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*USSA is a student-operated organization where the leadership and action agenda are determined by student delegates from member campuses around the country. USSA and its membership address a wide range of policy issues, including student financial aid, child care, affirmative action, recruitment and retention of students of color, racial profiling, bias-related violence, and campus safety.*

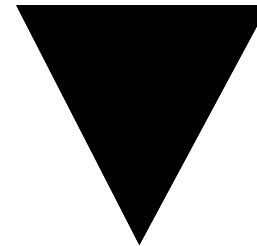
The USSA Foundation complements the work of USSA by producing informational materials; conducting weekend-long grassroots organizing trainings; and providing technical assistance on a wide range of issues. USSA Foundation sponsors the Student of Color Campus Diversity Project, the Student Labor Action Project, and our GrassRoots Organizing Weekend and Electoral Action Training.

UNITED STATES STUDENT ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION  
1211 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, NE  
SUITE 406  
WASHINGTON, DC 20036  
(P) 202.640.6570  
(F) 202.223.4005  
WWW.USSTUDENTS.ORG



# Transgender Inclusion Guide

*A primer by and for  
college students  
and student  
organizations*



National Queer Student Coalition  
National Queer Student of Color Caucus

United States Student Association  
Foundation



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The “Terms and Definitions” section is based on materials produced by Gender Queer of Lane County, Oregon.

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Waltham, MA 02254-0229

Phone: 781-899-2212

Website: [www.ifge.org](http://www.ifge.org)

The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) provides information, support and advocacy for intersex people.

ISNA

979 Golf Course Drive #282

Rohnert Park, CA 94928

Website: [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org)

The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) provides advocacy, education and information for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.

NYAC

1638 R Street, NW, Suite 300

Washington, DC 20009

Phone: 202.319.7596

Website: [www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org)

PFLAG T-NET, the transgender network of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides support and information for parents, friends, and allies of transpeople.

PFLAG

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 400

Washington, DC 20036

T-NET Phone: 216.691.8180

Website: [www.pflag.org/TNET.tnet.0.html](http://www.pflag.org/TNET.tnet.0.html)

The Renaissance Transgender Association provides support, education and social activities for crossdressers and others. Chapters and affiliates throughout the US.

Renaissance Transgender Association

987 Old Eagle Rd., Suite 719

Wayne, PA 19087

Phone: 610.975.9119

Website: [www.ren.org](http://www.ren.org)

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project's mission is to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine their gender identities and expressions, regardless of income, and without facing harassment or violence.

Sylvia Rivera Law Project  
322 8th Avenue  
New York, NY 10001  
Phone: 212.377.8550  
Website: [www.srlp.org](http://www.srlp.org)

Trans-Academics.org is a website with growing resources.

Website: [www.trans-academics.org](http://www.trans-academics.org)

The Transgender Law and Policy Institute (TLPI) works on law and policy initiatives to advance transgender equality.

TLPI  
328 Flatbush Avenue, Box 312  
Brooklyn, NY 11238  
Website: [www.transgenderlaw.org](http://www.transgenderlaw.org)

FTM International (FTMI) provides support and information for female-to-male transsexuals world-wide. Also publishes the FTM International Newsletter.

FTM International  
328 Flatbush Avenue, Box 312  
Brooklyn, NY 11238  
Website: [www.ftmi.org](http://www.ftmi.org)

Gender Education and Advocacy (GEA) provides gender education and health care advocacy. GEA operates the Gender Advocacy Internet News Service.

Website: [www.gender.org](http://www.gender.org)

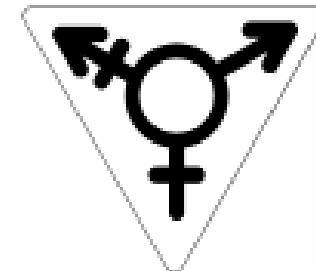
The International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE) provides telephone information, referrals, books, and a quarterly magazine Transgender.

