



Notes from the field

Equality USDA at Soil Science Society of America

Written by Gabriella Coughlin
Equality USDA Community Outreach & Engagement Coordinator

Last month, I attended the 82nd Soil Science Society of America conference in San Diego, CA January 6-9th, 2019. This was my first time attending an international soil science conference and is an experience I won't soon forget, thanks to the inspiring opening keynote delivered by **former Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack**. Vilsack's message to the 1,600 soil scientists at the conference was simple:

**"GET ENGAGED,
GET INVOLVED."**

For those of you who have seen the former Secretary's ["It Gets Better"](#) video, you know his gift for making people feel seen and valued, even in times of adversity. Which is exactly what he did for a room full of soil scientists who often feel overlooked and undervalued within the natural resource world.

In his talk, former Secretary Vilsack delighted the audience with his recitation of the 5 soil-forming factors**. He lifted us up by reminding us of the critical role we play in feeding and protecting the world. Then he challenged us: he challenged us to step up, stop talking amongst ourselves, and start reaching. To teach wider audiences about the amazing story that happens to and in the soil. Soils are about the beauty and wonder of diversity. His speech then ended with a final call to action, "Bring us into the mystery, bring us in to the passion, bring us in..."

After his talk, I had the opportunity to thank him, not just as a soil scientist, but as Oregon's LGBTQ+ SEPM and member of Equality USDA. I thanked him for providing me and hundreds of USDA employees the opportunity to bring our whole selves to the USDA workplace everyday. I provided him a list of all the great work Equality USDA and the LGBTQ+ Special Emphasis Program has done over the last two years and his smile couldn't have been prouder.



Image description: Gabriella Coughlin meets former Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

Meeting Secretary Vilsack reminded me that while my job is to help landowners understand the benefits of promoting healthy soils and ecosystem resilience through belowground biodiversity, it is also my job to not only educate, but advocate for our workplaces to be spaces where diversity, inclusion, and resilience can flourish just the same.

About the author:

Gabriella Coughlin is an LGBTQ+ accomplice, mapper of desertscapes, and purveyor of all things dirt. She's an NRCS Soil Scientist and SEPM based out of central Oregon. Got a question about soils or outreaching to underserved communities? Hit up Gabby at gabriella.coughlin@or.usda.gov.

****Repeat after me: Climate, Living Organisms, Relief, Parent material, and Time. And with that you have all been officially (CLORPT) and initiated into the dirt nerd fan club ;)**



Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Results of the 2018 FEVS are in!

The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) allows government employees to share their opinions and perceptions of their workplace. You can download a copy of the [2018 Governmentwide FEVS Report here](#). Check out a few notable highlights below!

In 2018, respondents had the option to identify their sexual orientation as: "straight, that is not gay or lesbian", "gay or lesbian", "bisexual", or "something else", as shown in the above table.

The "something else" category had 10,870 respondents. That's more than ten thousand federal employees, or 2% of the federal workforce, who identify themselves as something outside the LGB portion of the acronym, perhaps as queer, two spirit, pansexual, asexual, or intersex.

2,115 respondents (< 1%) identified as transgender. There are transgender federal employees at the majority of agencies and departments.

Sexual Orientation

Straight, that is not gay or lesbian	95%
Gay or Lesbian	2%
Bisexual	1%
Something else	2%

You can find FEVS sexual orientation and gender identity comparison reports dating back to 2015 at:

<https://sites.google.com/view/lgbt-fevs/>



LGBTQ+ at USDA



0.4% are transgender
1.7% are gay or lesbian
1.1% are bisexual
2.2% identify as something else

Source: 2018 Report on Demographics Questions by Agency



Survey Respondents	Generations
1%	Traditionalists (born 1945 or earlier)
38%	Baby Boomers (born 1946 – 1964)
44%	Generation X (born 1965 – 1980)
18%	Generation Y (born 1981 or later)

When acknowledging diversity in the workplace, we often forget about age. With this evolving multi-generational workforce, it is important to understand the benefits each generation can bring to an organization such as an LGBTQ+ employee resource group.

Be on the look out for future Equality USDA webinars where we will discuss the various historical influences and characteristics that impact LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace!



Did you know?

 You can find research and demographics on LGBTQ+ communities in your area on the Williams Institute [website](#).

