From signals to belonging: a practical pathway to LGBTQ+ inclusion

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Contents

Notes:

- "EY Oceania" refers to the EY member firms in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, each of which is a separate legal entity: Ernst & Young, Australia (EY Australia), Ernst & Young, New Zealand (EY New Zealand), Ernst & Young, Fiji (EY Fiji), Ernst & Young, Papua New Guinea (EY Papua New Guinea). EY Oceania does not refer to a separate entity; it is a name used for the group of EY member firms in these geographies that make up a region of the EY global network of member firms.

- In this report, we refer to ourselves as "EY Oceania", "we", "us" or "our". EY refers collectively to the global organisation of the member firms of EYG.

- All figures are from the EY Allyship Matters survey unless specified otherwise.

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Foreword

Leaders play a critical role in shaping an environment where LGBTQ+ people feel respected, supported and able to thrive.

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At EY Oceania, allyship is something we demonstrate through our actions. My own commitment has grown over many years, shaped by the conversations and interactions I've had with colleagues, the insights I've gathered over time, and the moments that made clear how much inclusion matters in the day-to-day experience of work. What has stayed with me is simple: when people feel safe and respected and have a sense of belonging, they can be themselves — and they do their best work.

This report sets out a practical pathway any organisation can adopt: **Signals → Engagement → Safety → Belonging**. It reflects what our people have told us works, and where they see the greatest opportunities for leaders to make a meaningful difference.

Public advocacy may shift over time, but the expectations of our people — especially younger cohorts — continue to rise. When allyship is credible, consistent and felt, inclusion becomes part of how we lead, how we work, and how we build trust with one another.

Our role as leaders is to create environments where every person can contribute with confidence. The steps in this report are designed to help us do exactly that.

David Larocca (he/him)

EY Regional Managing Partner and CEO, Oceania

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I've been with the EY organisation for many years and have always found it to be the workplace where I have felt most able to be myself, and that is largely down to the role played by LGBTQ+ allies.

At the EY organisation, we talk a lot about building a better working world. For people from the LGBTQ+ community, that starts with being able to bring their whole selves to work without fear. Allyship is how we make that possible. It's listening with curiosity, challenging bias when we see it, and standing beside our colleagues — not just when it's easy, but when it matters most.

This guide is here to help you do that. It offers practical steps and connects you to the LGBTQ+ community, so you're never alone on this journey. Because allyship isn't about perfection; it's about progress. Every conversation, every action, every moment counts.

My ask is simple: choose one action today and make it a habit. Signal your support, start a conversation, invite a voice that's missing, correct a small thing others might overlook. Those moments add up. They build the safety, trust, and unleash creativity our clients notice — and our people feel.

Cat Haines (she/her)

Unity Sponsoring Partner
Partner, Consulting, EY Australia

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Executive summary

At the EY organisation, inclusiveness for everyone is a global commitment that shapes our culture, business and impact.

With more than **400,000** people across **150** countries and territories – and nearly **9,000** colleagues in Oceania – diversity of thought, background and experience is both our reality and our strength. Inclusiveness enables our teams to innovate, deliver better results and create exceptional experiences for our people, clients and communities.

In Australia and New Zealand, the LGBTQ+ community comprises **4.5-4.9%[1]** of adults and is growing rapidly. Generation Z are three times more likely than Generation X to identify as LGBTQ+ and are projected to make up **~30%** of the labour force by 2030[2]. Employers therefore need intentional strategies to attract, engage and retain LGBTQ+ talent – as an organisational culture and business imperative.

Recent global studies, such as the EY Belonging Barometer and the EY US LGBTQ+ Workplace Barometer (2024)[2], show that LGBTQ+ inclusion is a decisive factor for people when choosing where to work. Creating a workplace where people feel safe, supported and free to be themselves is not only the right thing to do; it is essential for resilience and performance of the business. Effective allyship goes beyond symbolic gestures. It requires authentic engagement, consistent communication, and a willingness to address barriers and complexities. When leaders and employees embrace allyship, they foster psychological safety, belonging and authenticity for all.