IFGE  
P.O. Box 540229

## Introduction

This manual was written to provide resources for students, student governments, and student organizations who are allies or want to be allies to transgender students on college campuses. It is imperative that student organizations and student governments take proactive steps to be trans-inclusive in every aspect of their operations. It is also important that trans students be developed as leaders and have the opportunity to add their voices to the student movement. It is our hope that this manual will address some of these issues. This information is not intended to provide a full-fledged course in trans theory, but to provide a starting point for student organizers interested in making their organizations more trans-inclusive.

This manual came to be as a result of collaboration by the United States Student Association (USSA) Foundation, the National Queer Student Coalition, and the National Queer Student of Color Caucus, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Student Empowerment Project.



## Terms & Definitions

The usage of these terms varies across communities, and new ways of talking about the perceptions and experiences of transpeople appear every day as more and more transpeople are coming out and talking about their lives. Keep in mind that labels and terms like these are sometimes inadequate, and may or may not represent or apply to everyone in the trans community.

### Gender

A person's expression and/or presentation of some combination of masculine and/or feminine characteristics.

### Gender Identity

A person's personal view of their own gender. A person's gender identity may or may not conform to the conventional expectations for their birth sex.

### Gender Expression

The external presentation or appearance of a person's gender. (e.g. dress, mannerisms, hair style, speech, etc.). A person's gender expression may differ from their gender identity.

### Perceived Gender

What another person assumes one's gender is in a given interaction. Some people's gender expressions can be misinterpreted or confused and perceived as different from the person's identity.

### Transgender

A term used to describe people whose gender identity is not adequately described by the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is also used in some communities to describe all gender-variant people.

### Transsexual

A person who does not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Many, but not all, transsexuals have or wish to alter their bodies through the use of hormones or surgery. Transsexuals can be male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM).

### Transition

The process of changing one's presentation and/or expression to align with one's gender identity. Some of these changes include name change, pronoun change, hormonal modifications, or surgery. Transition varies greatly across the transgender community, both what people choose to change and when certain changes feel most comfortable.

## Resources

The United States Student Association (USSA) Foundation provides materials, trainings, and technical assistance on a wide variety of issues affecting queer students in higher education.

United States Student Association Foundation  
1211 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 406  
Washington, DC 20010  
Email: [ussa@usstudents.org](mailto:ussa@usstudents.org)  
Phone: 202.640.6570  
Website: [www.usstudents.org](http://www.usstudents.org)

The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) is the only transgender organization with a staffed office in Washington, D.C. and they do a great deal to educate communities and fight for transgender rights.

National Center for Transgender Equality  
1325 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202.639.6332  
Website: [www.nctequality.org](http://www.nctequality.org)

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Transgender Civil Rights Project focuses on a variety of trans issues, particularly legislation affecting transgender people both on the state and federal levels.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force  
1325 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202.903.0112  
Website: [www.nglhf.org](http://www.nglhf.org)

that the trans community on your campus will be in a position to do so. They may not be organized enough, it may not be safe for them to come out, or they simply may not have the numbers. Transfolk should be empowered to be at the forefront when possible. However, when the alternative is doing nothing, it is often best to cautiously move forward trans-inclusive policies and programs.

There is really no easy way to address this question, other than to do everything you can to ensure that trans voices are heard in your campaigns. Your campus may not have a large, vocal trans community, but there are probably at least a few folks who would be willing to advise your campaigns. Also, it's likely that your city, if not your college, has some kind of transgender advocacy and support group, or some other organization (a local PFLAG chapter, for example) with trans membership. These can all be good resources. Just be sensitive to the fact that many transgender people may not be willing to come out publicly, but they can still advise your campaign and provide support and input.

The important thing is to remember that your organizing will be most effective if trans folks are involved. Direct action organizing is all about empowering people to make change for themselves, even when this is difficult. Empowering, effective organizing will involve trans voices and energy as well as that of proactive, dedicated allies.



## Intersex

An individual whose biological birth does not correspond with conventional expectations of male/female anatomy or genetics. Some intersexuals consider themselves transgender and some do not. The older term hermaphrodite is considered by many to be offensive.