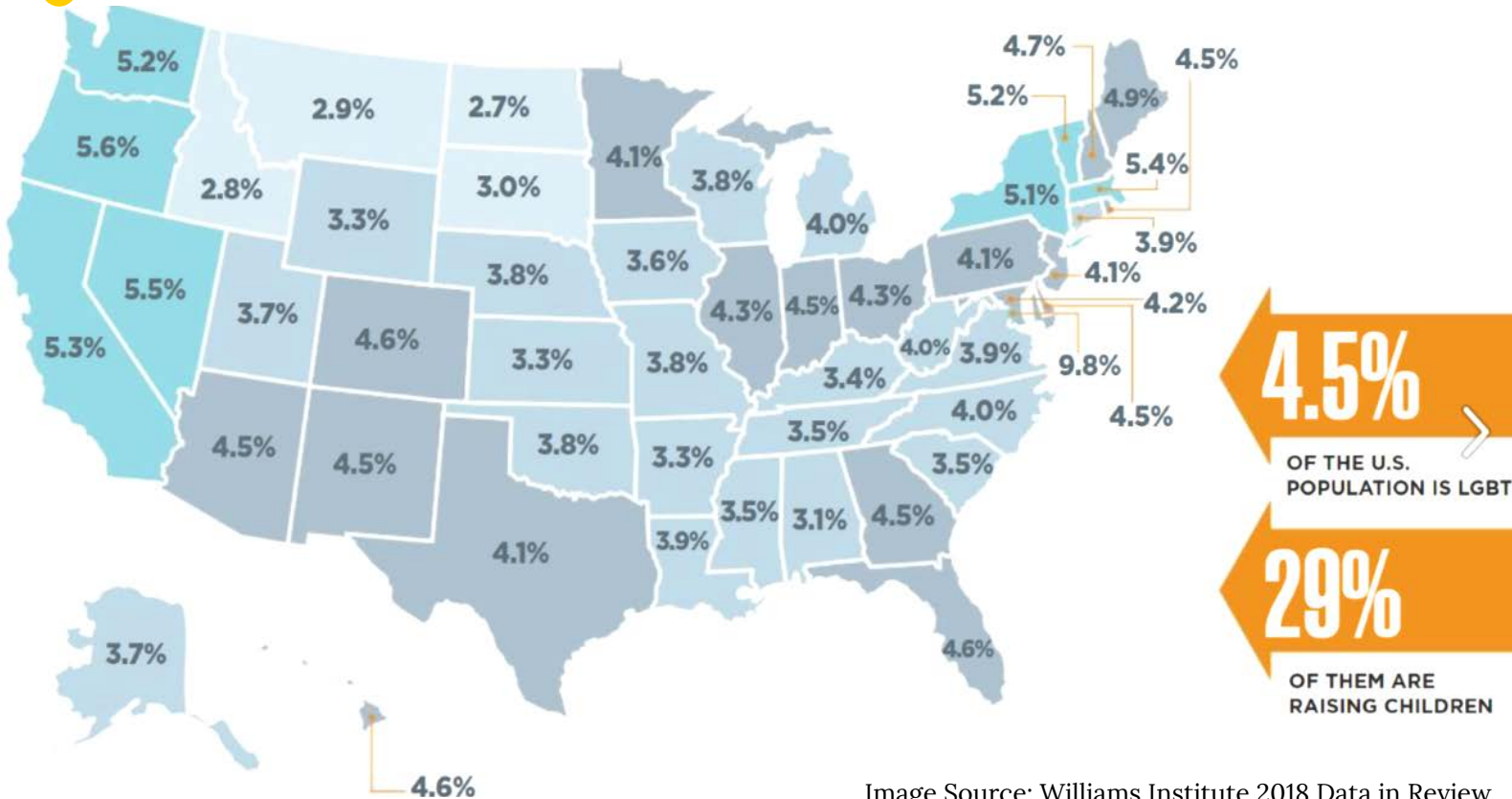



Image Source: Williams Institute 2018 Data in Review

 In the year 2025, Millennials will represent 75% of the workforce. Millennials are more than two times as likely to identify as LGBTQ+ and are more likely to identify as non-binary or gender fluid than previous generations. Check out the generational breakdown below!