This report shares what we have learnt in EY Oceania and offers a practical pathway that other organisations can adopt:
Signals → Engagement → Safety → Belonging.
The pathway translates into immediate senior leader behaviours.

By sharing our learnings, we aim to support other organisations on their journey towards **inclusiveness for everyone** – because it is about all of us, together.

Approach

EY Oceania collected employee data on LGBTQ+ allyship through multiple avenues, including a broad-based survey and targeted interviews. Quantitative data was gathered via the Allyship Matters survey, which received over 500 responses across multiple EY offices in Australia and New Zealand. Qualitative insights were drawn from open-text responses, AI agent interviews, and a working group of individuals with lived experiences. Responses were weighted to reflect the overall population, ensuring a representative view.

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The pathway model

Signals → Engagement → Safety → Belonging

1 Signals

2 Engagement

3 Safety

4 Belonging

	Signals	Engagement	Safety	Belonging
What it is	Opt-in, visible cues: pronouns, lanyards, inclusive signage	Leader presence and practical support: attendance at events, storytelling, promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion activities	Clear reporting routes, protections against retaliation, and bystander practices	Everyday inclusion routines: inclusive meetings, equitable staffing, fair access to development, regular progress updates
Why it matters	Reduces uncertainty and sets welcoming norms without mandating personal expression	Builds credibility, turns intent into felt impact, boosts engagement and productivity	Reduces fear and creates trust in processes	Sustains psychological safety and inclusion; improves retention and advancement confidence
Success metric	Percentage of employees who understand why signals are used; reduction in "uncertain how to be an ally" responses	Leader attendance at events and training; mentoring hours; engagement uplift where active executive allies are known	Awareness of reporting options; intervention confidence (by cohort); resolution timeliness	Equitable career and performance outcomes; closing LGBTQ+ inclusion gaps in engagement surveys

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Step 1

Signals: optional, normalised, explained

As public LGBTQ+ advocacy retreats and the number of active allies[5] declines, workplace anchored visibility becomes more salient.

What to do

- Use **voluntary** symbols (lanyards, pronouns, profile borders, inclusive signage) with a clear workplace-specific explanation as to **why** they're used and how they support colleagues.

36% Of respondents always or frequently display pronouns in their email signatures, but only **23%** consider pronouns effective[3] as an allyship action.

- Make a range of signal options available in the workplace: lanyards, MS Teams and Zoom backgrounds, pronouns in signature blocks, digital assets, and merchandise.

- Keep use of signals **opt-in**; avoid mandating personal expression. Qualitative feedback from the Allyship Matters survey indicates that symbols are seen as helpful when voluntary and contextualised.

Why it works

- Signals **reduce uncertainty** – the most cited barrier to effective allyship – by clarifying intent and norms.

34% Of respondents are unsure how to show allyship effectively. This is particularly significant among women and passive allies.

Providing clear ways and different options for signalling allyship helps to remove the barriers for employees who wish to show visible support but do not have the time or confidence.

While symbolic gestures are visible, they are not always perceived as meaningful unless reinforced by authentic **engagement.**

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Step 2

Engagement: attendance, stories, visibility

Qualitative feedback from the Allyship Matters survey suggests that when senior leaders attend events, interact meaningfully, and ask how they can support, it reinforces that LGBTQ+ inclusion is a genuine priority. Conversely, symbolic gestures without interpersonal connection, are often perceived as performative or disconnected from real action.

What to do

- Prioritise **leader presence** at LGBTQ+ sessions; invite **team storytelling** and sponsor **relevant career activities** (e.g., mentoring, project opportunities).

  The Allyship Matters survey showed that attendance at LGBTQ+ events and training is widely regarded as the most effective form of allyship. However, only **14%** of respondents report frequently seeing leaders at LGBTQ+ inclusion events.

- Encourage allies to **amplify** LGBTQ+ employee resource group's activities and promote inclusion through routine processes and practices. This may include applying **equity** to assignments, projects and career advancement opportunities, as well as adopting inclusive travel policies.