## Legal sex

The sex assigned on one's legal documents (license, birth certificate, Social Security Card, etc.). For transpeople these documents can be at odds due to differing laws regarding transitioning from state to state (e.g. a birth certificate that says female but a drivers license that says male)

## Birth sex

The sex an individual is labeled at birth determined by a combination of genetic and physical characteristics. Biological/birth sex is usually determined at birth by a "best-fit" strategy, dependent on the examiner's bias.

## Sexual Orientation

The gender or genders of the people one chooses to form romantic/sexual attachments to. Gender identity and sexual orientation are very different. Transpeople can be gay, lesbian, straight, queer, bisexual, or pansexual.

## Two-spirit

A term used by Native American LGBT people to empower themselves. The term comes from specific traditional and cultural gender identities historically used in various Native American nations.

## Crossdressing

Adopting the dress of another sex. The older term transvestite is considered by many to be offensive. Crossdressers differ from transsexuals in that they do not necessarily wish to change their sex.

## Drag

The adoption of clothing and roles of another sex for the purpose of play, entertainment, or eroticism. Originally used to refer to "drag queens" (Dressed as A Girl), there are also a number of "drag kings."

## Genderqueer

Someone whose gender expression is consciously not consistent with conventional standards for male and female behavior.

## Gendervariant

Someone whose combination of legal sex, birth sex, gender identity, gender expression, and perceived gender does not line up according to

societal expectations. Often used in replacement of “genderqueer,” this term can be more comfortable for those not comfortable reclaiming the word “queer.”



### Gender Dualism

The belief that there are only two genders.

### Standards of Care

A set of guidelines formulated by the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association to determine when and how transpeople could obtain sex reassignment, involving a period of psychotherapy, “the Real Life Test,” and , if desired, surgery. Only within the past year have The Standards of Care been rewritten with advice and counsel from actual

transpersons.

### Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

The process of taking hormones to achieve the secondary sex characteristics of the desired sex. “T” is a common short-hand for the male hormone Testosterone.

### Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

Surgery for the purpose of having a body more consistent with one’s gender identity. SRS can get quite costly, and not everyone who desires SRS has equal access.

conversations. Bringing in speakers is also fun and effective, but keep in mind that good trans speakers are often fewer and farther between than usual. When writing your budget, account for the possibility of higher travel costs.

It is essential to avoid tokenizing transgender issues (or your transgender membership!). A few trans-specific events per year are great, but it is equally important to make sure that all of your regular programming is trans-inclusive. Consider issues such as gendered space and language in your events. You may also want to provide space or resources specifically for the trans community, such as a discussion or support group.

If you are a queer-centered group, remember that it is impossible to universally apply the experiences of LGB people onto transfolk. While LGB people and trans people have many similar experiences, we face different oppressions. Many LGB groups attempt trans inclusion by adding “T” to the name of their organization or event. While this is important, it is not enough. The event must also be structured and administered in a way that is pertinent to trans people, or have a specific and well-integrated trans component.

### Direct Action Campaigns

The possibilities here are endless. There are so many things your college could be doing (and most likely isn’t) to make sure that trans students have the best educational experience they possibly can. A strategic and well-executed direct action campaign can make a world of difference for trans students. If you are stumped for issues, you might consider trying to get your campus to add gender identity and expression language to its nondiscrimination policy, or to develop policies that would make transfolk safe and comfortable in spaces like restrooms, locker rooms, and dormitories. Does your student health insurance cover hormone therapy? Are your health/counseling center staff educated about and sensitive to trans issues. Any of these issues would make a good campaign.

If you are not trans, you must be cautious when organizing around trans issues. When organizers work on issues that do not directly affect them, the line between being a proactive ally and disempowering people can become very thin. Queer groups are especially prone to this mistake, because the differences between LGB and trans experiences are often overlooked. Don’t fall prey to the assumption that non-trans queer folk completely understand or can advocate for trans people.

It is always better to let a community speak for itself, but we cannot take it for granted

## Organizing

Obviously, there are many reasons why trans students feel uncomfortable in student unions and student governments. Other chapters in this manual begin to address day-to-day issues like respectful language and staff education. This section addresses specific programming and campaigns. As with any under-represented group, the best way to increase trans participation and leadership in your organization is to do work on and around issues that the gender-variant community is invested in.

