGBTQ**

Office of LGBTQ Affairs  
Division of Equity & Social Justice

# Anti-TGNB Workplace Discrimination

Workplace discrimination against TGNB people living and working in Santa Clara County is common. In this study, 70% said they had experienced anti-TGNB discrimination or were not sure. During the interviews and focus groups, many participants expressed that they suspected discrimination, but there was no way to prove it. Participants also indicated a range of different types of discrimination in their past and current jobs. Discrimination can have a negative impact on job performance. Fifteen percent (15%) of participants reported that their job performance at their current job is negatively affected by anti-TGNB discrimination.

## Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



	Current Job	Past Job
My job performance was negatively affected by anti-TGNB discrimination	15%	39%
I was paid less than my cisgender coworkers for similar work	7%	23%
I was retaliated against for reporting negative treatment due to my TGNB identity	7%	20%
I was denied a promotion or pay raise because of my TGNB identity	4%	21%
I was denied time off that I needed for gender affirming care	3%	14%

## TGNB Voices

*People talk about things like trans women need help with dress or makeup. So let's have a makeup workshop. Trans women don't need cis women showing them makeup tutorials in order to get jobs. That's not how this works. It isn't the problem that we're having. The problem is there's systematic discrimination and we are not being judged on our skills.*

*Certain managers were actually gunning for me to get fired and let go. It's so hard when you feel like you are doing a good job, but then your gender identity literally makes them uncomfortable, and their judgements become more important than your safety and well-being financially.*

*Now I look for gig work. In the past, my supervisors or coworkers did not like my appearance. Lots of discrimination. I did not want to be in an environment that is hostile. It just made me prefer temp or seasonal jobs. If I don't commit, I don't get hurt.*

*It's really not that hard to not discriminate. It literally doesn't make sense to me sometimes, where I just see that type of discrimination happening towards me or towards others, and I literally don't understand the logic of it.*

*Santa Clara County needs to create more accountability when transphobia occurs. When we do experience it, where do we go? How do we report on it?*

*I was super fresh into my transition and it became an issue with one of my coworkers, where they weren't using the right pronouns, and I had brought it up to management. A couple days later I got fired. That's pretty intense.*

# Reporting Discrimination in the Workplace

Although many participants had experienced anti-TGNB and other forms of discrimination in the workplace, barriers to reporting such experiences were common. Indeed, only 24% of all participants had reported anti-TGNB discrimination to a supervisor, manager, and/or HR department. Participants expressed concerns about judgment, retaliation, or being labeled as a problematic employee if they filed reports. Some participants had been fired after making a complaint. Even among those who did not experience any form of retaliation, many encountered HR personnel who did not have knowledge or experience to work effectively with TGNB-related concerns, and perpetrators of discrimination rarely had any repercussions. Further, discrimination, misgendering, or microaggressions often come from the supervisor or manager, making it even harder to report. Some participants explained that reporting discrimination at work could lead to an expectation that the participant would then provide education to co-workers and supervisors on TGNB-related topics, including discussing their own experiences. Thus, few participants had positive outcomes from reporting discrimination. Many expressed a wish for the county to create a safe and centralized place to report anti-TGNB discrimination and for standardized protocols for employers to handle these experiences in the workplace.



Despite widespread experiences of negative negative treatment and discrimination in the workplace, only about a quarter (24%) of all participants made a report to a supervisor, manager and/or HR Department.

## TGNB Voices

*I didn't address the situation at first. I feared they would have judged me, so I just stayed silent.*

*I think something that would be really useful is a safe way and more accessible way to report employers for something like discrimination.*

*For eight years I was sometimes harassed for being trans in my job. I would report these incidences to my HR. Some HR representatives would handle the situation properly, but each store manager had a different way of responding to each situation. There is where I found that it's not really a company standard.*

*When I reported the situation to HR, they had coworkers take an online discrimination course. The reaction was not a better workplace, rather my coworkers confronted for making a report.*

*HR are not the people to go to because they might not even know how to handle it. They're not always the safest people to go to.*

*When you report a supervisor, they just deny everything, and because they are above me in rank, there are no repercussions.*

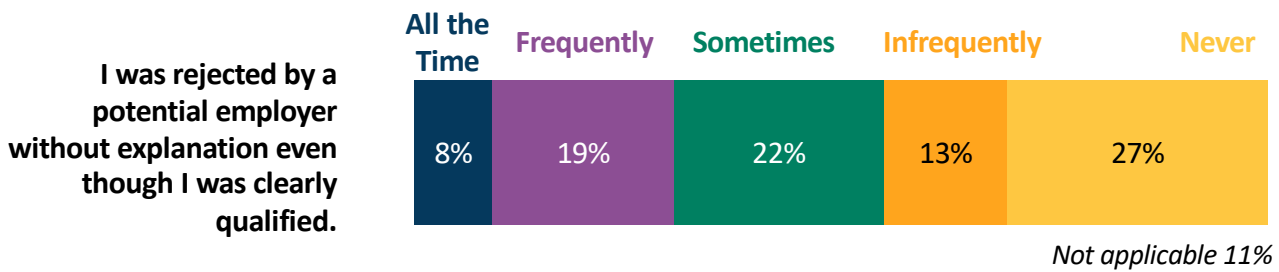
*At my current job I've had to educate HR and my manager about TGNB issues. They expected me to tell them how to support a TGNB person. My manager has repeatedly told me it's my job to educate others.*

*My supervisor told my coworkers and clients that I had complained about being misgendered without my permission or without trying to make it clear that that behavior wasn't acceptable.*

# Employment Rejection Without Explanation

Despite local and state-wide non-discrimination laws, TGNB people face explicit hiring discrimination based on their identity. A quarter of participants (25%) were told—directly or indirectly—that they would not be hired because of their TGNB identity. For example, one transgender woman reported being rejected for a job because the company was “looking for a woman.” More often than not, the reasoning for being rejected when applying is never made explicit. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of participants said that they are frequently rejected by a potential employer without explanation, even though they are clearly qualified. Participants often noticed that interviewers’ attitudes would change upon meeting the applicant for the first time and, presumably, noticing their gender expression or identity. This can happen even for jobs or in sectors that are explicitly experiencing a worker shortage and trying to hire more employees. Thus, TGNB job applicants can face both explicit and implicit discrimination in the application and hiring process, which can be a source of stress and discouragement and serves as a barrier to gaining employment and thriving in the workplace.

Please indicate the extent to which you have experienced the following while looking for a job.



## TGNB Voices

*I applied to retail and food service. It was really discouraging because on the news there were all these companies saying, "Oh, we can't get anyone to work for us. There's a work shortage," and then I'd go out to those exact places and apply and get an interview with them and then just be ghosted by them. It was really frustrating.*

*I had been unemployed for several months, and not for lack of trying. I can't say for sure why I had such a hard time getting employed, but it definitely felt like it was because I was trans. Most of the interviews were over Zoom. I would be presenting feminine, and it felt like they were giving me some weird looks or they were just kind of put off by my appearance and by my voice not matching.*

*Sometimes trans people will get themselves to a job interview and be looking the way they're looking and comfortable the way they're looking, and then the interview is 15 minutes and was like, "Thanks. Have a nice day." It was supposed to be an hour-long interview.*

*I'm fully aware that I'm not the perfect candidate for every job, but for one of them I was very good. My interview went very well, until I talked to the direct manager. I feel like once we actually talked in person or in teleconference, that being a trans woman had a negative impact on me getting the job.*

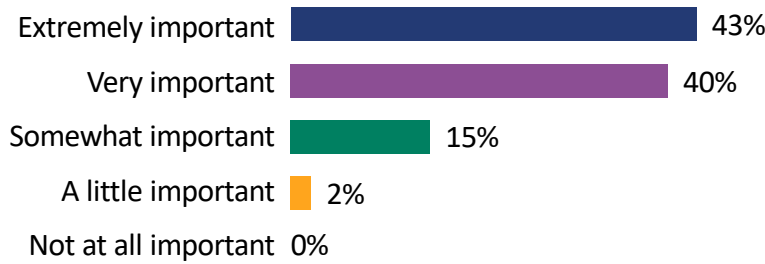
*My transgender clients notice things will seem to go differently at in-person interviews than phone interviews. They may appear to an employer to be a feminine name on an application, but when they show up they're not the person they thought they were going to meet. They feel prejudged and that they weren't able to get the position solely because of how they're presenting themselves.*

*I was applying for a senior position. Over the phone, everything seemed great. They loved my skill set. I get to the interview. They see me in person, and the interview takes a completely different tone. Suddenly, I'm no longer a fit. I personally believe it had everything to do with the interviewer recognizing that I was transgender. Why report it...it's not going to go anywhere.*

# Limits of Non-Discrimination Laws / Policies

Participants clearly pointed out that gender and gender identity non-discrimination policies and laws are essential and expressed gratitude for living in a county and state that have these in place. Indeed, 83% of participants felt that gender identity anti-discrimination policies were very or extremely important when looking for a job. However, they noted that employers, employees, and even job-seekers are often not fully aware of these laws and policies, and thus they are unevenly implemented and often not enforced. They also lamented the lack of a clear system to report violations. All of these factors can limit the usefulness of such laws and policies in Santa Clara County.

## How important is gender identity anti-discrimination policies when looking for a job?



## TGNB Voices

*Know your rights! I feel very blessed to live in California because there are rights against discrimination against those who are trans, intersex, nonbinary, etc. Literally, there are laws. I don't think a lot of people in my community know these laws.*

*For my current workplace I do appreciate that during the employment orientation they have for all employees they include non-discrimination and non-harassment policies that are enforced in all public companies in California. I appreciate that there are gender and LGBTQ policies.*

*Seeing "we are an equal opportunity employer" on a job announcement doesn't mean anything anymore. Announcements need to say POC, LGBTQ, trans or nonbinary are strongly encouraged to apply.*

*Even if they did have certain rules in place to protect those who are trans or gender expansive people, oftentimes, they weren't actually implemented. They ended up just being these words on pieces of paper that had no weight.*

*Non-discrimination policies can be forgotten. As long as employment is at-will in California, anyone can be fired for being whatever. Trans people will be fired for being trans unless we stop at-will employment and require firing to be for a work-related cause.*

*Anti-discrimination policies at a workplace...it's good to have legally, and I think that it's a step in the right direction, but it feels like companies put that in there to cover their own asses. Every job I've had and every job I've applied for has had that part of saying, "We don't discriminate on sex or sexuality or gender," but that hasn't stopped any of the negative experiences that I've had, or it hasn't stopped me feeling like I've been discriminated against.*

*I think something that would be really useful is a safe way and more accessible way to report employers for something like discrimination. The county could develop a way, if you experience discrimination in the workplace, to report that.*

*While in California things on the surface might seem a lot better than a lot of other parts of the country, there is still kind of a disconnect between what the law says and how employers behave.*

# Violence, Harassment, and Safety

Nationally, TGNB people are at very high risk for experiences of harassment and violence due to their gender identity and expression. Thus, one of the core components that shapes the experiences of TGNB individuals in the workplace is whether or not they feel safe to be “out” and express their authentic gender without risk of being victimized. Over a quarter (27%) of participants reported fearing for their safety in their workplace due to their TGNB identity in the past, and 10% reported feeling this way about their current employer. Further, looking at past employment, 29% of participants reported having been verbally harassed, 18% sexually harassed, and 8% physically attacked. Percentages were smaller but not negligible for current jobs. Safety concerns can constrain career choice. Participants reported staying away from careers that might be less safe and expose them to harassment and violence due to their TGNB identity. Safety concerns also influenced whether or not a participant was willing to come out or transition in the workplace and had implications for their sense of job security.

## Harassment and Attacks

	Current Job	Past Job
I have been verbally harassed at work because of my TGNB identity .....	10%	29%
I have been harassed by digital communication because of my TGNB identity.....	4%	14%
I have been sexually harassed at work because of my TGNB identity .....	6%	18%
I have been physically attacked at work because of my TGNB identity .....	2%	8%
I have feared for my safety at work because of my TGNB identity .....	10%	27%

## TGNB Voices

*There’s a lot of careers out there where being a trans woman isn’t necessarily safe. It’s not like I wouldn’t want to do some of those jobs, but they’re automatically unavailable to me because of the danger.*

*Honestly, I feel like safety at work is a really big thing. I feel like when I first came out I didn’t even really think of it. I was so confident, which is amazing. I think about it all the time now. I feel like now I’m so much more cautious and I’m very aware of where I’m applying.*

*I’ve been thinking about medically transitioning, too. I do worry about my safety or how people will perceive me.*

*Oftentimes you can get a vibe of, “I may not be safe here,” or, “Yeah, I’m actually going to be very safe.”*

*I think then it becomes more like myself advocating in a workspace, where I’m asking for rules and just proper responses rather than feeling as if those are already in place for me. It felt like I was constantly carving a sense of safety within the workplace.*

*I’ve had my employer say that they weren’t able to advocate and protect me on the job in community spaces with our program participants.*

*Once you feel that in a job space, that you’re not safe, then it’s hard to feel like I’m giving my time, effort, and energy to this company. They don’t have my back. They don’t believe in me. Therefore, the affirming part of security is not there.*

*Even in your own personal life, as an intersex trans person, you don’t really feel safe in everyday life out there due to the national statistics of those who are targeted and murdered for just being who they are, but to go to a workplace that you say, “I’m trying to do better for myself,” and you feel the same exact thing, it’s very helpless. It crushes your soul, really.*

# Microaggressions

Microaggressions are subtle, indirect statements or behaviors that communicate bias against a minoritized group. Importantly, microaggressions may be intentional or unintentional. Many prejudiced ideas about TGNB people are embedded in society to a degree that individuals are not always aware when they are perpetrating a microaggression. A majority of participants reported experiences of microaggressions in past or current workplaces coming from coworkers, customers, and supervisors alike. Rates of microaggressions for current jobs were lower than at previous jobs but notably still high. It is possible that this reflects participants’ abilities to move from less affirming jobs to more affirming ones.