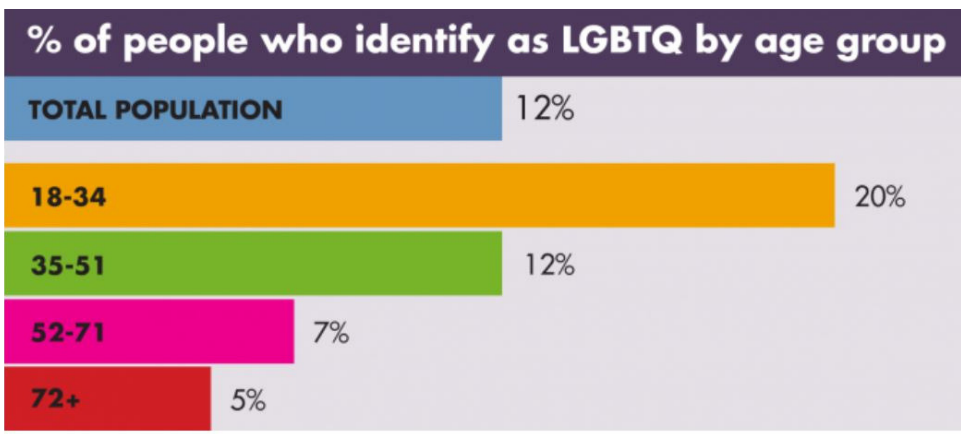


Image Source: GLAAD, Accelerating Acceptance, 2017



In the News

OPM Revises Guidance for Trans Employees

In November 2018, changes were made to OPM's "Guidance Regarding the Employment of Transgender Individuals in the Federal Workplace". This document served as a best practices guide for transgender and transitioning federal employees and their managers. The recent changes are substantial: explanations of important core concepts are removed, like gender identity, gender expression, transgender, and gender non-conforming; guidance about dress and appearance, names and pronouns, sanitary facilities is revised or removed. For a copy of the changes to the Guidance, email equalityUSDA@gmail.com.

The new guidance is available on OPM's website: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/diversity-and-inclusion/reference-materials/guidance-regarding-non-discriminatory-practices-in-federal-employment/>

Pride in Federal Service inquired with OPM about the reason for these changes and OPM stated that they have "determined that it is best to afford agencies more discretion in responding to the needs of their workforce. The guidance clearly and directly reiterates the Federal Government's policy to provide a workplace that is free from discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of gender identity. It does so in a manner consistent with the law and with guidance from the Department of Justice."

While OPM's guidance document has changed, there is no change to case law or EEOC policy regarding gender identity discrimination. In *Macy v. Dep't of Justice* (April 20, 2012), the EEOC held that intentional discrimination against a transgender individual because of that person's gender identity is, by definition, discrimination based on sex and therefore violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For more information, refer to the [Guide to Employment Rights, Protections, and Responsibilities from OPM, EEOC, OSC, and MSPB](#).

If you believe that you have been the victim of employment discrimination due to your gender identity, sexual orientation, or for gender non-conformance, take prompt action to preserve your rights. You must contact your Agency's or Department's EEO office or a designated EEO counselor within 45 days of any incident of discrimination, or you will lose your ability to pursue the remedies that may be available to you. It is also important for you to know that you have the right to representation throughout this process, including by an attorney, a colleague, or anyone else you choose. For additional information, you may wish to visit the following EEOC sites:

[Overview Of Federal Sector EEO Complaint Process](#)

[What You Should Know About EEOC & Enforcement Protections for LGBT Workers](#)



2019 Out & Equal Workplace Summit CALL FOR WORKSHOP PROPOSALS

Have research or best practices on LGBTQ+ inclusion to share? Submit a workshop proposal for the 2019 Workplace Summit!

Find a toolkit for proposals [here](#).



Partnership Report

Written by Randi Johnson
Equality USDA Partnership Liaison

Before the first brick was even thrown at the Stonewall Inn, transgender people have been at the forefront of the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. Luminaries such as Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, Laverne Cox, and Janet Mock have changed how we talk about and understand gender identity, all the while waging a particularly difficult fight for the inclusion and acceptance of transgender people. The LGBTQ community has not always prioritized the needs of our trans siblings. Still, transgender people continue to exist, fight, survive, and thrive. The most recent battle has been over service in the military.

The timeline at right walks through recent shifts in policies about transgender service in the military. According to a 2016 by The RAND Corporation, there are an estimated 1,320–6,630 transgender service members in the active component.

On Tuesday, January 22, 2019, the Supreme Court reinstated President Trump's order placing restrictions on transgender persons enlisting and serving in the military by granting a stay of two lower court injunctions that had blocked the president's policy. The justices voted 5-4, reflecting the high court's conservative majority. The decision allows the Pentagon to prevent many transgender persons from joining or, in some circumstances, remaining in the military while the lower court rulings that had blocked the policy are appealed. The justices did not allow the Trump administration to leapfrog the appeals court, as it had requested.