### Policy

Adopting an official policy of transgender inclusion and support is both the most and the least important step your organization can take. It is the most important because it sends an official message about your organizational values and because it will outlast your administration and set a precedent for your organization's future. It is the least important because a policy that is well-meaning, but poorly articulated or not followed, will do nothing to increase your effectiveness in addressing trans issues. Write a policy that's specific enough to speak to all the needs of your organization and then follow it. You may want to build-in an annual (or more often) review of your policy so it can change as your organization does.

Keep in mind that a good policy should inform what your group does, but can't stand by itself. This policy will take the time and commitment of everyone in your organization. For example, if you have a men's or women's group, a policy where people self-select which group they attend is a good place to start. However, it will take the active participation of everyone involved to create a space where transfolk feel comfortable talking about their experiences, and where others feel comfortable responding to those experiences in a sympathetic way.

### Programming

One of the best ways for your student group/government to address the needs of transgender/genderqueer students is programming that specifically addresses their issues. This is especially important if your group is an LGBT-focused organization, as trans issues tend to get either ignored or tokenized in such groups. Trans-focused programming is important not only because it helps members of the trans community feel more comfortable in your space, but also because it can start conversations about transgender issues, inclusion, and experiences among your broader constituency. "Trans 101"-type workshops and panel presentations are excellent ways to start these

## Day-to-Day Operations

This section addresses how to create a trans-friendly atmosphere in the physical space of your organization. Whether you have your own office or just use a meeting space, it is important that it be accessible to transgender students. Here are some suggestions on how to create a welcoming atmosphere.

### Queer Groups

#### Watch your language.

People tend, for the sake of brevity, to refer to LGBT organizations with terms like "the gay office." Ask yourself whether this language is true to the mission of the organization and whether it represents the entire membership. Consider the same question when choosing titles for events, programs, discussion groups, etc.



#### Have protocols for addressing anti-trans behavior.

In order for your office to be a safe space, you need a system to address situations that cause transfolk to feel threatened. You don't need to kick anybody out, but occasionally people need to be educated about how their behavior makes people feel. Do this consistently and promptly. Also, be prepared to address hostile and/or transphobic behavior on the spot, even if there is a trans person present. It can be tiring for transfolk to always be expected to confront inappropriate behavior.

#### Be sensitive.

When addressing concerns about anti-trans language or behavior, make sure that the person who has brought up this concern is comfortable with the action taken. If behavior needs to be addressed immediately, this might require a quick judgment call. Mistakes are not the end of the world, just make sure to check in with the concerned individual afterwards.

#### Be proactive.

It may be helpful to have conversations at your group meetings on topics like how to be a good trans ally and how to make your office a trans-inclusive space. Dedicating meeting time to this issue will demonstrate that it is important to you. It will also bring

your broader constituency into the conversation and cause them to feel invested in it.

### **Learn good ally behavior and model it consistently.**

As a leader, it is your responsibility to be a role model and demonstrate your dedication to being an ally. Further discussion of good ally behavior is in the Staff and Self Education section of this manual.

### **Be consistent in your support of trans people and trans issues.**

Dedicate the same amount of time and resources to trans issues that you would to an issue affecting any other part of the LGBT community. Bring up the “trans angle” of every issue that is discussed. For example, a discussion of same-sex marriage could be furthered by discussing how the issue would (or would not) affect trans communities, or a discussion of racism within the queer community could include the differences and similarities between how racism affects transgender people and how it affects the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities.

### **Don’t tokenize your trans membership.**

Having a few transfolk who regularly attend meetings or events is great, but it doesn’t mean your work is done or that your space is completely trans-inclusive. Additionally, tokenism is frustrating and it is unlikely that your trans membership will stay involved for very long.

## **Other Groups**

Most of the guidelines for queer groups are applicable to non-queer student unions or student governments, so read the above list and adapt it to your own purposes. There are, however, a few things that groups which are not specifically focused on queer issues should be especially aware of. Pay particular attention to learning and modeling good ally behavior. You also may need to devote more time to educating your constituency about trans issues, as these issues are seldom even discussed outside of queer groups.