In describing some of these microaggressions, participants indicated that they were often subtle but had harmful effects on their mental health and job performance. Common microaggressions included misgendering, being asked invasive questions about TGNB identities, and arguing about whether “they” can be used as a singular pronoun. Not all microaggressions were perceived as intentional, but all left the TGNB employee wondering how much they could or should offer corrections and directly address the microaggression. While microaggressions are inevitably going to occur in any cross-cultural interaction, the crucial thing that will help reduce their impact is having policies, procedures, and cultural competence trainings to help each workplace and employee develop skills to respond to and learn from these instances. In the absence of these clear guidelines, participants often chose to remain quiet in order to protect themselves and avoid further conflict or potential retaliation from supervisors. This process can erode employee security over time and can negatively impact their ability to thrive in the workplace.

I experienced microaggressions during the interview process **53%**

I have experienced microaggressions related to my TGNB identity from coworkers

**83%**

**45%**

Past Job Current Job

I have experienced microaggressions related to my TGNB identity from my supervisor or manager

**84%**

**36%**

Past Job Current Job

## TGNB Voices

*Nobody in my workplace is explicitly transphobic, at least not intentionally, but I do think that there are sometimes subtle biases. But it’s usually with individual people.*

*I have no better way to describe it than microaggressions, just people saying things that they wouldn’t say if they knew a trans person was around. I just get annoyed by how insensitive people can be.*

*At my previous employment, while there were a few people that were allies and did their best to speak up on my behalf, which I thought was a positive or helpful thing, the microaggressions at the previous employer were really harmful.*

*It’s hard...people are in meetings where they’re actively being told, “I can’t manage the pronoun thing. I can’t deal with that.” Or, “That’s weird,” or “That’s grammatically incorrect.”*

# Misgendering

Misgendering is the act of referring to a person as the incorrect gender, such as through the use of incorrect gendered language (e.g., man/woman, sir/ma’am), incorrect pronouns, or incorrect name (i.e., using someone’s legal name instead of their chosen name). Misgendering is a common microaggression experienced by TGNB people in the workplace. It can be unintentional or intentional, but even unintentional misgendering should be subject to correction, and then an effort should be made to avoid it in the future. Over half of the participants indicated that they have experienced misgendering at past employers. Participants reported this experience in small group conversations, large meetings, forms/documents, and email. At least one-third also reported experiencing misgendering in each of those situations in their current job as well.

Ongoing instances of misgendering contributed to participants feeling that their workplace was not supportive or even was hostile. Some participants took steps to facilitate accurate gendering, such as wearing pronoun pins or including their chosen name and pronouns on Zoom meetings, but sometimes misgendering would continue to occur even after these efforts. Participants described stress associated with decisions about whether or not to correct coworkers, customers, or supervisors when they were misgendered. Often, participants chose not to correct them due to concerns about escalated conflict or retaliation. Participants wished for clear processes for reporting and addressing misgendering. Participants also hoped that employers would address this as a systems and policy issue to take the burden off the individual.

	Current Job	Past Job
I have been misgendered verbally in private or small group conversations	41%	56%
I have been misgendered verbally in a meeting with many people	32%	50%
I have been misgendered on forms or documents	33%	48%
I have been misgendered in email or other electronic communications	33%	42%

## TGNB Voices

*In my retail job, even though I was wearing a pronoun pin nobody ever paid attention. Everybody misgendered me. Even the management wasn't paying attention. At some point I just decided it stopped being worth trying to do anything about it.*

*I've had two jobs before this one, both of which were retail. A lot of misgendering. A lot of weird comments about my identity. There wasn't anything we could do about it because it was such a small business that there was no management structure.*

*I interact with clients and I take a lot of phone calls and basically everyone misgenders me. That can be a little bit grating. But when my coworkers or my bosses specifically misgender me, it's a little more noticeable. I've had to point it out to my supervisor, which is very awkward.*

*If I corrected every single person who misgendered me, I would not have coworkers because I would be just correcting people all the time and we wouldn't be able to have a full conversation about the job. I just swallow it.*

*I was just in a meeting and in my name plate on Zoom it says my name and then it has my pronouns and people are still misgendering me.*

*It's like people will hire me and then actively misgender me the entire time that we're working together.*



# How TGNB Identity Can Influence a Career Path

The vast majority (82%) of participants indicated that their TGNB identity has influenced their choice of a career or job path at least “a little.” For nearly half (44%), it had a large influence on their career path. Many noted feeling that their TGNB identity is core to themselves in a way that makes them want to work in fields related to TGNB or LGBTQ+ issues; however, they also noted that the number of county or nonprofit jobs that focus on these issues are very limited. Many participants avoided certain sectors or types of jobs altogether, noting the lack of safety and lack of prospects for a TGNB person. There is also a burden of working in some fields that require the TGNB person to continuously assert their identity and come out “over and over again.” Some noted that trans-affirming healthcare coverage connected to a new job would attract them to change employers, even if not in their preferred career. Many participants noted geographical concerns and whether or not they could live authentically outside of the Bay Area, even if better job opportunities were available elsewhere. In these ways, many TGNB people choose careers directly and indirectly because of their TGNB identity: for practical reasons as well as simply because gender identity can shape interests and priorities.

## How much has your TGNB identity influenced your choice of a career/job path?



### TGNB Voices

*We tend to get the youth that would like to change the world, so that's kind of a large goal for all of them; the amount of opportunity that there is to do that professionally is low, and then the pay for that is also usually not great. We should be able to do what we want and be who we want to be, but larger societal structures don't support that.*

*I think my identity does influence my career path, and it's really exhausting to have to come out over and over again. To come out as queer, to come out as nonbinary, to come out as being multiracial. It is exhausting and it emotionally takes a toll on you.*

*I was actually a teacher. That was about when I realized I was trans. I was so scared learning this about myself that I just didn't want to deal with it, and I quit.*

*I do feel employment pigeonholed geographically. There are probably some places out there. I certainly wouldn't feel the same way as I do here in the Bay Area.*

*A lot of trans and nonbinary folks would like to work with queer organizations. The problem is there are not a ton of those types of jobs. The other thing is those types of jobs do not pay well in the nonprofit industry. It's really hard to support yourself.*

*I felt a little bit burned out by working for nonprofits. There can be a little cognitive dissonance between how much they say they support us and then how very little they know how to support us as employees.*

*My gender identity definitely influenced where I am now in my career. I got into the field because when I was a trans youth and starting to try to find my way, there weren't a lot of resources for trans-masc individuals. I wanted to be the change that I wanted to see.*

*Because of prejudice around where I live, it's made me really want to be the top boss of my own business, just so nobody can tell me what I'm doing because hey, it's my dang business.*

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 6

# Affirming Work Environments



**LGBTQ**

Office of LGBTQ Affairs  
Division of Equity & Social Justice

# What Makes a Positive Workplace

While TGNB people face unique struggles in the workplace, many participants also reported positive experiences and workplace environments that were affirming. Despite many negative experiences related to TGNB discrimination, most participants (65%) indicated being very or somewhat satisfied with their current or most recent job. On average, participants had higher satisfaction with their current job than with their previous one. This may indicate that they actively sought out a more affirming workplace. The participants highlighted some of their positive work experiences and gave suggestions on how employers can be more TGNB-affirming. The word often used was "supportive," which includes policies and benefits, but also a workplace that is openly and publicly supportive of TGNB people rather than simply being tolerant. Supportive workplace environments recognize the unique concerns of TGNB employees yet at the same time do not make a big deal of a person's gender identity or expression. This section of the report describes attributes of TGNB-affirming workplaces.

## How satisfied are/were you with your work or employment situation?



## TGNB Voices

*When I transitioned in the workplace, only a few of my coworkers knew beforehand. I told closer workmates privately, and then everyone. They responded the way I hope everyone does, which was just with a, "Okay, thank you," and then they quietly started using my preferred name and pronouns. I was glad that no one made a big thing of it. I just wanted them to accept it and move on, and that's what happened.*

*I have a really small workplace, so we do not have any other trans people, but I think people do kind of affirm without knowing they're doing it, like involving me in the groups with the guys or inviting me to come have a beer with everybody else. It's just the little things that make me feel like they understand.*

*At the company I work at they have a lot of LGBT-affirming stuff. They celebrate Pride month. I see some people include their pronouns in their signatures. When I came out to my team with my updated pronouns, and then later with my updated name, they took it on immediately. That was really good.*

*We need more companies that just clearly let people know that they are supported and welcomed and that discrimination of any kind against them won't be tolerated. They need to say, "Hey, trans people, gender nonconforming people, you're welcome here. You can work here, and you're safe here. We're not going to tolerate any mistreatment of you."*

*Almost to my surprise, actually, a lot of folks in my job have been just very nonchalant about it. I think that's how most people should be. How you present yourself and how you want to be seen in the world shouldn't be something that causes issues.*

*For me, I was actually really lucky because I was referred to my current job by a friend who is trans. They had a temperance for the company and kind of let me know ahead of time, which was really great. If I was looking at a potential job again, I would probably want to ask about their support when I interviewed.*

# What Makes a Supportive Supervisor

Participants described supportive supervisors as available, personable, and emotionally supportive, as well as informed about the specific workplace concerns of TGNB people. They provide tangible support when employees navigate TGNB-specific challenges at work, such as changing their name in company systems or taking time off for affirmation surgery. Participants appreciated it when supervisors serve as a role model for other employees as to how to use a TGNB employee's correct name and pronouns. These actions help create a more inclusive workplace environment and give others the tools to maintain that environment. Supportive supervisors may also make mistakes but are quick to self-correct and to step in and correct others, thereby taking the burden to do so off of the TGNB employee. Supportive supervisors recognize when there is a need for a brief apology and correction, but do not belabor the point. Supportive supervisors also work to ensure that TGNB employees' job skills are recognized and that they are included in all workplace activities relevant for their job role.

## TGNB Voices

*My current employer has been very positive. The few times that I've been given the wrong pronouns, they've immediately corrected themselves, or my executive has immediately corrected them and just said, "No, it's her." I would say it's been, wholly, a very positive experience, a very helpful and supportive environment that has emboldened me to be more myself and not to feel like I need to hide.*

*I think it's super important that there's extra responsibility on supervisors to model some level of diversity competency and understanding for other employees, because when you have a supervisor that isn't going to use your pronouns and name and is going to be sharing all of your business with people, it definitely impacts how other people treat you.*

*I think just acceptance and having somebody to talk to about it at work. I am lucky that I have my boss to talk to, that is a big deal. I get a lot of support and overall support from my boss. He's really easy to talk to about anything. He says that I am supported. I feel like I am.*

*Sometimes other clients have used the wrong pronouns. I'll have my supervisor actually step in before I get a chance and say, "No, that's not their pronouns," which I thought was really cool, just having my supervisors modeling this is the correct pronouns that you should use. I mean, pronouns aren't everything, but it does feel good.*

*My supervisors were these gay men. They're just the coolest people. When I transitioned, they were like "Oh, okay. Let us know what we can do for you."*

*I went to talk to my boss a couple of months into transitioning. I went and called the head supervisor and talked to her about it. We set up a meeting with the staff. It went really amazingly well. It was an easy transition.*

*Once my supervisor had to come in with a customer, she very quickly stepped in and said, "No, she was helping you," and she very strongly corrected this person, which I really appreciated.*

*My manager came up to me and was like, "You should apply for this new job at the company." And I got the better job because my manager was looking out for me.*

# Attention to Pronouns

Pronouns are used all the time to refer to people without saying their names. Pronoun use in the workplace comes up in a myriad of ways: in workplace conversations and meetings (both in-person and digitally), referring to other employees, on forms, and in interactions with clients and customers. Ninety-five (95%) of participants have changed or are considering changing their pronouns.

In the English language, pronouns carry a gendered connotation; thus, while pronouns are distinct from gender identity, they are often a way for people to express their gender or feel affirmed in their gender. A trans man using he/him pronouns communicates to others that his gender aligns in some way with the ideas associated with those pronouns, and when others refer to him with those pronouns, they reflect that accurate identity back to him in an affirming way. Similarly, nonbinary individuals may use they/them or a number of other gender-neutral pronoun sets (e.g., ey/em, ze/hir, xe/xem) to express their gender identities as existing outside the gender binary. When TGNB individuals are misgendered, they may feel disrespected, invalidated, or invisible. On the other hand, correct pronoun use conveys respect and validation. Thus, asking employees for their pronouns and consistently using them is a straightforward and tangible way to foster a TGNB-inclusive environment.

