

GUIDE FOR BEST PRACTICE IN RECRUITMENT, INCLUSION, AND RETENTION OF WOMEN AND TRANS/NON-BINARY PEOPLE WITH DIVERSE SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES IN LGBTQ+ SPORTS ENVIRONMENTS



From a research collaboration between
PROFEMS Lab and Équipe Montréal

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1.ORIGIN OF THIS GUIDE

Diversity remains unequally represented in many LGBTQ+ sports environments, particularly with regard to women and trans/non-binary people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. These environments, despite upholding values of solidarity, openness, and respect, can still perpetuate dynamics of exclusion or invisibility. Équipe Montréal has observed this issue within its sports teams. Seeking to address this problem, Équipe Montréal approached the Laboratory For The Advancement of Women+ in Sports in Québec at Laval University (PROFEMS Lab) to conduct a consultation with its members to find concrete solutions to this situation.

The research project developed by the researchers at PROFEMS Lab aimed to identify the challenges and best practices within LGBTQ+ sports teams for the inclusion and retention of women and trans/non-binary individuals.

To this end, questionnaires were distributed to 19 Équipe Montréal sports team managers, and interviews were conducted with 16 LGBTQ+ athletes (including four racialized individuals and one indigenous individual). The information gathered made it possible to identify good practices already in place in some teams, and promising solutions proposed by the consulted members.

We hope this guide will inspire and support you in implementing solutions with strong potential impact to make the LGBTQ+ sports environment as inclusive and welcoming as possible for all.

Enjoy!



2. PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide aims to help LGBTQ+ sports organizations create environments where everyone feels welcome, respected, and valued. We want every person, regardless of their identity, to be able to fully participate in and thrive in sports.

Our goals are to:

1. Develop sports environments where the plurality of identities and backgrounds is recognized, valued and integrated at all levels.
2. Strengthen the representation and active participation of women of diverse sexual and gender identities, not only as athletes, but also as coaches, managers, volunteers and community leaders.

In the following pages, you will hear the voices of those who sometimes feel excluded from LGBTQ+ sports.

Their stories reveal:

- What motivates them to join an LGBTQ+ team.
- The obstacles that still exist for women and trans/non-binary people.
- Concrete action plans to build more inclusive and equitable sports environments.

Together, these perspectives will offer you keys and concrete ideas to take action and make sports a true space of inclusion and pride.

3.WHY JOIN AN LGBTQ+ SPORTS TEAM?

Belonging.

To meet people who experience similar realities, and find a welcoming community.

Safety.

To practice a sport in an environment where you feel safe, respected and listened to.

Affirmation.

To be yourself, to affirm your identity, and to see role models who inspire confidence.

Serenity.

To make friends without stress or discomfort related to gender identity or sexual orientation.

Engagement.

To act together in your community and help make sports more open to everyone, especially LGBTQ+ people.

4. WHAT OBSTACLES MAY STILL EXIST FOR WOMEN AND TRANS/NON-BINARY PEOPLE?

Invisibility.

Some environments are still very masculine or dominated by certain groups, which can make others less visible and less comfortable.

Exclusion.

Sexism, inequality, and exclusionary jokes still occur, and hurt the atmosphere.

Insecurity.

Fears related to safety, accessibility, or well-being can discourage participation.

Barriers.

There may be practical problems, such as access to suitable changing rooms or inflexible schedules for some (e.g. parenthood, atypical schedules).

5. CONCRETE ACTION PLANS

Making sports more inclusive means allowing everyone to feel welcome, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation! This section offers suggestions for action to improve the experience of women with diverse sexual and gender identities in the LGBTQ+ sports environment:



5.1 INCLUSIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Participants shared that team spirit (the “vibe”) and the way women and those with diverse gender identities are included are reflected in the language used in written communications (website, social media).

Overly binary or masculine language can alienate some people and hinder the recruitment of individuals who are not cisgender men.

Therefore, using inclusive language is strongly encouraged. However, it was noted that this approach could prove to be “too much” for the motivation of certain people.

To facilitate inclusive writing in sports in Quebec, the organization Égale-Action has produced a free [guide available here in french.](#)



5.2 DIVERSE VISUAL REPRESENTATION

In communications, it would be good practice to increase the visual representation of female role models and gender diversity. According to Nadège, feeling represented helps attract women: “It takes women to attract other women. And you know, that’s why ‘my friend’, ... knowing that we’re here now, she’s ready to do it, she’s ready to come.”

Furthermore, highlighting visuals featuring indigenous, black and people of colour (BIPOC) would be a positive practice.

5.3 RESPECT FOR PRONOUNS

It is recommended to pay specific attention to not misgendering individuals, through the correct use of pronouns and grammatical agreements: “For me, being called ‘girls’ is condescending, especially by old men of 60. I’m like: ‘no, what makes you think I’m a girl?’” (Fred, non-binary queer person).

For example, asking athletes for their pronouns at the beginning of a practice session helps reinforce their correct use and/or allows for a collective refresher when needed. Fred suggests printing a sheet for the first team meeting where athletes can write their names and preferred pronouns. Like many others, Katya supports asking for pronouns as a standard practice and emphasizes that it is “the foundation” of a respectful relationship.