## **Strategies to Facilitate Staff Development on Trans Issues**

It is important whether you are in charge of staff, or are students trying to keep resource center or campus staff accountable, that a standard be established for personnel to always pursue further understanding and knowledge on issues. Staff development is critical for any office or organization to evolve to serve its clientele or constituency.

During staff retreats, trainings, or meetings there should be a discussion as to how transgender issues are being addressed whether it is from the perspective of a student government, a queer resource center, or a queer organization. Other possibilities for facilitating staff development as allies is to create a budget for bringing in speakers or trainers to better equip your staff with the skills and knowledge to address and organize around transgender oppression. If it is possible, attempt to form a transgender student focus group where transgender students are able to comment, critique, and advise student government, queer organizations and university offices as how to better service their community.

There is a final aspect to staff development that must be explored. It is critical, if your organization or office is serious in creating a safe environment for transgender students and staff, that a clear and sensitive grievance procedure be established where students and staff alike feel as if they have the ability to address grave concerns. This may seem a bit drastic, however having such a procedure in place allows for a quick response to remedy and mediate the situation.

Remember, the goal is to eliminate transphobia and discrimination. This may mean, in the interest of ensuring the wellbeing of transgender staff and students you must not be afraid to dismiss an individual who is not cooperative and clearly not willing to embrace a philosophy that is inclusive of transgender people.

## Educating Your Staff/Leadership To Become Allies

There are some simple procedures that people who are looking to hire staff for their Student Government Association, queer resource center, or student organization (queer or otherwise) can follow that would ensure a greater chance of hiring individuals who are knowledgeable and sensitive to transgender issues. The suggestions are as follows:

### Hire transgender identified people.

An obvious and usually most overlooked option is to recruit and retain transgender students and staff to your campus. Create a strategic plan in order to outreach, and advertise that you encourage transgender people to apply. Also, consider an affirmative action plan and policy regarding transgender people to better organize and plan your efforts.

### Hire people with clear experience working on transgender issues.

Make it a priority and criteria to hire an individual that has definite and extensive experience working on issues surrounding transgender identity. Make sure to ask for references or samples of materials created when verifying an individual's skill.

### Create scenarios for candidates to answer that gauge their competence on transgender issues.

Presenting problem scenarios to candidates can offer a unique opportunity to assess an individual's response to various situations. Also, it is a good tactic in evaluating a person's immediate reaction to certain situations.

### Make sure that job descriptions are clear in requiring work on transgender issues, recruitment, and retention.

Adding this as a component to a job description is a strategic way of institutionalizing change beyond the time you will be on your campus.



## Multiple Identities

Often people do not recognize the multiple dimensions an individual's identity may encompass. We often see ourselves in our totality, but rarely afford another person the same consideration. This behavior is intensified when we enter into an identity-specific space. So, if we are in a queer identified space most individuals would only interact with a person on that basis, not acknowledging someone's race, ethnicity, ability, immigrant status, class position, etc. A realization must occur in that all of our identities inform and influence how we will experience each one of them. The fact that one transgender person is white and another is Latina/o will change how each experiences their gender identity. It is the multiplicity of our beings that prevent us from being able to identify "the transgender experience," because that experience differs depending on whether a person is a person of color or white, working-class or rich, a person with a disability or able-bodied, documented and undocumented immigrant or citizen, etc.

### A Comment on the "Oppression Olympics"

Although it is imperative to acknowledge all of the various identities we encompass as individuals; it is equally important that we do not allow this to devolve into a competition of who is oppressed more, otherwise known as "Oppression Olympics." Such a competition is never beneficial and often undermines any work and organizing that you are involved with. Acknowledging someone's holistic identity does not mean oppressions must or can be ranked. It just means recognizing that people experience oppression differently. For example, two transgender people are physically assaulted. However, one is white and another is Native American. Whereas the transgender person who is white was assaulted presumably only for being transgender, the assault on the Native American transgender individual could have been just as much about their race as it was about their gender identity. Therefore, to solve the physical violence experienced by these two transgender people one would have to address both transphobia and racism.