## Have you changed pronouns to affirm your gender?



Yes, I changed my pronouns



I am considering changing my pronouns

## TGNB Voices

*I know that pronouns are not the only thing that matters in terms of employment, but, to me, it's just the most basic, surface-level way of testing the water and getting a sense of a company.*

*Last year they started a push to put preferred pronouns in our email signatures. I noticed several people had they, them or she, ella. I knew that there was one other out trans person at my work. That encouraged me to be braver about changing my own pronouns.*

*I think that a lot of people with pronouns like they/them, they're not supported at my workplace. We're not able to display anything on our person that would express being nonbinary.*

*I think if there's a place in the application process to put the name that I go by and to put my pronouns, that is really a good sign.*

*In my current internship I feel very supported. Everyone makes the effort to use my proper pronouns and tries to correct themselves without prompting. I've had people ask questions and want to be educated. It's very affirming.*

*It doesn't seem anything actually gets done with that information. I've submitted applications and interviewed for jobs in which my pronouns were indicated in my application, and not once has anyone gotten my pronouns right in the job interview. Feels like lip service.*

*I do feel affirmed in the sense that a lot of my closest coworkers have put in a lot of effort in terms of learning about my pronouns and using them correctly.*

*The rest of my team doesn't use pronoun signatures. I don't think they even really understand pronouns. There's been no competency training around this.*

# Transitioning and the Workplace

Transition refers to behaviors, processes, or procedures a TGNB individual may choose to engage in to affirm their gender identity and increase congruence between their gender identity and the way that they are perceived. This may include:

- **Medical transition:** medical procedures such as hormone-replacement therapy and surgery
- **Legal transition:** changing legal documentation such as legal name and gender marker
- **Social transition:** additional changes to live in one’s affirmed gender such as changing pronouns, name, or style of clothing

Every TGNB person’s transition is unique. Transition is not linear, and there is no specific order or number of steps in a transition. Not every TGNB individual engages in all or even any of these types of transition.

In this study, the majority of participants (80%) had engaged in at least some aspects of transition while employed. Social transition while employed was the most common type (72%). However, it is important to note that more than a third of participants had engaged in legal and/or medical transition while employed. This means that employers and HR departments need to have basic knowledge about transition-related topics and clear policies in place to assist employees who are transitioning. For example, protocols for changing name and pronouns within all company systems, insurance coverage for medical transition, and time off for medical affirmation procedures were all noted as very important by participants.

## Percent of participants transitioning while employed at a past or present job.



## TGNB Voices

*I went into the job knowing I would eventually transition because it had a nondiscrimination policy. When I finally called HR, they were super helpful. They told me everything I needed to do. They told me that they were just introducing trans-affirming health care. They talked with my manager, who was also very helpful. When it was time to come out to the whole team, it went pretty well.*

*Top surgery, hormone replacement therapy... because they often get labeled a private, personal thing, it can be really hard to ask for accommodations or even to express the emotions that I'm going through which may impact my work performance.*

*There's a lot of discussion about physical transitioning, but don't neglect the less publicized difficulty of social transitioning.*

*Companies need to understand that when it comes to specific surgical, medical interventions, HR should accept medically-affirming procedures are a need. My mental health is important.*

*At one of my first jobs I was fresh into my transition. It became an issue with one of my coworkers. I brought it up to management and HR, and they were like, "Okay, we'll handle it." A couple days later I got fired. That's pretty intense.*

*I got top surgery that I needed extended time off. Everyone was super understanding and generous in terms of using my new name and pronouns. Everyone was super wonderful about it.*

# Importance of Healthcare Coverage

The majority of participants (84%) reported having some kind of health insurance, with only 41% of participants receiving health insurance through their employer. A key component to an inclusive workplace is insurance that covers gender-affirming medical care, including access to transition-related surgeries and hormone-replacement therapy. Ninety-four percent (94%) of participants indicated that health insurance is at least “somewhat important” when looking for a job, with 63% indicating that it is “extremely important.” Health insurance is also particularly important to TGNB people to be able to access general mental health and medical services, given the health disparities that this population experiences. The majority of participants reported that their current health insurance includes gender-affirming medical services; however, 15% reported that it did not, and 27% were unsure whether it did or not. Some said that gender-affirming benefits were seemingly available from a health insurance company, but practically using or navigating the use of these benefits seemed impossible. Thus, affirming employers should make sure that gender-affirming medical coverage is both available and accessible to TGNB employees. Further, employers should provide health insurance plans that include sufficient mental health coverage, given the high level of need among TGNB people and the fact that many participants identified this as a deficit in their own insurance plans.

## How important is health insurance when looking for a job?



## My healthcare plan gives me access to gender-affirming medical services.



## TGNB Voices

*Where I am now, that is one of the biggest complaints. The company touts these health benefits, but to find them and to get clear answers and clear understanding of what is provided, how to get that, that's a whole quagmire.*

*I would say that my gender transition in the workplace has also been directly impacted by the nature of health insurance. My plan does not cover the gender-affirming surgeries that I am specifically looking for.*

*Good mental health coverage in the insurance is huge and important. And certainly, trans-affirming insurance would be huge.*

*I would love the security of working in an established company with health benefits. It's such a dice roll when I'm applying to jobs.*

*I need to look into a job that has really good insurance because I have such high medical costs. I need to think long term on that, on what will give me good insurance so I can keep having gender-affirming medical care.*

*The company offers very comprehensive LGBTQ and specifically transgender care benefits to include transgender procedures that need to be done and having a transgender therapist support line available 24/7.*

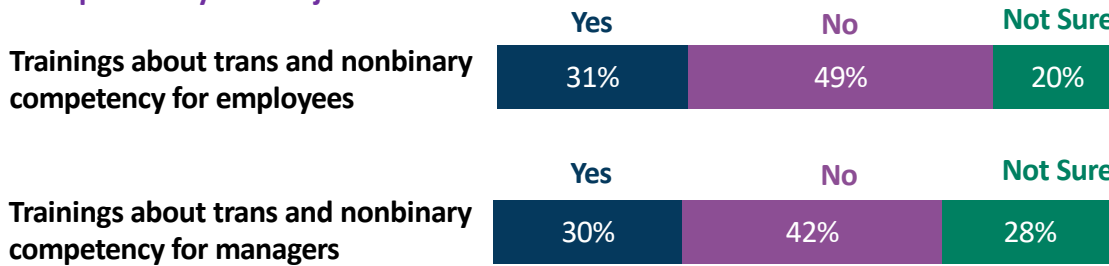
*Having affirming health insurance is important, but also having an understanding of how a trans person would navigate their health insurance.*

*For me, not being able to have the affirming work that I'm looking to have done covered has meant a burden on my financial and emotional life.*

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training

Participants suggested that workplaces should include mandatory diversity trainings that include a focus on TGNB-related topics. While some form of diversity training is common in many workplaces, about half of participants indicated that their current workplaces do not provide any training on these topics for either employees or supervisors. Participants saw this as a significant challenge to creating inclusive workplaces, given that most supervisors and employees lack the specific information needed to create such an environment. Supervisors also need specific diversity training to help them guide the entire workforce and appropriately respond to the many concerns raised in this report. Some participants also pointed out that diversity training in itself is not enough. Training needs to be ongoing, and supervisors and managers need to create a workplace culture that respects all employees. When employers and supervisors do not take such training seriously and do not embrace it as integral to the workplace, employees are unlikely to take necessary actions to affirm their TGNB coworkers.

Please indicate whether your current workplace has the following. If you are currently not working, please respond for your last job.



## TGNB Voices

*There's technically a training section in the online materials for that company, but like every other module of training learning, everybody just click, click, click, get through it. I wish they could have a representative from Q Corner or Billy DeFrank or someone who knows what they're talking about give a presentation. That would be ideal.*

*I would say that in the three years I've been at this job there has not once been a committed training to genuinely and accurately reflect conversations and education about human sexuality, gender expression, and safe social and personal relationships.*

*Employers should require some kind of level of competency training or sensitivity training.*

*I think there definitely needs to be more training. Some places the training is for specific departments, but I think there needs to be a more overarching investment.*

*The SOGIE education is the only thing that would come to mind, is if all of the government workers had to go through that. Education is the first key to overcoming the barriers.*

*Companies could use training or videos showing how gender is expressed in multiple ways. A company needs to make sure that they are not displaying discriminatory treatment or experiences, especially within the interview process.*

*How do local employers need to change? They need more diversity training. They need as much training as they can stand. Constant, because our lives are constantly evolving. We're not staying the same, so I think maybe every few years or so you go back in and retrain all these large companies in Silicon Valley.*

*When I got hired, I had to watch a few training videos, including one about transgender and nonbinary people. It talked about using the right pronouns and don't assume one's gender. I assumed okay, maybe I could tell my employer that I use these pronouns, but then they immediately misgendered me and called me ma'am. Then I kind of just pretended that I was cis just so I could get through my job.*



# Restrooms

Participants emphasized the importance of employees being allowed to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity. A key piece of this is access to all-gender restrooms in the workplace. This is particularly true for nonbinary employees who may not be safe or comfortable using either the men’s or women’s restroom. Participants discussed experiences of being attacked, harassed, and witnessing anti-TGNB hate speech in restrooms at their workplaces, particularly when access to all-gender restrooms was not available. Employees in Santa Clara County often have access to adequate restroom facilities; however, one in five of participants reported difficulty finding a work restroom that they feel comfortable using at their current job. Employers should ensure that employees have access to gender-affirming restroom facilities, including all-gender restrooms and changing rooms.

**I have had difficulty finding a work restroom that I am comfortable using**



**Current Job**



**Past Job**

## TGNB Voices

*I’m not out as nonbinary at work. One thing is that they don’t have gender-neutral bathrooms in the store.*

*Employers must let trans people use the restrooms that they want to use, giving them that protection.*

*More of an acknowledgement of gender-neutral restrooms or all-gender restrooms so that folks can feel safe at work.*

*We even have gender-neutral or family bathrooms. I can’t think of anything that they could do more than they’re doing now.*

*At a base level, employers should be de-gendering restrooms.*

*I always hate talking about the whole bathroom situation. I’m very appreciative of gender-neutral restrooms. I’m kind of trying to dig deeper into how it feels for me to be in an environment where there is one.*

*At the extreme end, people are being assaulted verbally and physically. A lot of different workplaces are navigating bathrooms. Where I work now there’s an ongoing battle. There are people who are writing hate speech on the doors. There still is a physical safety issue people are enduring, and then there’s actual hate speech going on.*

*This is for employees and just people who live in the community in general. If more places could have gender-neutral bathrooms. I hate going to women’s bathrooms. I hate it. Having that in workplaces, you get to know how coworkers see you, if they aren’t going to have an issue. But the general public is nasty. Being attacked in the bathroom sucks.*

*At my workplace they have gender-neutral restrooms. Those crazy liberals in California, I would love if there was something like an OSHA thing that said if you have over X amount of employees you have to have at least one all-gender restroom.*

*It’s really nice to see that they’ve gotten the resources at the LGBTQ office for bathroom signs. It’s really nice to see that people are starting to replace the signs with an all-gender sign.*

# ERGs and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Participants valued the ability to connect with other LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace and noted that this contributes to an inclusive, supportive workplace environment. LGBTQ+ supervisors and coworkers can play an important role in fostering an affirming and inclusive workplace culture. Participants also reported that LGBTQ+-focused Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are very important to build community and engage in advocacy for more inclusive policies in the workplace. For larger companies, some have developed ERGs and spaces specifically for TGNB employees. For smaller companies with few employees, other efforts to create LGBTQ+-affirming workplaces are important. Most TGNB participants did not work for companies with an ERG. Participants expressed that when looking for a job, interacting with LGBTQ+ interviewers and seeing symbols of LGBTQ+ affirmation such as rainbow flags, safe space stickers, and other LGBTQ+-themed décor served as a signal to them that the prospective employer would be supportive. These symbols of support helped applicants to engage in the interview process more confidently and authentically and made the employer more appealing to the applicant.

