

Be the
Source

Real Experiences.
Better Conversations.
Stronger Workplaces.

“

As a Two Spirit Cree-Anishinaabe person, I believe our ancestors left us a path. A path rooted in love, balance, respect, and responsibility. If we have the courage to walk that path together, we can heal together. If we heal together, we can rise together. And if we rise together, there is no limit to what we can become as a people.

— Anonymous federal employee

Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ Experiences in the Workplace

Understanding Two-Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ experiences helps counter assumptions and recognize the diversity of Indigenous identities, communities, and lived experiences. While the term Two-Spirit is contemporary, it reflects some Indigenous ways of understanding identity and community that existed long before colonization and continue to evolve today.

Some people may face barriers related to multiple aspects of their identity, including their Indigenous identity and their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression. This makes it especially important to approach each person with respect and without assumptions.

Building this understanding helps create workplaces where people can contribute fully without feeling pressure to explain, justify, or hide important parts of who they are.

*Feathers from the Two-Spirit flag designed by Patrick Hunter.



What to know



Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ identities are diverse:

Understandings of gender and sexuality vary across Nations and may be connected to culture, spirituality, land, language, and community. Individuals may use Nation-specific terms, other LGBTQIA+ identities, or no label at all.



Two-Spirit is an Indigenous-specific identity:

The term is used by some Indigenous Peoples and should not be adopted by non-Indigenous people.



Two-Spirit has a distinct cultural meaning: It is not interchangeable with terms like gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or non-binary. For many, it reflects interconnected aspects of culture, spirituality, community, gender, and sexuality.



Each experience is unique: No single person can represent all Indigenous, Two-Spirit, or LGBTQIA+ experiences. Perspectives vary across Nations, communities, and individuals.

From our community's history

In 1990, Indigenous leaders came together to adopt the term Two-Spirit as a shared way for some Indigenous people to describe their identities. This term reflects something much older, as many Nations have long held their own teachings and understandings of gender and sexuality. Today, in Canada, "2S" is often placed at the beginning of the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym to recognize and honour Two-Spirit people and Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality.

Everyday actions that make a difference



Respect self-definition: Use the language a person uses for themselves and avoid redefining or simplifying it.



Avoid assumptions and generalizations: Do not assume someone identifies as Two-Spirit because they are Indigenous or expect them to explain their identity or speak on behalf of Indigenous or 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.



Be mindful of context: Two-Spirit identities are connected to some Indigenous cultures and experiences. Approach conversations with respect, openness, and humility, recognizing that reconciliation can be reflected in how we listen, learn, and engage with one another every day.



Seek Indigenous-led perspectives: Build your understanding of Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences through Indigenous-led or supported organizations, resources, and learning opportunities.

Be an Ally

Inform yourself and learn by seeking evidence-informed sources and listening to people sharing their lived experiences. You can also counter misinformation with accurate information, and if you witness harassment or exclusion, make use of appropriate workplace support mechanisms to raise concerns.

Need support?

If you have questions, concerns, or need support, reach out to the person or workplace resource you feel most appropriate for your situation, such as your manager, the ombuds office, union representative (if applicable), your organization's Employee Assistance Program or Pride Network.

Learn more :

[Be the Source](#): Explore the collection to get the facts, and support informed workplace conversations.

[Guide for Two-Spirit, Transgender, Non-Binary, and Gender-Diverse Employees in the Federal Public Service](#)

[Manager's Guide to Supporting Two-Spirit, Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender-Diverse Employees in the Federal Public Service](#)

[2SLGBTQIA+ - Canada.ca](#)

[Understanding the employment experiences of Two Spirit, Trans, and nonbinary people in Canada - Egale Canada](#)