### Multiple Identities at Work

If your organization, whether it is a student government, organization, or center, is attempting to address issues that transgender people face, then to be effective you must also address the problems that working-class individuals, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, etc. experience because transgender people fall into all of these categories. Also, acknowledging all identities allows for easier coalition building and a greater understanding of what solutions are needed on our campuses to solve issues involving oppression.

## Staff and Self Education

### Becoming An Ally Yourself

Before anyone begins to decide to self-educate or be educated on someone else's experience and oppression there are a number of realizations that need to take place. If these understandings are agreed to and put into practice it may ensure a better process for becoming an ally, but does not guarantee that outcome. It should be noted that if these levels of awareness are not actualized through our behavior and only agreed to in theory, then it is highly unlikely that one can become a competent and effective ally. These six realizations are as follows:

#### **Transgender people experience daily *overt* and *covert* oppressions.**

The oppression of transgender people manifests itself not only during one-on-one interactions, but also in how our laws are written, organizations function, who is educated and how they are educated, etc.

#### **Non-transgender identified individuals experience privilege, and because of that have a vested interest and bias to perpetuate transphobia.**

Even if we identify with some other oppressed community we are afforded the privilege moving through society without the systematic discrimination transgender people face constantly. We must acknowledge that we are socialized to reject a transgender experience and world-view; otherwise our subconscious might undermine our efforts.

#### **Do not question the validity of a transgender person's experience.**

Often times privileged individuals question the extent of someone's oppression in whether it actually occurs or is only perceived. Recognize that it is a learned reaction to reject the notion of transphobia and attempt to maintain your privilege.

#### **An ally can never become an expert on transgender experiences.**

While we can learn a lot, there is a difference between understanding issues and experiencing being trans. Unlearning one's years of socialization to oppress transgender people is a lifelong endeavor that is never complete, so it is important not to let yourself think that the work is done.

#### **Transgender experience is varied and different.**

Transgender people have multiple facets to their identity, just like any other community, that produces a diverse array of experiences. Talking to one transgender person, or even ten, or reading a book by a transgender author does not inform a person to the full breadth of transgender experience.

### **An ally is responsible for seeking out information.**

An ally should not wait for a transgender person to approach them for the sake of educating them. Allies have the responsibility to seek out information and the truth; do not say you do not know where to begin. Information is out there, it just takes a little effort to find it.

### Strategies to Facilitate Personal Education

There are a number of means by which an individual may approach the process of becoming an ally to transgender people. The most important strategy is to tailor your education to your needs. It is very possible to jump into all of the information that is available and feel overwhelmed. Any person who wants to become an ally to a transgender person must be very honest with themselves about what issues they do not understand or just reject out of hand.

Maybe you do not understand either gender, the difference between being transgender, transsexual, or a cross-dresser, legal problems, policy issues or any of these issues; the point is that you must identify what information is necessary immediately. Once you understand your immediate needs, you may begin a more directed search for the information you require. After the immediate necessity is met, then you may begin on a different issue or topic. In order to help begin the process of helping people find information, there is a resource list at the end of this manual that will be useful in this endeavor.

While it is useful to search out information in books, pamphlets, magazines, internet, etc., doing research alone does not address the powerful learning experience a potential ally may have in interacting with transgender people. Although learning directly from transgender individuals poses a unique opportunity, one should not search out transgender identified people for the mere fact of wanting to ask questions. Such behavior would be offensive and could be seen as an exotification of someone's experience. Whenever a transgender person shares their story and experience freely and willingly, that is a gift and should be treated as such. If your campus has invited a transgender individual to speak or present a program, this could provide a means by which much of your book and intellectual research about issues can become real at an emotional level. If these programmatic opportunities do arise, it is important to prioritize them if you are serious in becoming an ally. Lastly, when you are talking to a transgender friend or are attending a transgender program it is important to listen. So often, those people who are allies or are becoming allies often believe they have done enough by just attending an event or befriending someone who is transgender, without truly listening to their story and experience.