**Please indicate whether your current (or past workplace) has an LGBTQ+ employee group.**



## TGNB Voices

*It can be about the LGBTQ people already working for that company because those are the folks that are setting the tone at the company. They are the culture of the company.*

*Nothing to help my career, but it would be really nice if there was an LGBTQ affinity group or something that could meet. We do the racial affinity groups for the company, and those are good. It would be nice if they had one for LGBTQ people.*

*I felt very supported in the cannabis industry. I guess it's just everybody kind of comes from different walks of life in the industry. There were also a lot of transgender, nonbinary people within the cannabis industry as well. It also kind of made me a safe space.*

*For my tech company, there were other queer people on my team, it feels like a safe place to be yourself. We had happy hours together. We went to the annual company-sponsored Pride event together. The LGBTQ employee resource group was really vocal. It actually felt very genuine.*

*Oh, yeah, and the interviewer was queer, and that was really cool. It made me want to work there. So, seeing themselves in the interviewer has also been a really good experience for folks who are looking and getting past at least that first stage of applications.*

*I did an interview. I think it was June, so Pride month. In their office they had a big display or something that was—basically, it was this was a safe space or something like that. It made me feel like a little more comfortable, at least they're open and supportive of LGBTQ people.*

*I remember it was a group interview. There was one interviewer who I felt might be queer. I remember feeling that I had to connect with her specifically.*

*I feel especially lucky that I even have another queer person on the team. I feel like if it wasn't for her being such a good ally, I don't even know if I would've come out.*

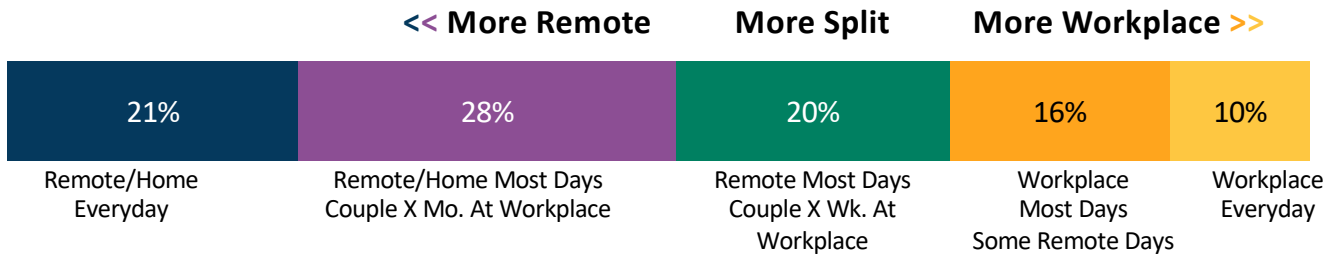
*When I got to my current job, they used my correct name and pronouns with no problem. Once I legally transitioned, they just changed the paperwork. Also, there is a supportive queer ERG at my company, and there is a Slack group for trans and nonbinary people.*

*If a company works with their employees to set up an ERG, that can be a really big one. If you find there's an LGBTQ+ resource group, great.*

# Working from Home vs. at the Workplace

For many people in Santa Clara County, the COVID-19 pandemic created more opportunities to work remotely. This change was welcomed by many participants, who cited positive practical aspects of remote work such as saving time and money from commuting and greater work/life balance. For many participants, remote work also helped them to avoid some of the anti-TGNB microaggressions, misgendering, and negative social interactions that they had previously experienced in the workplace. On the other hand, some participants reported that being physically present in a workplace, rather than working at home, can be a positive experience when coworkers and supervisors are supportive. Overall, nearly half (47%) of participants would prefer to work at home most or all of the time, and only 26% prefer being in the workplace most of the time.

## If you had the choice, where would you prefer to work?



4% indicated an "other" way of working besides the choices listed.

## TGNB Voices

Please explain the reasons that you prefer to work at home and/or remotely.

- Working from home allows me to do more in the day. Also cuts down on commute costs.
- I don't have to worry about others judging me in the bathrooms.
- Working from home tremendously reduces gender dysphoria.
- Less risk of judgement and microaggressions that can happen every day in an office.
- I genuinely love working with people most of the time BUT when you have coworkers who constantly slip up on using correct pronouns, it can be tiring.
- It's safer because hostility in the workplace is real. I do not feel safe in the bathrooms there.
- My workplace is a socially toxic, negative environment.
- Working from home is more comfortable because it reduces stress from judgement.
- I feel more comfortable at home. I don't need to code switch or defend my pronouns or feel self-conscious.
- Because it is the future, and my home is my sanctuary.

Please explain the reasons that you prefer to work at a workplace with coworkers.

- I like my coworkers and I like meeting new people through my job.
- I need to have my work life separate. It becomes too stressful for me otherwise.
- After being in a pandemic for 2 whole years in the house it starts to get lonely. I'd rather interact with people face-to-face.
- Assuming the workplace is supportive/accepting, it is good for me to get out of the house.
- I find it very rewarding to socialize with people and get along well with most.
- I work off other people's energy. I have no motivation to work without people to work alongside.
- It's the only time I get out and better for my mental health.
- It's better for my mental health to get out of the house and have some interpersonal interaction.
- I love the chaos and variety of my workplace. Sitting alone at home all day in silence was not ideal for me.
- I appreciate that my work day is absolutely done when I get home.

# TGNB Pride and Disclosure in the Workplace

A prominent theme that emerged was the importance for TGNB individuals to express themselves openly and authentically, with pride, at work. Many participants described feelings of loss and sacrifice when they had to conceal their identities at work. Some participants indicated that needing to hide their identity at work would be a deal-breaker, and they would not continue to work for that employer. On the other hand, many participants discussed that the ability to be open about their TGNB identity at work contributes to a respectful, supportive workplace and to the overall well-being for the employee. There was also a theme of resilience and inspiration from engaging in self-advocacy and witnessing other visible TGNB individuals in the workplace. This authenticity and well-being contribute to better work performance and improved relationships with coworkers and supervisors. Both the employee and employer benefit when an employee is able to devote more cognitive and emotional energy to succeed at their job.

## TGNB Voices

*I would tell young TGNB people not to make compromises on their identity for the sake of a corporation. I think the reason it took me so long to come out was partly because I didn't feel like I would've been supported at the workplace. I just kind of compromised on that and I stayed in the closet for the sake of job security.*

*The people that inspire me the most are the ones that just don't give a s\*\*t. They're like, "My workplace is not openly hostile, they're not super welcoming, but they're paying my paycheck, so I'm going to keep existing how I exist, and we're just going to be in this uneasy peace with each other." I think that's really valuable to say and know and hear because you're not always in a situation where it's sunshine and rainbows.*

*I want a job where I won't feel like I have to hide any part of myself, because I've already spent so much of my life hiding that I am not planning on doing it ever again. If there was a job that required me to hide my trans identity, I couldn't do that.*

*I know that some of our more outspoken community members who are very good at standing up for themselves have definitely done mini trainings in their workplaces with their direct coworkers. They inspire me.*

*For me personally, getting to the place where I'm not apologizing for who I am.*

*I went from being a silent man to an extremely verbal woman and high level of writing quality and getting paid for it. The difference has just been shockingly positive.*

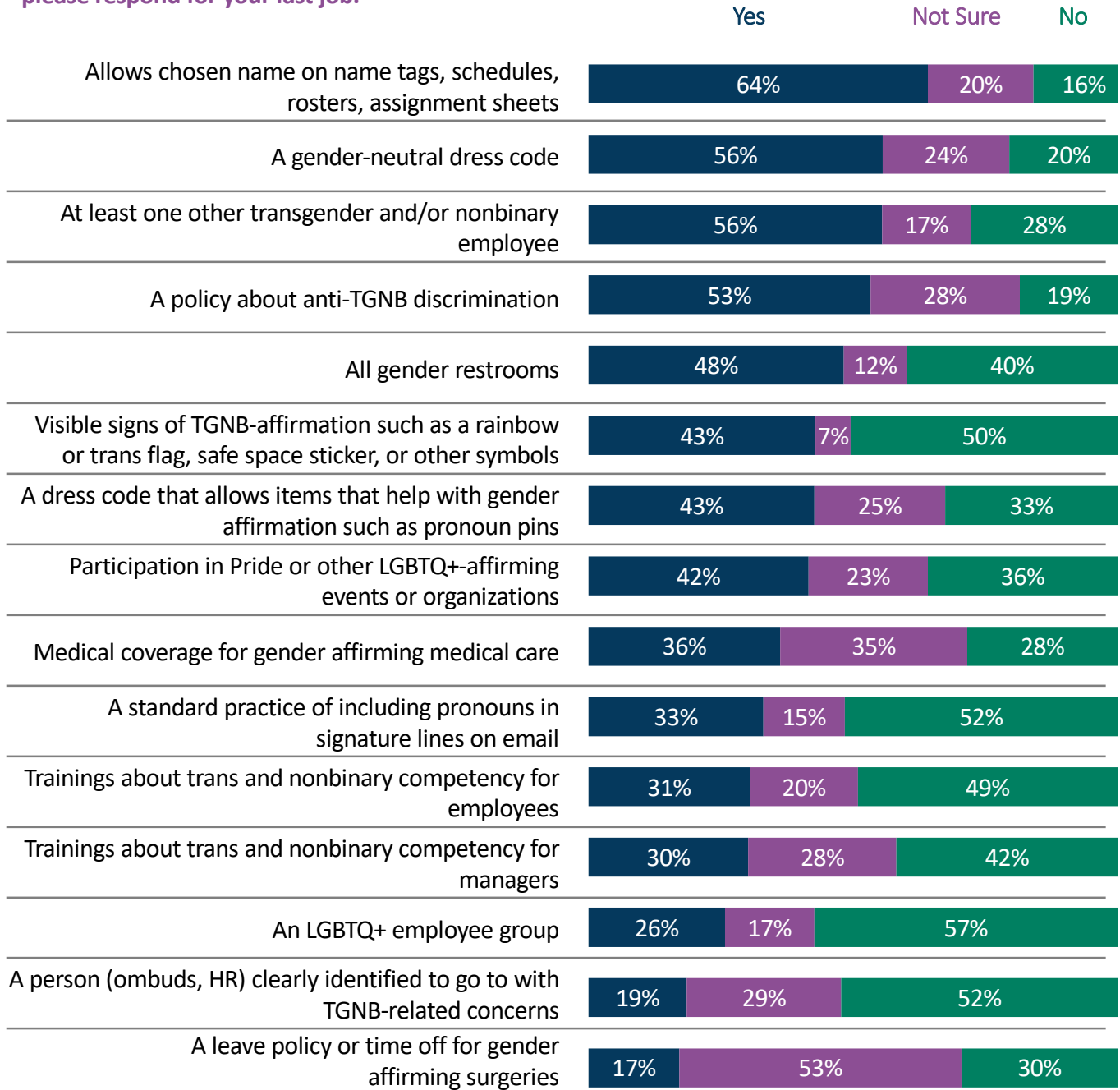
*My social and cultural, my political experiences as a trans woman, a trans millennial gen Z person, have informed how I want to move professionally in the world. It's nearly a full two decades of being somewhat visibly queer at every point in my life, I just know that there's nothing more important than moving the needle in a substantial way.*

*What I would tell a younger person is that if you can afford it at all, if you can take an extra couple months to job search for somewhere where you don't have to compromise your identity, definitely take that opportunity.*

# Workplace Policies

Participants were asked to indicate whether a variety of policies and practices in the workplace that could be affirming for TGNB employees are in place at their current workplace. This summary chart indicates participants’ responses, with the policies and practices that were most frequently endorsed as “yes” at the top. As the chart shows, many of these TGNB-affirming policies and practices are not currently in place at county workplaces.

Please indicate whether your current workplace has the following. If you are currently not working, please respond for your last job.



# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 7

# Improving the Job Search and Hiring Process



**LGBTQ**  
Office of LGBTQ Affairs  
Division of Equity & Social Justice

# Stress and Barriers When Looking for a Job

The process of looking, applying, and interviewing for a job has unique stressors for TGNB people. Anti-TGNB stigma and cisnormativity influence all aspects of the process and can serve as barriers to seeking and securing employment in a TGNB person's chosen field. Participants often did their own background research on employers before applying in order to determine the extent to which they might be affirmed and supported in the workplace. Participants were concerned about issues such as having to explain their prior work history and resume when it is associated with a deadname, having to educate and explain TGNB issues to hiring managers and interviewers, considering when and if to come out in the application and interview process, and wondering how much they will be able to be open and authentic should they obtain a job at this company. This section of the report explores how the typical employment process creates challenges for TGNB individuals.

## TGNB Voices

*Looking for a job is stressful: Navigating those spaces as a trans person, especially thinking about how are people reading me, can people tell that I'm trans, and how is that impacting how they're reading my application materials, and then if they can tell that I'm trans, how does that impact how they see the validity of my work that I do?*

*I'll probably end up doing some research. Have other queer people in my community tried to find local San Jose jobs? Do I know anyone who's been involved in that company? Is there anyone who is using a pronoun in their signature? Just any little something that seems like they're at least wise to it. It is really tricky.*

*One of the problems in my resume is that it lists work I did under my old name. I'm not quite sure what to do with it. I need to reveal my deadname on my own CV. I worry that a potential employer may judge me negatively.*

*If it's a company that is looking for good people, good workers, they really need to put that effort first to say, "It's okay to apply here," because the application process, in and of itself, can be very scary.*

*You can say your nondiscrimination act or the law is in effect as much as you want to, but the employers are still doing it. We can't even report that to anyone because it's like they don't like how I look so they didn't hire me, but the phone interview went great. Who do we even tell that to?*

*It was just a different experience being the person who was applying for a job and not really knowing how to handle it. What do I put on my résumé? Do I put my pronouns on my résumé? I don't know what stage to bring this up in the hiring process. I just definitely felt a lot of stress about it.*

*If I'm given the opportunity for an interview, I make sure that they know that about me. I don't want to waste your time and I don't want you to waste my time. If this is going to be a problem, let's get it out of the way right now.*

*I've had a couple of instances where the interview's going fine, but then I'd bring up, "Oh, by the way, I'm trans. Is that going to be a problem?" and they immediately stop talking to me. They sideline me almost immediately, which at this point it's started to hurt so much emotionally, kind of just rotted in my head, almost, where it's just that negativity constantly repeating itself.*

# Job Advertisements and Applications

Participants indicated that job advertisements and applications are key places where employers can communicate their support for potential TGNB employees. Based on participants' experiences, most employers have room for improvement. For example, the vast majority (91%) of participants have filled out at least one application that included only "male" and "female" gender options. Additionally, 64% have avoided applying for jobs they otherwise would have been interested in out of concern that they would not be accepted as a TGNB person there. Participants also noted that most applications do not have space for a chosen name in addition to a legal name. Applications should be made more inclusive by including space for a chosen name and pronouns and explicitly stating support for TGNB individuals on websites, job ads, and other materials.