Why it works

- Presence and engagement address **time** and **credibility** barriers: seeing leaders **show up** and **share** stories signals permission and reduces fear.

- Pair engagement with **practical support** (e.g., mentoring, skills building) to move beyond identity-led visibility.

  Where **active allies** are known, Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey data shows[4]:

32% Increase in perceived productivity of LGBTQ+ respondents; **18%** for non-LGBTQ+ respondents.

51% Increase in engagement levels of LGBTQ+ respondents; **24%** for non-LGBTQ+ respondents.

Engagement invites voices to speak up and builds confidence to contribute. Turning that confidence into trust means **safety** and clear next steps if something goes wrong.

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Step 3

Safety: confidence to call out and reporting clarity

Pairing confident leader intervention with clear, non-retaliatory reporting routes and regular bystander practice strengthens psychological safety for LGBTQ+ colleagues and makes safety visible and actionable.

What to do

- Make **reporting mechanisms clear and safe**. Add a simple 'How to report concerns' link or QR code in team communication channels; restate non-retaliation at the start of key meetings; offer private check-ins and anonymous options.

77% Of LGBTQ+ respondents of the AWEI survey reported experiencing discrimination that they knew was directly attributed to being LGBTQ+.[4]

While most LGBTQ+ colleagues in EY Oceania did not report challenges, a small but important minority did. Those challenges were typically around heteronormative culture, isolation, fear of disclosure and microaggressions. This reinforces the need for clear, protected reporting pathways.

- Activate confident **leaders** to **lift team safety**. Leaders are more confident addressing incidents (**72%** vs. **41%** juniors); require them to intervene in the moment, log and escalate via the formal channel, and **communicate outcomes.**

- **Teach and normalise bystander behaviours**: explore call-it-out and call-in scripts; set leader expectations to resolve concerns safely and fairly, including following formal and informal processes, and making sure communication is clear.

47% Of senior leaders acknowledged they need more education and training about LGBTQ+ issues and allyship to become a better LGBTQ+ ally.

Why it works

- Safety reduces **fear** – the most acute barrier when addressing microaggressions, stereotyping or harassment.

- Transparent processes and **follow-through** build trust and shift allies from passive to active.

Safety lowers fear so people can speak up. Clear processes resolve incidents when they arise; inclusive routines ensure those moments do not define the culture.

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Step 4

Belonging: day-to-day inclusion

Belonging grows when signals are voluntary and backed by routine practice – from how meetings are run to how work is allocated and progress is shared.

What to do

- **Embed everyday inclusion routines through** inclusive meeting norms, such as **sharing** accessible agendas in advance, **inviting** optional pronouns and avoiding heteronormative assumptions. Teams can also try inserting a five-minute 'All in Moment (AIM)' to bring in quieter voices and **check for missing perspectives.**

- Pair LGBTQ+ employees with senior rank allies for career development mentoring. Track mentoring uptake and outcomes and make sponsorship expectations explicit.

- Share **regular updates** on actions taken and outcomes achieved in LGBTQ+ inclusion space, so it feels visible and continuous.

62% Of respondents agree that senior leaders in their team support LGBTQ+ inclusion; yet only **26%** agree that leaders communicate LGBTQ+ inclusion progress and outcomes – signalling a clear opportunity for routine updates that reinforce belonging.

- **Recognise** allyship contributions and make participation count (e.g., key performance indicators and goal plans), without mandating personal expression through visible symbols like LGBTQ+ pins, lanyards or profile borders. These should remain optional, so employees can choose how they show support.

Why it works

- Belonging and psychological safety strongly correlate to retention and career advancement; when people feel psychologically safe and included, they stay longer and progress further.

89%

Of respondents felt included and supported by the people they interact with each day. While the survey didn't find a significant difference between responses of LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ respondents, findings showed active (92%) and passive (95%) allies are more likely to feel included compared to non-allies (79%) and LGBTQ+ rejectors (68%).[5]

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What senior leaders can do now

The Allyship Matters survey asked employees what senior leaders should prioritise while building an LGBTQ+-inclusive workplace. The top actions are:

- Provide practical guidance on implementing inclusive practices in the workplace.