Sources:
Out magazine - <https://www.out.com/transgender>
NPR
<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/22/687368145/supreme-court-revives-trumps-ban-on-transgender-military-personnel-for-now>

TIMELINE: SHIFTING POLICIES ON TRANSGENDER SERVICE IN THE MILITARY



-  **BEFORE 2016**
Before 2016, openly transgender persons are restricted from serving in the military.
-  **JUNE 30, 2016**
The Department of Defense (DOD) adopts a policy permitting transgender people to serve in the military based on a nearly two year DOD review determining that there was no valid reason to exclude qualified personnel from military service because they are transgender. See: "Assessing the Implications of Allowing Transgender Personnel to Serve Openly", The Rand Corporation (2016).
-  **JULY 26, 2017**
President Trump announces that "the United States Government will not accept or allow transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military."
-  **AUGUST 25, 2017**
President Trump issues memorandum instructing Secretary Mattis to draft policies to implement his decision.
-  **AUGUST-DECEMBER 2017**
NCLR, GLAD, ACLU, Lambda Legal, and Equality California all file suits challenging the transgender military ban. Four lower courts (in DC, MD, WA and CA) issue preliminary injunctions in these cases, putting a halt to the ban
-  **JANUARY 1, 2018**
Armed forces begin accepting transgender applicants.
-  **MARCH 23, 2018**
The White House and Department of Defense release documents laying out a new policy regarding military service by those who identify as transgender; specifically stating those with gender dysphoria or those who require or have undergone gender transition are disqualified of from military service.
-  **APRIL - DECEMBER 2018**
A series of appeals dealing with the four lower court rulings, by both Appellants (trans) and defendants (government) as government tries to dissolve the preliminary injunctions banning trans exclusion so the March 23, 2018 policy can be enforced.
-  **DECEMBER 13, 2018**
The Trump administration filed petitions asking the U.S. Supreme Court to lift the injunctions blocking the ban from taking effect if the Court declines to hear the cases this term.
-  **JANUARY 4, 2019**
The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia put on hold one of the four (DC) injunctions banning trans inclusion.
-  **JANUARY 22, 2019**
The Supreme Court grants the Administration's request to allow it to bar most transgender people from serving in the military while cases challenging the policy make their way to the court. Note that at the same time, the Court did not agree to the administration's request to leapfrog the usual judicial process by hearing the case against the ban this term. This allows all four of the cases to continue through the normal course in the federal district courts and courts of appeal. Because two of the four nationwide injunctions blocking the ban were not implicated in the January 22 Supreme Court ruling, the Administration cannot yet enforce the ban.





Save the Date!



August 19-24, 2019

**NRCS Joint Employee Association
Leadership Training
"Strive for the Summit"
Spokane, WA**

Mark your calendars, update your Individual Development Plans, and come join Equality USDA at the 2019 NRCS joint employee association training in Spokane, Washington! The event is open to all USDA employees and retirees.

Five employee associations are partnering to facilitate a week of training and leadership development opportunities. As in years past, the training event is divided into two segments:

August 19-22, there will be training courses for FPAC employees, such as Managing for Excellence and the Working Effectively (with Hispanics, American Indian Alaska Native, Asian American National Hawaiian Pacific Islander) series. Final course offerings to be determined.

August 23-24, the Employee Association Leadership Training will feature tracks focused on leadership, technical proficiency, and diversity & inclusion from an wide range of speakers. Senior leaders from NRCS and FPAC are invited and planning to attend - we hope you'll join us, too!

If you are interested in attending, have questions, or speaker recommendations for LGBTQ+ inclusion at the event, email gabriella.coughlin@or.usda.gov and meghan.walter@or.usda.gov.

**SPONSORING
EMPLOYEE
ASSOCIATIONS:**

- NRCS Asian Pacific Islander Organization (**APIO**)
- NRCS American Indian Alaska Natives Employee organization (**AIANEA**)
- National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (**NOPHNRCSE**)
- National Organization of Professional Women in NRCS Employees (**WiN**)
- Equality USDA





Upcoming Events



**February 25, 2019: Equality USDA monthly member call
4pm ET**

Teleconference access info will be emailed to members

March 18, 2019: Equality USDA Member Call - Let's talk Pride Planning! 4pm ET

June 2019: LGBTQ+ Pride Month & 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots

June 19-21, 2019: Cultivating Change Summit, Des Moines, IA

August 23-24, 2019: NRCS Joint Employee Association Conference, Spokane, WA

October 14-17, 2019: Out & Equal Workplace Summit, Washington, D.C.

Contact Us!



equalityusda@gmail.com



<https://www.facebook.com/EqualityUSDA/>



@equalityUSDA



www.equalityusda.org

Equality USDA Executive Board:

President: Meghan Walter

Vice President: Kimberly Kelley

Communications Director: Jeremy Wood

Secretary: Vacant

Treasurer: Diana Ramos

Partnership Liaison: Randi Johnson

**To join Equality USDA, complete a
membership form [here](#).**

Information and weblinks shared in this newsletter does not constitute endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of the linked websites, or the information, products or services contained therein. All links are provided with the intent of providing educational information in support of Special Emphasis Program initiatives and employee welfare.