Indicate the extent to which you have sometimes experienced the following while looking for a job.

91%

**I filled out a job application that included only "male" and "female" gender options**

64%

**I avoided applying for a job because of concern that I would not be accepted as a TGNB person**

## TGNB Voices

*I had questions because I didn't know how to apply on the employment application. Do I do it under my old name or do I do it under my chosen name? That is scary when your name has not been legally changed to show my ID. You fear that you will be disqualified.*

*Encourage employers to add things like pronouns to resumés or online job applications, giving a space where they can put a preferred name. I think that just those few extra blank spaces on an application or online form will help transgender individuals feel that where they're applying is going to be inclusive of them.*

*If I put anything other than male or female, they're going to automatically not hire me based on that. I will say it's very hard to find a job that says anything other than female or male as an option. I always feel a kind of hesitation when I do put "Decline to self-identify." I do always feel a little bit of, "I know I'm not going to get a call back because I put that."*

*Probably I would look to see maybe if the company has any sort of explicit statement of support for LGBTQ people. I would look to see if they have the option to put down nonbinary as a gender option.*

*A job description that emphasizes the value for people whose perspectives are not represented would also encourage trans and gender non-conforming people to apply and feel like what they have to offer is also valuable.*

*I've also seen applications where they ask for preferred names and pronouns, so things like that do make me more comfortable with going into the situation.*

*I would want to share my pronouns when I'm doing a job application. I feel like I'm sort of trying to test the waters. "Will you accept my she/her pronouns?" If you won't even do that, then I don't want to throw more personal-to-me information out there.*

*I never know what to put down on an application. Being nonbinary, I have the choice of either lie or feel uncomfortable.*



# Interview Process

Participants reported several TGNB-specific barriers that arise in the job interview process. Misgendering and microaggressions were common during the interview process, with 67% of participants experiencing misgendering during an interview and 53% experiencing microaggressions. Most participants (71%) reported sometimes hiding their TGNB identities during the interview process to avoid discrimination. Participants would like potential employers to explicitly ask what name and pronouns the interviewee would like used during the interview and in other communications. Interviewers that share their own pronouns indicate an inclusive environment. Interviewers should not ask the interviewee directly about their gender identity. TGNB individuals may have greater difficulty finding professional clothing for a job interview, so employers should focus on the content of the interview and place less emphasis on the interviewee’s attire. Job interviews can be especially stressful for TGNB people if they have had negative experiences in the past. Putting the potential new employee at ease from the start will help TGNB applicants have a successful interview.

Please indicate the extent to which you have sometimes experienced the following while looking for a job.

**67%** I was misgendered in a job interview

**53%** I experienced microaggressions during the interview process

**53%** I had difficulty finding appropriate clothing for a job interview

**71%** I hid my TGNB identity during the interview process to avoid discrimination

## TGNB Voices

*I remember being brought into an interview and the interview shifted from my work qualifications to that of my gender identity, and it was inappropriate. What they don't realize is, when they do that, the interviewee is going to walk away feeling super discouraged, super helpless, super just unmotivated, and that might lead into worse mental health.*

*There had been some employers who basically offered me an interview, and though I did not get to the next step of being offered a job, they were highly affirming and they were highly validating. That itself is such a gift, and it inspires me to continue applying.*

*When I go into an interview, I ask for the interviewer's pronouns as my own gauge to see, are they going to ask me for mine in return? How are they going to respond to me asking them for their pronouns? It's my dipping the toe in the water.*

*With my current employer, when they learned that I was transgender, they had asked if I wanted to continue interviewing with my legal name. Since I'm still legally a different name, my current employer flat out asked which name I wanted used for all of their interviewing documentation. I found that to be very affirming and definitely made me feel at ease during the entire interview process.*

*Interviews can be stressful. I can definitely feel it in the room where it was like, "oh, maybe I should not have worn this to this interview." It starts to internalize.*

*When I interviewed in early transition, I got that job and it was positive. I was nervous, but I didn't feel like anyone was judging me based on my gender identity.*

*If I see gender-neutral bathrooms where I am interviewing, that's always a good sign.*

*When you apply for a job, they were so good about pronouns. They got it right from the beginning.*

# Lived Experience as a Job Qualification

Lack of recognition of lived experience as a job qualification was one of the most frustrating parts of the job-seeking process for many participants. Many jobs have rigid education or job title requirements in order for an applicant to be considered. Government employers were especially seen as creating this obstacle for TGNB applicants. TGNB individuals often have barriers to obtaining college or graduate degrees and may have non-traditional work histories due to their prior experiences of discrimination, as well as other factors such as the time and financial burden associated with transition, overall economic marginalization, and mental and physical health disparities. Participants noted that many TGNB people have valuable lived experience that might be useful as an employee and wished for employers to be more flexible with education and work history requirements to acknowledge and affirm lived experience. Participants discussed positive experiences with interviewers who were able to appreciate the way their lived experience matched the skills needed. This resulted in positive outcomes overall because the TGNB individual was able to get a job they were well-suited for and felt valued by their employer, contributing to a supportive workplace environment.

## TGNB Voices

*I think they need to loosen up on their perceptions of what their model employees look like. Employers need to broaden their lens of who can actually get the job done. If you want to have this trans or nonbinary person come in and do the job because they're the right person for the job, be more open to different types of experience, like that life experience or that lived experience versus an actual job that you held down for X number of years.*

*Trans and nonbinary folks don't have the same access to education, but they could have learned and gained a number of very, very valuable life experience skills. But that is not going to necessarily be expressed on a résumé or job application. Companies need a way to assign worth to a person's life experience.*

*Especially trying to get in to be a county employee or even some of the other companies in Santa Clara County—you don't even get considered for the job unless you have the right degree or a certain type of training. We need to emphasize that we have lived experience that may be relevant to the position. Doesn't that count for something? I have the wisdom from going through my transition and standing up to all this discrimination.*

*Jobs that require certain qualifications need to understand that transgender people often have a giant pause on their life when transitioning. Sometimes a person is not going to go to school because they've saved all those finances to get surgical interventions.*

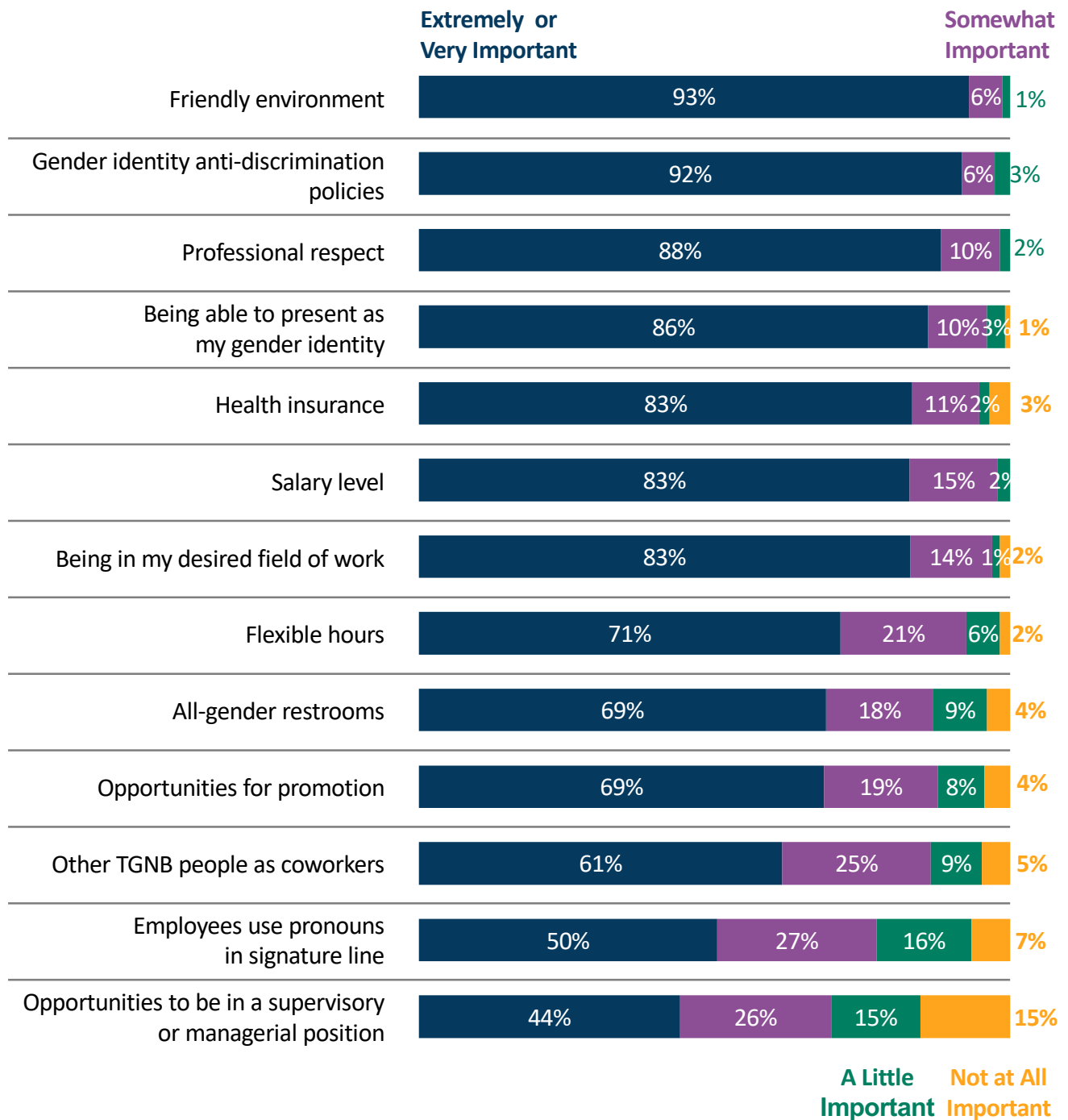
*They say that you don't have enough experience that we need, but they don't value experience that does not check off their boxes. Degrees and job titles should not be the starting and ending point of our consideration of you. They should consider the quality of your résumé, the quality of your experience, your references, how are you are connecting the dots and communicating all of that interest into those job descriptions.*

*I would like to see a job description that emphasizes the value of people whose perspectives are not represented in a company. It would encourage trans and gender nonconforming people to apply and feel like what they have to offer is also valuable.*

# Job Search Criteria

All participants wanted a living wage and opportunities for advancement. Additionally, participants indicated a number of workplace practices that cisgender workers may take for granted. These include a friendly environment, gender identity anti-discrimination policies, professional respect, and being able to present as their gender identity. Below are the most important policies and practices that TGNB employees are looking for in the workplace.

## How important are the following when looking for a job?



# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 8

# Additional TGNB Employment Insights



# Differences by Race and Ethnicity

The following three pages review some of the differences seen in the results by race and ethnicity. In total, 62% of participants were BIPOC.

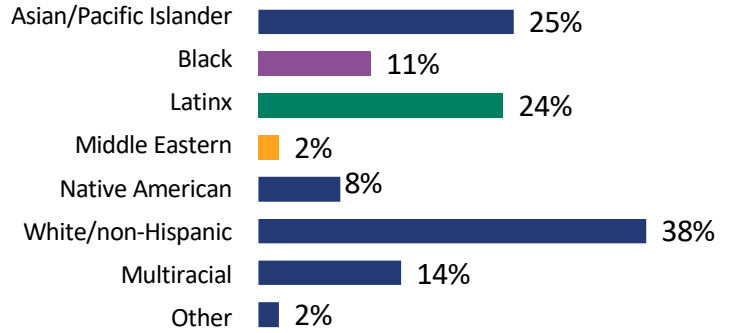
## Demographic Characteristics

BIPOC participants trended younger, with BIPOC participants more likely to be Gen Z (API and Latinx participants in particular). BIPOC participants were similar to White participants in their self-defined gender, as transgender, nonbinary, or both, with an approximately even distribution of one-third per umbrella category. For sexual orientation, there were no large differences, except that White participants were more likely to identify as queer, and BIPOC participants were more likely to identify as bisexual.

## Financial

BIPOC participants overall showed greater disadvantage on indicators of socioeconomic status. BIPOC participants had lower individual income levels, lower education attainment levels, and were more likely to be single. It is important to note that the BIPOC participants were younger on average, so some of these

## Study Participants by Race/Ethnicity



factors may be related to both age and race/ethnicity. BIPOC participants were more likely to indicate that they struggle to pay for basic life needs; for example, 43% of BIPOC participants struggle to buy food compared to 26% of White participants. White and API participants reported the least difficulty meeting financial needs. This may be reflective of intergenerational patterns of wealth, as Latinx participants were most likely to report very low socioeconomic status growing up and continued low socioeconomic status now, while White and API participants tended to indicate having adequate financial means both growing up and currently.