  Pathway link: `Signals` → `Engagement` - issue short "how we do allyship here" guides; include bystander scripts and reporting steps.

- Attend and publicly endorse LGBTQ+ events.

  Pathway link: `Engagement` - set attendance goals for executive teams; where possible, pair visibility with authentic engagement in Q&A and lived-experience stories.

- Attend bystander intervention workshop or training with your team.

  Pathway link: `Engagement` → `Safety` – learn together, then practise together; ensure that every team member knows who intervenes, how to log and escalate an incident, and who closes the loop.

- Enable diverse representation, including LGBTQ+ people in leadership roles - visible role models matter.

  Pathway link: `Belonging` – consider using diverse slates for promotions and succession; normalise career conversations and sponsorship; publish LGBTQ+ role model stories; monitor promotion outcomes.

While some of the actions listed above are relatively easy to embed into day-to-day activities, others require consistent and ongoing focus to achieve tangible change.

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Conclusion

Signals set the tone, engagement builds credibility, safety creates trust and belonging sustains performance.

The evidence across EY Oceania shows that allyship is most effective when **voluntary signals** are paired with **leader presence, clear processes** for addressing harm and **everyday routines** that make inclusion tangible. Cohort differences (e.g., in how symbols are used or felt; in who feels most included), alongside the decline in **active** allies, underscore the need to **activate allyship** with practical pathways and to **communicate progress** consistently.

For other organisations, the **Signals → Engagement → Safety → Belonging** pathway is a replicable model. Adopting this pathway will help allies be **credible, practical and felt** – ensuring inclusion becomes a **lived value** that strengthens innovation, resilience and productivity. We invite every leader to adapt and improve on this model, and to contribute to **inclusiveness for everyone** across workplaces.

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References and notes

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) and New Zealand Census (2023)

[2] EY US LGBTQ+ Workplace Barometer (2024)

[3] As per the Allyship Matters survey. In the Allyship Matters survey, effectiveness was defined as the ability of action to create psychological safety, promote a sense of belonging, and encourage individuals to feel safe in being their authentic selves. The frequency of use was assessed by respondents who in the past 12 months have "always" or "frequently" used the allyship symbol or practiced the allyship action.

[4] Pride in Diversity (2025). Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs.

[5] In the Allyship Matters survey respondents were grouped into allies and non-allies based on the following definitions:

- Active ally were respondents who self-reported as someone who has actively supported and advocated for LGBTQ+ group in the past 12 months

- Passive ally were respondents who self-reported as someone who has supported LGBTQ+ inclusion but have not done so overtly or actively in the past 12 months

- Non-ally were respondents who self-reported as someone who has not actively or passively supported LGBTQ+ group in the past 12 months

- LGBTQ+ rejector were respondents who self-reported as someone who does not support LGBTQ+ inclusion due to their personal beliefs or values.

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Contributors

Alex Wilson
EY Regional Inclusiveness Leader, Oceania
alex.wilson@au.ey.com

Victoria Solilova
EY Regional Inclusiveness Strategy and Implementation Lead, Oceania
victoria.solilova@au.ey.com

Kasmira Geering
EY Regional Inclusiveness Senior Advisor, Oceania
kasmira.geering@au.ey.com

Cat Haines
Partner, Consulting, EY Australia
cat.haines@au.ey.com

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Alissa Baker
Senior Manager, EY-Parthenon, EY Australia
alissa.baker@parthenon.ey.com

Joseph Kelly
Director, Consulting, EY Australia
joseph.kelly@au.ey.com

Sarah Grant
Manager, Consulting, EY Studio+, EY Australia
sarah.grant1@au.ey.com

Maeve Rees Murphy
Assistant Director, Talent, EY Australia
maeve.rees.murphy@au.ey.com

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