5.4 CLOTHING FLEXIBILITY

Adopting flexibility in clothing is encouraged so that people can choose clothes that suit their gender expression and make them comfortable: “Knowing what kind of outfit you want ... You know, you don’t have to wear masculine or feminine clothes all the time. ... You know, it’s not just men and women out there. ... Fitted or loose-fitting clothes; you know, there are lots of possibilities. ... For me, it’s really important that you can feel comfortable in your clothes” (Flavie, non-binary, lesbian). If necessary, train people in key positions on these issues, as this creates a safe environment for everyone.



5.5 WELLNESS MANAGER(S)

Establishing a designated leader or committee dedicated to supporting the well-being of team/league members can be a promising approach to addressing conflict or discomfort with compassion. This committee should be independent of management. For example, one participant shares their experience with such a committee in the queer softball league they co-founded: “We have a committee separate from the organizing committee, called the CARE Committee. People can contact them if there’s a problem. These can be small interpersonal issues, up to more serious matters [...]” (Maxim, a non-binary queer person).

For Fred, a non-binary person, it plays out differently: “This year, we also decided that I’m the go-to person for inclusion issues within the league. If there’s ever any transphobia, racism, or sexism, and people want to talk to a trusted individual, I’m that person.” However, Fred cautions that inclusive initiatives and efforts to represent women, trans, and non-binary people often stem from someone who takes them to heart – but the departure of that dedicated person can lead to the cessation of these initiatives. Fred also points out that people who are not cisgender men tend to be less visible in the public sphere.

5.6 CREATION OF TEAMS, EVENTS OR RESERVED TIME SLOTS

Some people, like Fred, don’t find mixed-gender play so appealing: “... maybe in other leagues, but not in mine. I think it might be a way to build solidarity between different identities ... queer or collective. But in the league I’m in, I honestly don’t see any advantage to doing it mixed. I don’t. I don’t think there’s any advantage.”

Creating teams, events, or time slots reserved for specific needs can help make women and gender-diverse people more comfortable (because for some people, too many cis men is “not the best,” as Fred would say). These specific approaches may be family-friendly time slots during the daytime and on weekends (or the availability of babysitting or inclusion of children in the activity), as named by Julianne, the creation of exclusively queer or BIPOC-only teams or slots (without allies).

5.7 FEEDBACK

Another possible solution is a feedback survey, as suggested by Maxim. Indeed, administering a questionnaire during or at the end of the season allows for improvements to practices (e.g., in terms of costs, geographical accessibility, scheduling, etc.), and for making changes that enhance everyone's comfort. This can be done anonymously using online tools.

5.8 BECOMING AWARE OF ONE'S BIASES AND SELF-EDUCATING ON THE SUBJECT

Acknowledging our own biases and educating everyone about fairness in sports are cited as essential steps in creating environments free from discrimination and exclusion: "Right now, I have a lot of fellow badminton players in the league. We're talking about very privileged [laughs] people who... [interrupts the thought]. The only privilege they don't have is not being straight, but otherwise, they pretty much tick all the boxes. And that's it. I get the impression they tell themselves they're not sexist because they're gay, but..." (Fred). Tulio shares: "It's not just about working on the side of women, but on the side of men, too. That's also important; if we don't have education and all from the outset, it's like women become a mystery and all. It doesn't help."

¹ This statement is controversial; people like Marcelo (a trans man, gay) disagree: "... we're excluding, discriminating against people because they're not LGBT, which I find a bit strange. I understand the principle. I understand the idea of a safe space and all. But it can't be done without simultaneously doing what we don't want done to us [exclusion]. There's a certain dissonance in that way." For her part, Claudie has created "Ally Day" time slots.



6. CONCLUSION

One of the key messages of this consultation is very clear: For things to change and for the environment to become welcoming and inclusive, those in leadership positions must be actively engaged in implementing inclusive practices. It is essential to be intentional and genuinely committed to creating change. LGBTQ+ sports environments have the potential to become models of open spaces for all, inspiring the entire Quebec sports community.

Équipe Montréal is one of the largest LGBTQ+ sports and recreation organizations in Canada, established in 1991. Their mission is to create an inclusive environment for all LGBTQ+ athletes in Montreal, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Our organization also aims to create opportunities for LGBTQ+ athletes to connect, such as an annual Gala, to support one another, celebrate their athletic and recreational achievements, and participate in inclusive events like the Gay Games.

Website: <https://equipe-montreal.org/>

The mission of the **Laboratoire sur la progression des femmes+ dans le sport au Québec (Lab PROFEMS)** is to advance equality between women and men in the Quebec sports system through research focused on technological and social innovation. Research activities will therefore be conducted in collaboration with stakeholders in the field to foster the development of concrete strategies with a strong potential impact on the advancement of women in sport, both at the level of participation and the level of decision making.

Site Web : <https://lab-profems.fse.ulaval.ca/>