*Continued on next page*

## TGNB Voices

*I fear hitting a glass ceiling. No matter what I do, or how many qualifications I have, I won't be able to rise above. It has happened to me at past employers; there were other people advancing that had been there both before me and after me, yet I have all of these qualifications and I'm stuck. As far as discrimination, I think my race may have been more important than my gender.*

*I think right now part of my motivation to get out of my industry is that there's a lot of weird, honestly, racist undertones and gatekeeping. I feel many BIPOC people are hired for diversity points and not necessarily being completely respected in the entirety of their identities.*

*I think the most supportive and affirming thing is, for me, just not with my gender identity, but also my racial identity. I want to work with other nonbinary people, with other multiracial people. That is probably the most affirming thing and when I really feel seen.*

*Identities that are important to me include being Asian, being queer, coming from a refugee background—what else would I say?—growing up low-income.*

# Differences by Race and Ethnicity

## Education and Employment

White and API participants were more likely to have achieved higher than a bachelor’s degree in education, while Black and Latinx participants were more likely to have less than a bachelor’s degree. Latinx participants were most likely to have dropped out of high school, with 18% not yet achieving a high school diploma or GED. The percentage of participants who were currently in school was similar across race and ethnicity.

Full-time employment was the most commonly reported employment status for all participants, regardless of race/ethnicity. However, 48% of White participants indicated full-time employment compared to 41% of BIPOC participants. Participants were equally likely to indicate feeling “very or somewhat satisfied” with their current employment by race or ethnicity. BIPOC participants were more likely to say that their position was as a staff person, rather than a supervisory role, but this may also be due partially to age and/or racial discrimination.

## Perception of Santa Clara County

Perceptions of Santa Clara County being a supportive place to live and work were similar by race and ethnicity; 67% of BIPOC participants and 61% of White participants agreed or strongly agreed that the county is a supportive region.

## Workplace Discrimination

The focus of this study was on anti-TGNB discrimination. However, BIPOC individuals may experience racial/ethnic discrimination in the workplace as well. The extent to which BIPOC people experience racial/ethnic discrimination versus gender discrimination in the workplace varies person-to-person. Overall, BIPOC participants reported higher levels of workplace discrimination, microaggressions, harassment, and other related stressors than White participants. Only 21% of BIPOC participants experiencing discrimination had reported any incident to a supervisor, manager and/or HR Department.

*Continued on next page*

## TGNB Voices

*I’m older, black, and trans. I used to hate thinking that I was an affirmative action hire. But it’s so dire for trans communities, I would be okay as an affirmative action hire not regarding race, but because of being perceived to be trans. If that’s going to get me in the door and help to open the door for other people like me, that would be a great thing.*

*For being able to thrive the next five years relating to my job goals, I do very much appreciate that California and Santa Clara County have a lot of resources for low-income and minority populations.*

*Being part of the Vietnamese community, a lot of people are still pretty homophobic and transphobic, but I’ve seen growth too, like some parents be surprisingly open to their LGBTQ child. There also now queer and trans Viet groups.*

*My family has seen so much gender discrimination since moving to a more rural area of the county. And we experience racial discrimination too.*

# Differences by Race and Ethnicity

## Being Out and Transition

BIPOC participants were somewhat less likely to have completed steps towards social, legal, and medical transition. For example, 82% of White participants have taken steps towards social transition, compared to 66% of BIPOC participants. Similar patterns are seen for legal name changes and social name changes. BIPOC participants were less likely to be “mostly out” to coworkers (50%) than White participants (63%). This was also true for being out to supervisors. When asked about factors that may get in the way of sharing one’s TGNB identity at work, BIPOC participants were more likely to express concerns about discrimination, being fired, and personal discomfort. In the interviews and focus groups, younger BIPOC participants were more likely to discuss unsupportive families, which made it difficult to continue to live at home.

## Searching for a Job

Overall, BIPOC participants reported more difficulties finding employment due to their TGNB identities (48% for BIPOC compared to 41% for White participants). When asked about important factors to consider when searching for a job, most

participants ranked salary as “very” or “extremely” important, but Black participants were the most likely to say that this was “extremely” important. Health insurance was also highly valued among all groups, but White participants were more likely to rate it as “extremely important” than the other groups.

## Support for Future Educational and Career Goals

Overall, BIPOC participants were more likely than White participants to indicate a need for supportive services to further their career and educational goals. Of the 18 suggested supportive services (see page 74), BIPOC participants were more likely to request each of these services than White participants. It is crucial to emphasize the importance of developing TGNB supportive services that address the concerns and differences for BIPOC TGNB community members. Implementing these services is paramount to closing racial/ethnic gaps in support and ultimately supporting all TGNB community members in achieving their career goals.

## TGNB Voices

*I’m from East Side, and the culture there is very traditional. It’s a lot of immigrant communities, and I think something that Santa Clara County could do is have more programming with diverse cultures about how to support TGNB residents.*

*Part of my support is my community. For me, I have an indigenous spirituality that I follow, a code of ethics from my indigenous circle. My spirit isn’t really being fed from what I’m doing for work right now.*

*I think it’s more difficult for some people than others, and that’s where the identities do intersect, right—if you’re a person of color, if you’re part of the LGBTQ community, if your parents are immigrants—whatever that case may be.*

*Although my work might be LGBTQ-friendly and puts their pronouns in and pays attention to those details, I was still harmed based on racism. It’s sort of how race and gender and sexuality intertwine. The organization didn’t really pay attention to all forms of possible discrimination.*

# Supporting All Age Groups

**Younger TGNB Employees:** The greatest protective factor for TGNB youth is family support, while the lack of family support can pose one of the greatest challenges to launching a successful life as a TGNB adult. TGNB youth with unsupportive families may be disowned or kicked out of their home and have to fend for themselves from a young age. These individuals may become homeless; may be unable to finish school; and may lack access to adequate nutrition, shelter, and healthcare. This places them at a severe disadvantage entering the job market. They also lack typical employment mentorship that may exist in a family structure or the ability to get a first job as a teenager, which may further delay their employment progress.

**Older TGNB Employees:** Older TGNB individuals also face unique obstacles. Many social groups and community programs for TGNB individuals are geared towards adolescents or young adults. Many older TGNB individuals may have faced decades of discrimination, severely limiting their employment prospects. In addition, older TGNB adults face dual employment discrimination from both age and gender identity.

It is essential for employment programs to be available to TGNB individuals of all ages and for the programs to truly understand the unique areas of support that TGNB individuals need at those different stages of life.

## TGNB Voices

*I have had lots of opportunity. I'm more worried about the LGBT youth that are homeless or don't have a long résumé or anything for providing starter jobs.*

*If they are going to be providing resources for queer folks, young people need things like clothing closets. Young people often need mentorship on the interviewing process and dressing.*

*No one tells me what to look for in an employer. I just have learned from bad experience, and I think that especially if we want to look out for youth that are coming up through the workforce, starting small and training them.*

*Trans community members can have a lack of family support. Some people unfortunately do get disowned or kicked out and have to make it on their own.*

*I am older. My experiences have damaged me and my ability to work, which include homelessness. There are gaps in my employment history which I cannot tell a potential new employer. It makes it impossible to find a good job.*

*I've worked with many trans people that are starting their transition or relocated here from other areas, or trans youth just out of high school. There's a lot of need for just that basic job training and job readiness. They are looking for job resources.*

*I know that there are specifically trans social groups that exist in the county of Santa Clara. Most of them are geared at young adults, young twenties, late teens. There really aren't any for more mature transgender individuals. It's very hard to connect in those types of support groups with people that are so young.*

*LGBTQ and trans spaces tend to scale a lot younger. I'm not usually rejected, but it does tend to be a younger group. It's not necessarily a bad thing as long as they're accepting of all ages.*



# Jobs in the Technology Field

Technology companies play a prominent role in the culture of Santa Clara County and provide many jobs to county residents. Many TGNB participants stated that they would love a job at a large tech company, but it seemed impossible for them. Participants who worked for tech companies currently or in the past indicated very little visibility for TGNB people in this field. Participants who had tech industry experience reported both positive and negative workplace experiences. On the positive end, tech companies tended to have more robust and inclusive HR policies and practices than jobs in other fields. This included excellent gender-affirming medical insurance and other benefits. However, on the more negative end, the tech field is still primarily made up of cisgender men, resulting in cisgender male cultural norms dominating the social landscape of the workplace. Many participants felt excluded from social and team-building functions that were often held outside of the workplace and typical business hours. This can make it difficult for TGNB employees to acclimate, feel included in the workplace, or make the social connections needed to get promoted. Additionally, because the tech field is global, TGNB employees often interact with individuals from other places or cultural backgrounds that are less TGNB-affirming and less aware of LGBTQ+ issues, which puts them at risk for experiences of discrimination and microaggressions. Technology employers should continue building strong, supportive policies and practices to create an inclusive social environment in the global workplace so that TGNB individuals can feel a sense of belonging and function more effectively as employees and as people.

## TGNB Voices

*I have found a few TGNB folks working in tech. They are very few and far between. My clients are all over Silicon Valley. I can't think of a single one of my clients in tech who have any TGNB employees that I come into contact with.*

*Tech, as companies, are pretty trans-friendly, but the culture may not be friendly to trans women. It just seems kind of geared towards younger, certainly, and mostly male—not always.*

*One of the issues I have with the tech industry in general is I'm not seeing a lot of transgender visibility. I have one personal acquaintance who's been working in tech as a transgender and nonbinary person for the last ten years, but they are the exception. They are not the rule. That's one person in tech out of thousands that I know. I find it very depressing.*

*There's definitely a desire for transgender people to work for larger tech corporations, especially being here in the Bay Area where all these giant companies are. But there is lack of understanding on how to get connected.*

*I think that there is still a bias against TGNB and LGBTQ people in tech. Some of the bias is inherited from American values, and some of the bias is inherited from cultural values brought in from outside the US. I know, for example, from personal experience, that many of the folks I work with from other countries tend to be divided very sharply on LGBTQ people.*

*Most of the employees in my tech company were young and male. I'm not sure if it was because I was a woman or because I was a trans woman, but I did feel excluded. Largely, I just felt socially alone and not listened to. I had 20 years of work experience, but I just felt like I wasn't being taken seriously.*

*For TGNB workers big tech can be very comfortable, in terms of benefits, work culture, general ability to feel like I can be my authentic self at work.*

*First of all, just getting hired by a big tech company felt like a big step for me. Having a really good interview and not having my gender identity really seem to be a part of it, that was great.*

# Retail and Customer Service Jobs

Retail and customer service jobs have particular considerations for TGNB employees given the high level of interaction that employees have with customers and clients. Even when a company has inclusive policies and supportive coworkers, interactions with clients and customers typically fall outside of the company’s or employee’s control. The employee may be exposed to microaggressions, misgendering, abusive language, or even the potential for physical harm from clients or customers. To help support TGNB employees in these types of jobs, employers should allow employees to use their chosen names on their nametags or badges and have a space for pronouns or allow employees to wear pronoun pins. Supervisors should also be prepared to intervene if a customer misgenders or otherwise harasses their employee. Employees should be given explicit permission to walk away from a customer or client interaction if they are being treated disrespectfully or are in danger. Participants indicated that this type of support from their supervisor and company would make them feel more valued as an employee and would increase job satisfaction.

## TGNB Voices

*I usually haven’t had problems with coworkers, it’s usually with customers. If you’re in the service sector, you’re up against the general public—we can’t control the general public the way we control who decides to hire and what we can deem acceptable in a workplace. The mantra that the customer is always right: That can do a lot of damage.*

*The employer should have the employee’s best interests and should be supporting of the employee if something is escalating to a point of aggression. Say you are in food service and a customer is giving a server a hard time because of their identity. I would love to see the restaurant manager come out and say, “Hey, you’re treating our staff poorly, so you can’t be here.”*

*For trans and nonbinary people, customer service jobs can seem desirable. But you can’t really assume that all customers are going to be respectful of your identity or stuff like that. It’s just an added layer of complexity in that kind of work.*

*Once my supervisor had to come in with a customer, she very quickly stepped in and said, “No, she was helping you,” and she very strongly corrected this person, which I really appreciated.*

*For customer service and public-facing positions where they have nametags, I would like corporations to put pronouns on nametags or at least allow pronoun pins.*

*There’s a lot of things just kind of out my control but are within the control of the employer, like protections when working with customers. It would be nice to have the option to work more in customer service, but it’s so difficult. It’s just rough.*

*Sometimes the clients would say stuff. If I was out delivering and I was walking back to my car, the people I just delivered to would yell out offensive slurs to me. What the heck? I’m just doing my job. Is that necessary?*

*The one job I had in retail was less supportive...It wasn’t the job itself that I had a problem with, it was that the customers sometimes would be terrible.*

# Self-Employment

Many TGNB individuals gravitate towards self-employment with 17% of participants working for themselves. When asked about future career goals, 25% of participants wanted to start or expand their own business. Participants engage in many different forms of self-employment, including owning small businesses. Many participants hope to create a successful business someday, but they need guidance. Participants discussed the advantages of self-employment, especially avoiding misgendering, harassment, and other microaggressions in the workplace. Participants also discussed the benefits of flexibility associated with self-employment, such as setting one's own schedule and rates. This made employment more accommodating and accessible for participants, resulting in overall improvements to mental health. However, it should also be emphasized that self-employment is sometimes perceived as participants' only option due to discrimination. More often for the participants, self-employment meant short-term gig work. When participants have a hard time obtaining a job with a company, gig work was often their only option for earning money and providing for basic life necessities. Some participants wished for more training aimed at the TGNB community on how to start and operate an independent business. They also wished for more ongoing support for TGNB business owners. For those who continue to work in the gig economy, information sharing and support could be beneficial from other TGNB people in these roles.



