

**Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector
Research Translation Brief**

**Constructing and Implementing Transgender Policy for Public
Administration**

Administration & Society

[Click here for full text](#)

Nicole M. Elias, Ph.D., John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

In a Nutshell:

- Social problem: Lack of comprehensive transgender employee policies in federal agencies leads to challenges for transgender employees transitioning in the workplace.
- Social science insight: Having formal, detailed transgender policies that address issues like restroom access, dress codes, and name/pronoun usage can significantly improve the transition experience for transgender employees and the overall workplace climate.
- What we should do: Federal agencies should proactively develop comprehensive transgender employee policies that:
 - Come directly from agency leadership
 - Clearly outline expectations for inclusion and non-discrimination
 - Designate specific points of contact for transition assistance
 - Address key issues like restroom access, dress codes, and name/pronoun usage
 - Are readily available to all employees

The Problem

The key social problem this research is addressing is the lack of comprehensive policies to support transgender employees transitioning into the federal workplace. This is problematic for several reasons. It leaves transgender employees without clear guidance or support during a difficult and sensitive process, and agencies are often unprepared to handle transitions consistently and appropriately. The lack of policies fails to educate managers and coworkers about transgender issues, potentially leading to misunderstandings and a less inclusive environment. It also puts transgender employees at risk of discrimination, harassment, and

unequal treatment in areas like restroom access, dress codes, and use of preferred names/pronouns. The absence of policies signals a lack of institutional support, negatively impacting transgender employees' workplace experience and well-being. Additionally, it leaves agencies vulnerable to potential legal issues if they mishandle transitions due to a lack of clear guidelines. In essence, the lack of comprehensive transgender-inclusive workplace policies fails to provide necessary support, guidance, and protections for transgender federal employees during a major life transition, while also failing to create an informed, inclusive environment for all employees. This can result in discrimination, stress, and challenges for transgender employees that cisgender employees do not face.

New Insights for Addressing the Problem

- Most federal agencies lack comprehensive policies to support transgender employees transitioning in the workplace. Only a few agencies like NASA, DOI, IRS and DOL have formal transgender-inclusive policies.
- Having formal, detailed transgender-inclusive policies that are readily available to all employees and supported by leadership can significantly improve the transition experience for transgender employees and overall workplace climate.
- Key policy areas that need to be addressed include restroom access, dress codes, name/pronoun usage, and privacy protections for transgender employees.
- Federal agencies should proactively develop transgender-inclusive workplace policies before being approached by a transitioning employee, rather than handling transitions on an ad hoc basis.
- Agencies can look to model policies from other agencies, EEOC guidance, and input from transgender employees and advocacy groups to craft effective, supportive policies tailored to their needs.
- More research is needed on transgender employee experiences across different types of agencies and organizations to further improve policies and practices.

Why Are These Insights Important?

- They highlight a significant gap in federal workplace policies that impacts the well-being and job satisfaction of transgender employees.
- Addressing this gap can create more inclusive and supportive work environments for all employees.
- Proactive policy development can help agencies avoid potential discrimination issues and legal challenges.
- Improving transgender employee experiences can enhance overall workforce diversity and retention.

What Should Decision Makers Do?

- Agency leaders should develop and implement comprehensive transgender-inclusive workplace policies, drawing on existing model policies and input from transgender employees and advocacy groups.
- Human Resources departments should create clear procedures for supporting employees through gender transitions, including guidance on updating personnel records and benefits information.
- Managers should receive training on supporting transgender employees and fostering inclusive work environments.
- The Office of Personnel Management should consider developing government-wide guidelines for transgender-inclusive policies to ensure consistency across agencies.

What Do We Still Need to Know?

- How do transgender employee experiences vary across different types of federal agencies (e.g. civilian vs. military, field offices vs. headquarters)?
- What are the long-term career impacts for federal employees who transition on the job?
- How can agencies best measure the effectiveness of transgender-inclusive policies?
- What strategies are most effective for overcoming resistance to transgender-inclusive policies from some employees or managers?

Contact

Nicole M. Elias

John Jay College of Criminal Justice - CUNY

nelias@jjay.cuny.edu

Prepared by

Maria Cedeño

Initiative for Gender Equity in the Public Sector

maria.cedeno@jjay.cuny.edu

View more research translation briefs at www.igeps.org.