- 17% of participants reported working for themselves, much higher than the general population
- 25% of participants wanted to start or expand their own business

## TGNB Voices

*For small business owners, advertising to grow the business is a big barrier, especially for a transgender person. I would like to see in the social groups or technical assistance offered specifically on marketing and advertising for TGNB business owners.*

*Now I look for gig work. In the past, my supervisors or coworkers did not like my appearance. Lots of discrimination. I did not want to be in an environment that is hostile. It just made me prefer temp or seasonal jobs. If I don't commit, I don't get hurt.*

*I work for myself to avoid transphobia, doing work that I enjoy without dealing with misgendering, questioning, and disrespect.*

*My resume is a lot of work in the transgender community. I think some employers pass on my resume because of it, so I need to find income by working for myself.*

*I don't want to wear, listen to, say, or limit myself with anything others need from me. I love being mobile and on the go. I love setting my own schedule and rates.*

*I need more examples of people that look like me, transgender and nonbinary people that are doing it, who are successful in owning their own business. I would love mentorship to really thrive, more spaces for us, more visibility and space, more affirming our work.*

*I haven't been able to find "regular" work even after years of applications and searching, so all I have left are gigs.*

*Independent contractor/gig positions hire very quickly, and therefore I can maintain some income while searching for a full-time, benefitted position.*

# Attire and Dress Codes

Clothing is a crucial aspect of gender expression that is very salient for TGNB individuals, especially in the context of employment. Participants experienced stress as they made decisions about clothing choices when going to job interviews or to work - for example, weighing the relative benefits of clothing that conceals their gender identity in order to avoid discrimination versus the benefits of dressing in an affirming way that feels authentic. For workplaces with uniforms, participants indicated that they prefer gender-neutral options so that they do not have to make those stressful decisions or be put in a position of needing to choose a gendered uniform. Another notable concern was access to clothing that was the correct size and gender expression for job interviews. Participants stated that they would benefit from low-cost gender-affirming clothing and tailoring services. TGNB individuals have a particularly difficult time finding clothes that are both fitted properly and affirming due to the way clothing is manufactured in a gender binary way, with different sizes and cuts for “men’s” and “women’s” clothing based on assumed differences in fat and muscle distribution and height between the two binary genders. Programs to increase access to properly fitted, affirming clothing will ensure that TGNB individuals are adequately prepared for job interviews, improving equity in the job-seeking process.

**I have dressed in clothing that does not truly express my gender in order to avoid discrimination at work.**



**How helpful would these potential services be to you to meet your career goals over the next five years?**

- Clothing in my size and gender expression for job interviews**
- Very helpful ..... 40%
  - Somewhat helpful ..... 26%
  - Not helpful ..... 12%
  - Not applicable for me ..... 22%

## TGNB Voices

*I've also wanted to get new clothes, and that's been kind of a barrier for me. I need interview clothes I'll be confident wearing. If they are going to be providing resources for queer folks, things like clothing closets. Young people often need mentorship on the interviewing process and dressing.*

*I've experienced a lot of fraught discussions with my employer related to dress code. Trans women can be hypersexualized as my body doesn't show up in the workplace in the same ways that a cisgender person would. If you're looking at my body in that way, I think that's an issue and I would consider that workplace harassment.*

*I work at a chain drugstore as a cashier. I'm not as out as nonbinary at work, but the uniforms are gender-neutral, so that's good in that it's not gendered in that way.*

*I could use free tailoring. No professional clothes fit me properly, and worrying about when I go to interviews, how I'm going to be looking in my ill-fitting suit. Getting help with fit of clothes is a big one.*

*For young people in some retail and food jobs, they tend to not enjoy, but feel at least somewhat comfortable and safe in jobs that have uniforms. That's the big thing. If everybody is expected to dress and present the same way, it takes a lot of the onus of deciding how to look off. It also helps folks blend in a little bit more.*

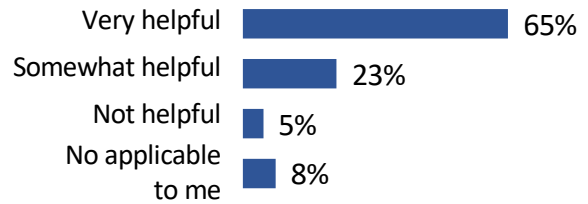
*Dress is a concern for me. I've been exploring more of my gender expression. It's been really hard to, every day, wake up and wonder, "Should I dress more fem today, less queer, look more straight if I'm meeting with a homophobic or transphobic client?" Sometimes I feel I need to mask my identity to work in this environment.*

# Mentors

Mentorship was a prominent theme in participants’ desired programs to support TGNB individuals’ employment needs and long-term career goals. A sizable majority (88%) of participants indicated that mentors would be helpful for meeting their career goals over the next five years. Participants discussed many ways in which mentors could be beneficial - for example, in learning how to navigate professional environments generally and how to handle TGNB-specific issues such as disclosure and transition in the workplace. Participants also discussed mentorship in the context of the importance of visibility and to be reminded that they are not alone in navigating these issues as a TGNB individual in the workplace. Many participants also described their own interest in giving back to the TGNB community by becoming a mentor to others. Mentorship programs will facilitate employment growth through tangible support for TGNB employees and job applicants. They will also serve a vital role in fostering community connection, a known resilience factor for TGNB individuals that promotes greater mental health and well-being. Mentorship programs are needed across age groups, from TGNB teenagers considering future careers to older TGNB community members.

## How helpful would these potential services be to you to meet your career goals over the next five years?

### Mentors specific to my field of work



## TGNB Voices

*If the county could find a way to endorse or even create mentor circles, create specific support mechanisms for other transgender individuals. There are so many uncertainties about, “How do I come out at work? What can I ask them to change? What can I ask them to do that’s legal or even right?”*

*Mentoring would be great. I think a program where older trans people having direct mentorship on how to navigate the professional environments would be very helpful to me. It helps to be able to see other examples of trans women doing the same thing as I’m doing. I’m not the only one, and it helps to know that sometimes.*

*I have two queer professors and I love them so much. They’re my dear mentors. I tell them all the time, “I just really appreciate you guys being here and being present and being that role model that you can be queer and a highly accomplished professor.” I want to kind of do that, too, for my future students, as well.*

*I think programs need to be peer-led, like people who are trans working in Santa Clara County sharing about their—almost mentoring, about to go through the process of applications, and how to navigate through working at particular types of workplaces.*

*Getting to network with other trans people who are currently professionals in my field, people in different professional levels and varying experiences across the US and seeing how they navigated it.*

*My goal has been to talk to more of my trans friends who have transitioned medically and to ask them how they hold those conversations in the workplace, because I have no idea how to start it right now.*

*Mentorship would be great, if there was a program of some sort where we got to connect to another nonbinary or trans person who can support us through our field or navigating resources.*

*Mentorship programs to connect with another nonbinary or trans person in my field. I don’t have any of those mentors that are older. I think that would be awesome.*

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

## Section 9

# Recommendations: Improving the Workplace for TGNB Community Members



## Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment *Report Recommendations*

Based on input from TGNB community members in Santa Clara County, the study identified recommendations for supporting TGNB employment experiences, both when looking for a job and while in the workplace. These are divided into recommendations for actions to be taken by the County of Santa Clara as a government entity; actions to be taken by entities within Santa Clara County such as nonprofits, schools, and support agencies; and recommendations for actions to be taken by local companies and employers in Santa Clara County.

### ➤ **What do TGNB job-seekers and employees need in order to thrive?**

On the one hand, the employment goals of TGNB people in Santa Clara County are similar to what any employee wants – a living wage, opportunities for career advancement, and a friendly and supportive workplace where they are respected by their peers and superiors. They also recognize that their mental and physical health and well-being are essential to being able to thrive in the workplace. The cost of living in Santa Clara County, especially housing, was a major concern and barrier to living and working here for many participants.

However, it is important to note that TGNB employees face numerous additional barriers to meeting their employment goals, above and beyond those experienced by cisgender people. Pervasive anti-TGNB stigma, high rates of discrimination, and the mental and physical health consequences of these experiences significantly impact TGNB career development. These challenges can impact the completion of formal higher education, job skills training, the likelihood of obtaining a job, and thriving in the workplace.

TGNB employees also have specific concerns related to how a workplace supports them during transition – medical, legal, and social. This also includes specific concerns about workplace benefits such as medical coverage and leave policies to support transitions.

Anti-TGNB stigma and discrimination not only pose challenges to finding and keeping a job, but also may limit the choices that TGNB people make about which sectors, companies, and job roles they will pursue. TGNB people often select jobs based on their desire to minimize experiences of on-the-job discrimination, even if these are not jobs that are the most fulfilling to them or the most financially rewarding. TGNB people also have a high rate of self-employment, often to avoid discrimination and harassment. While it may be personally rewarding to start and operate a business, many TGNB people who are self-employed are doing low-paid gig work just to survive.

Even in the absence of outright discrimination, TGNB people are most comfortable in workplaces where they are affirmed, supported, and have visible community and role models. Active TGNB allyship in the workplace goes beyond just tolerance.

## ➤ Recommendations for the County of Santa Clara as a Government Entity

The goal of the County of Santa Clara is to support TGNB employment by increasing access to TGNB-affirming resources in the county. While this includes county-operated services, the County of Santa Clara should provide practical support, technical support, and financial support for the development of new targeted programs that promote job and career readiness. Broader county programs can also address overall social, mental, and physical well-being of TGNB community members which will help remove barriers to employment. The county can also provide oversight of employers to ensure that nondiscrimination laws are followed and TGNB cultural competence is prioritized. Finally, the county needs to increase awareness of new and existing programs by and for TGNB people. It is not the sole responsibility of the county to provide these services; instead, the county should increase partnerships and grants that allow TGNB employment programs to thrive. Participants noted several ways in which the county as a government entity could improve TGNB employment.

### **Increased Awareness and Outreach Budget:**

Many participants were not aware of the resources for TGNB people that already exist in the county. Participants also discussed the need for greater outreach to and visibility of TGNB people and TGNB-affirming resources, especially regarding employment opportunities. Understanding that those most connected to existing LGBTQ+ resources are most likely to be aware of county activities, more effort needs to be made to reach those who are less connected to the county's existing programs. The Office of LGBTQ Affairs already offers a number of services, but there needs to be better awareness of these programs and an increased promotional budget. The county needs additional outreach staffing, specifically for the TGNB community.

### **TGNB Employment Public Awareness**

**Campaigns:** County residents and employers would benefit from public and professional awareness campaigns to highlight TGNB employment. This report demonstrates that employers of all types need education and encouragement to improve TGNB workplace experiences. Employer awareness campaigns could both identify some of the concerns addressed in this report and discuss TGNB-affirming employment practices. Public

campaigns could highlight TGNB community members who have been successful in their career paths and could direct the community to existing and new employment programs.

**Enforcement of Anti-Discrimination Laws and Policies:** Participants emphasized that state and local anti-discrimination laws are helpful, but the county needs some way of ensuring compliance and enforcing standards. While the county has a system in place through the Equal Opportunity Division, the process is not widely understood by the TGNB community. Many TGNB participants said that they do not report illegal termination, discrimination, harassment, or violence because they assume nothing will be done about the issue. It would be helpful if a specific TGNB community representative is identified in the Equal Opportunity Division or a liaison is assigned to the Office of LGBTQ Affairs. Participants desired clear direction on the best way to report a complaint, but in a way that also feels safe to the employee and protects them from retaliation. Although discrimination in hiring and the workplace is often challenging to prove, participants suggested that the county should be more active in obtaining data about any employer-based discriminatory practices.



## ➤ Recommendations for the County of Santa Clara as a Government Entity

### Ensuring that all County Services are TGNB Inclusive:

Participants noted that the county should increase TGNB access to resources by ensuring that all county services are actively TGNB-inclusive and affirming.

It is particularly important that all programs are created and administered with attention to intersectionality. Inclusive services need to take into account the diversity in Santa Clara County’s TGNB community including gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, ethnicity, language, and more. Employment programs can be used as an example. Some participants felt that existing general employment programs might not be “safe spaces” for TGNB people. Often this was a general feeling without specific interactions with these programs, but even so, this perception prevents access to the programs. This highlights the importance of taking an active and visible approach to inclusivity rather than assuming that neutrality will be perceived as inclusive. The unique concerns of TGNB people of color, immigrants, and disabled people should be incorporated into programs. Age emerged as another notable intersectional factor as many of the older participants lamented that most TGNB resources are geared towards youth and young adults.

### Ensuring All Public Spaces and Resources in the County are TGNB-Affirming:

Participants recognized that the county has already taken some steps towards TGNB inclusivity – for example, all-gender bathrooms and gender inclusivity on many county forms. However, they emphasized that these issues are not always uniformly addressed across the county, particularly in more rural areas. It is important to consider sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) as well as pronouns and use of chosen name in county activities, forms, training, and data collection. Making sure that all public spaces are TGNB-affirming will make Santa Clara County a place where TGNB community members can fully thrive in their work life. Similarly, the county should institute guidance to help private sector businesses and employers become more TGNB-inclusive, including model job applications and other employment forms, all-gender bathroom signs, and financial assistance for small businesses and non-profits to complete needed changes.

### Gender Inclusion Policy / TGNB Employment Rights:

Participants asked for greater education about their rights as a TGNB job-seeker and employee. The county should address this by publishing and disseminating a TGNB employee “bill of rights” and gender inclusion policy that includes legal information, resources, and suggestions for navigating interpersonal situations. This could be added to the Office of LGBTQ Affairs’ website.

### Importance Of BIPOC Cultural Competency

*Within the research, TGNB participants representing BIPOC communities were the most adversely impacted by lack of access to basic needs, demonstrating the effects of multiple marginalizations. Importantly, when TGNB participants were asked about programs to improve their employment prospects, BIPOC participants indicated the greatest utilization of these programs. All the recommendations discussed in this report should keep this in mind. It will be important that all TGNB employment programs emphasize racial and ethnic cultural competency.*

## ➤ Recommendations for the County of Santa Clara as a Government Entity

### County’s Internal TGNB Employment Practices:

Participants noted that the County of Santa Clara has improved policies and practices for TGNB people in their hiring process. However, participants with direct experience reported some inconsistencies in practice. Participants perceived that while many TGNB people apply to county-level jobs, very few are hired for these jobs. A big concern is that the county's hiring process can be inflexible to some of the realities of TGNB people. For example, standardized requirements for a high school diploma or a specific college degree may discount the experience of some TGNB people who faced barriers to obtaining a degree but would otherwise be qualified for the job. TGNB candidates may have lived experience that directly relates to job duties, but there is no

place to express those qualifications on a standard application process.

Participants also described inconsistency in interview practices across the many departments in the county. It was apparent to some participants that their interviewer(s) did not appear to have any knowledge or training to help them interact effectively with TGNB applicants, and at times interviewers even made blatant discriminatory statements during the hiring process. The county should provide standardized interviewer training that covers TGNB topics to ensure consistently affirming interview experiences. The Employee Services Agency – Human Resources should audit current policies and training to make them more uniform across all departments and regions within the county.

### Survey Question:

**How helpful would these potential services be to you to meet your career goals over the next five years?**  
*Please select all that apply.*

	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful
Access to TGNB-affirming mental health services	74%	13%
Access to medical care	68%	13%
Mentors specific to my field of work	65%	23%
Stable housing	64%	7%
TGNB-identified mentors to support my employment goals	60%	28%
TGNB-specific networking events	59%	31%
Access to gender affirming medical services and treatment	58%	19%
Tuition money to return to school	52%	15%
Money to buy food	50%	16%
Student loan forgiveness	45%	7%

	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful
Clothing in my size and gender expression for job interviews	40%	26%
Career counseling	38%	36%
Assistance getting my legal name and/or gender marker changed	35%	20%
Help on best practices and strategies to find a job	35%	36%
Help applying to college, vocational or graduate school	33%	19%
Coaching on interview strategies	32%	34%
A cellphone or smartphone	31%	12%
Classes in using technology	21%	26%
Help completing my GED	10%	4%
English fluency classes	8%	7%

*Not helpful to me and not applicable were also response options*

## ➤ Recommended Programs to Expand TGNB-Affirming Employment

While participants recognized that Santa Clara County is relatively TGNB-affirming in the context of the broader United States, they noted there are still many improvements needed. The research points to new initiatives to improve TGNB employment prospects. The way in which programs are developed may take many forms. While the county may initiate some programs, there are also opportunities for county nonprofits, educational institutions, and existing employment programs. The county could be involved by providing financial grants, planning assistance, or technical assistance to such programs. TGNB community members should be part of the staffing of these programs. Many participants strongly desire to do paid work that directly supports TGNB communities. Programs such as those listed below could provide paid opportunities to work directly with and for TGNB people in affirming environments. The following programs should be considered.

### TGNB-Specific Employment Training

**Specific Job Training:** Certain jobs need entry-level training and certifications. Programs can be tailored specifically for TGNB people to learn together and support each other on specific career paths.

**TGNB Employment Workshops:** As indicated in the report, employment information needed by TGNB job seekers can be unique, such as navigating coming out to employers, pronouns and chosen name, and transitioning. "How-to" workshops tailored for TGNB community members can help connect TGNB individuals with others who have navigated similar situations. These workshops could cover topics such as how to search for a job, interview strategies, advancing in your field, and how to navigate TGNB employees' rights and experiences of discrimination.

**Self-Employment Workshops and Coaching:** A high percentage of TGNB participants work for themselves or wish to start their own business. Doing so can be quite empowering, as it gives the TGNB community member autonomy over their work-life and allows them to create a TGNB-affirming workplace. Programs should be developed to help with skills and knowledge to start a new business, as well as support to manage and expand existing businesses and/or thrive in the gig economy.

**Mentorship Programs:** A common request from TGNB participants was mentoring programs. These programs could be short-term, such as public forums and panels open to all TGNB community members, as well as mentor-matching programs to link volunteer mentors with mentees for periodic one-on-one or group meetings. Mentorship programs are needed across age groups, from TGNB teenagers considering future careers to older TGNB adults.

**Professional Career Counseling and Coaching:** Some TGNB community members would benefit from career counseling and coaching from trained and culturally competent professionals. Coaching could also include specific assistance on issues such as transitioning in the workplace and effective responses to incidents of anti-TGNB discrimination or harassment.

**TGNB Education and Training for Employers:** The county needs increased SOGIE training for employers, with content specifically for managers and supervisors in order to take the lead in ensuring a TGNB-affirming workplace. This should also include guidelines for employers on developing TGNB-affirming policies and procedures. The county should work with a nonprofit or vendor to develop and administer this training based on the content of this report.

## ➤ Recommended Programs to Expand TGNB-Affirming Employment

### **TGNB-Affirming Employment Program Audits:**

There are many existing employment, education, and job training programs. These programs should self-audit their services to ensure that they are TGNB-affirming based on the findings of this report. Audits should be implemented with the awareness that existing programs often do not feel safe or affirming for TGNB community members, and thus greater attention to cultural competence is needed. Audit results may find that general population employment, job training, and education programs in the public and private sectors need to be re-tooled to be more inclusive.

**Local Employment Directories:** A partnership between a nonprofit vendor and the county should develop a county-wide “TGNB-affirming employer” directory, with minimum criteria to be met and independently verified for an employer to be included. The directory should be widely distributed to TGNB community members and employers, such as by being hosted on the Office of LGBTQ Affairs’ website. Participants emphasized that this would help them obtain affirming employment, as well as provide an incentive for employers to improve their affirming policies in order to be included in the directory.

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### **Employment-Related Aid Programs**

TGNB community members would benefit from programs that support employment. These programs could be operated by the county or by nonprofit or educational institutions and funded by government, private grants, and/or relief aid funding.

**Ensuring Basic Needs are Met:** Given the high cost of living, lack of housing availability, and severe wealth inequality in Santa Clara County, many participants emphasized that housing instability and food insecurity influence their ability to seek and maintain employment. Addressing this gap and ensuring that TGNB community members’ basic needs are met is a challenging but essential goal for Santa Clara County.

**Ensuring TGNB-Affirming Medical Care:** Access to gender-affirming medical care and mental health services emerged as an important factor for many participants. Providing accessible care is a community-wide responsibility touching government, employers, public and private medical facilities, educational institutions, and non-profits. All organizations in the county should audit their internal health systems to ensure that benefits and interaction touch points are appropriate and accessible to TGNB community members. Further, a coalition of Providers should develop recommendations for private employer and nonprofit medical plans,

with the goal of increasing access to gender-affirming medical care.

**Educational / Financial Aid Assistance:** Programs could assist in sourcing grants and loans to enroll in college, graduate school, and vocational training. Assistance in applying for loan forgiveness programs will also be needed. A centralized TGNB-affirming source of information would help facilitate these connections.

**Legal Aid:** TGNB community members would benefit from access to free or low-cost legal services to assist with legal name and gender marker change, navigating transition in the workplace, as well as cases of discrimination, harassment, and violence.

**Clothing Assistance:** Programs could provide practical and financial assistance to obtain and tailor clothing that reflects the needs of TGNB community members, fits their bodies, and is suitable for interviews and workplaces. Implementation of TGNB-specific clothing swaps and clothing drives can help this need.

## ➤ Recommendations for Individual Employers and Companies

While the County of Santa Clara and local nonprofits can play an important role in supporting TGNB community members to thrive in the workplace, these actions can only go so far. The findings of this report led to numerous recommendations specifically to be implemented by employers and companies to create TGNB-affirming workplaces. These recommendations are drawn from participants' own perceptions of positive experiences in various workplaces and job roles, as well as their explicit requests and ideas for what would make workplaces more affirming.

This report recommends that all employers in Santa Clara County, large and small, complete a TGNB employment self-audit. Below is a list of characteristics of TGNB-Affirming Workplaces, as identified in this study. It includes **general recommendations** for companies to become more TGNB-affirming, as well as recommendations specifically for the **hiring process** and for **supporting employees on-the-job**. This resource may be used by employers to create a "TGNB-Affirming Workplace Checklist" and develop standards for employer cultural competence training. Achieving all these goals will help make a workplace culture that is truly affirming of TGNB community members and employees at all levels.

### General

- Explicit TGNB affirmation in the company mission statement, discrimination statement, policies, and/or procedures
- Support for TGNB and LGBTQ+ employees and communities throughout the year, not just during Pride month
- Visibility of TGNB people in leadership roles and on-the-job
- All-gender restrooms offered throughout the physical space
- When binary restrooms are offered, policies allowing the use of restrooms that match a person's gender identity
- Regular, ongoing TGNB cultural competence training for all managers, supervisors, and employees
- Active outreach to TGNB communities for input into company cultural competence
- Recognition of the unique aspects of TGNB employees' experiences that may differ from those of cisgender LGBTQ+ employees
- Trainings to increase managers', supervisors', and employees' knowledge and skills to better support TGNB employees
- HR or management representatives identified as TGNB-affirming allies to report concerns
- Availability of LGBTQ+ and TGNB Employee Resource Groups (ERG) or other opportunities for TGNB employees to find each other in the workplace
- Health insurance coverage for TGNB-related medical care such as hormones and surgery
- Health insurance coverage for adequate mental health care for all employees
- Willingness to listen to feedback and make changes as needed to promote ongoing cultural competence within the organization

## ➤ Recommendations for Individual Employers and Companies

### Hiring

- TGNB inclusivity in recruitment materials and active recruitment of TGNB community members for open positions
- Policies and practices that provide TGNB employees the opportunity for promotion and acting in managerial roles
- Job applications that consistently include an array of gender options with a check-all-that-apply and fill-in-the blank format; questions to indicate pronouns and chosen or preferred name
- Normalize pronoun sharing throughout the hiring process (i.e., interviewers and supervisors share their own pronouns routinely) while also allowing this to be optional for applicants who do not wish to share pronouns
- Anti-bias and TGNB cultural competence training for everyone who participates in the interview and candidate selection process, including quality control checks, clear policy expectations in the selection process, and a process for addressing any bias that occurs
- Focus on skills and lived experience relevant to the job duties, with flexibility built in regarding formal higher education attainment and past employment experience as appropriate for the specific job

### On-the-Job

- Anti-discrimination policies that are regularly shared with all employees, with clear procedures for TGNB employees to follow when they experience anti-TGNB bias in the workplace
- Clear remediation steps to be taken when discrimination and microaggressions occur in the workplace, including sanctions for serious or repeated policy violations
- TGNB employee input as to what actions would feel most affirming and helpful to them when they do experience discrimination
- Policies to protect TGNB employees in public-facing roles who experience discrimination and harassment from clients and customers
- Encourage TGNB inclusion in social and team-building activities to mitigate TGNB employees' feeling of isolation in the workplace
- Time off for transition-related medical and legal services
- Flexibility to work remotely when possible
- Programs that support further education or student loan forgiveness
- Clear processes for coming out, transitioning, and changing name and pronouns, and guidelines that allow the TGNB employee to be in charge of the pace of transition at work
- Normalizing pronoun sharing and correct pronoun use in all everyday interactions, with flexibility for employees who do not wish to share their pronouns
- Supervisors and managers setting an example to other employees by modeling affirming communication styles and correcting misgendering and microaggressions in the workplace
- Creating a workplace culture that supports open-mindedness and acceptance of all forms of diversity
- Recognition that it is the responsibility of the employer, not TGNB employees, to create policy change and offer diversity training
- If applicable to the employer, dress codes and uniforms should have gender-neutral options and dress code policy should be flexible
- Prioritizing having TGNB people in leadership roles and creating policies and programs that support TGNB pathways to supervisory and management positions

# Santa Clara County Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender Expansive Employment

For more information about this report,  
contact the County of Santa Clara  
Office of LGBTQ Affairs

Phone (408) 678-2900

Email [lgbtq@ceo.sccgov.org](mailto:lgbtq@ceo.sccgov.org)

Web <https://lgbtq.sccgov.org>



**LGBTQ**  
Office of LGBTQ Affairs  
Division of Equity & Social Justice