

White Paper

Designing for Equity: An FFRDC's Journey to All-Gender Bathrooms

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Lincoln Laboratory
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
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Massachusetts Institute of Technology
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**Designing for Equity:
An FFRDC's Journey to All-Gender Bathrooms**

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ABSTRACT



All-Gender Bathroom at MIT Lincoln Laboratory (image credit: Niki Fandel).

This white paper aims to share knowledge and experience about the process of building All-Gender Bathrooms (AGBs) at MIT Lincoln Laboratory (MIT LL), including the cultural change management process, community-based planning and design process, and design standards for All-Gender Bathrooms. MIT LL is a Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC*) applying advanced technologies in support of national security. Located in Lexington, Massachusetts on Hanscom Air Force Base property, MIT LL reports to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, MIT Campus) Office of the President. MIT LL is managed by MIT on behalf of the Department of Defense.

In 2017, an employee reached out to the Lincoln Laboratory Out and Proud Employee Network (LLOPEN), the Laboratory's LGBTQ+* Employee Resource Group (ERG), with a work-related issue. The employee expressed they were struggling to find a bathroom they felt comfortable using that was designated

for their gender identity*. The employee stated they would often walk through several buildings before reaching a single-occupancy bathroom. In all cases, these single-occupancy bathrooms were constructed to comply with the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA*), a law that requires buildings or facilities that were designed, built, or altered with federal dollars or leased by federal agencies after 12 August 1968 be accessible. Since MIT LL is located on federal land, our buildings must comply with the ABA. If your facilities are not on federal property, however, your facilities may be required to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA*), a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on disability. The MIT LL employee would frequently find the single-occupancy bathroom occupied, which required them to wait in a public corridor until it was vacated. This mundane task of using the bathroom at work, which most of us take for granted, was causing them stress, anxiety, and loss of valuable work time.

Prompted by this employee's struggle and the struggles of others sharing similar experiences with bathroom facilities, LLOPEN began a multiyear journey to provide All-Gender Bathrooms across existing campus buildings. As building codes and best practices around All-Gender Bathrooms had not been defined at MIT LL, LLOPEN had to start at the very beginning by asking questions such as: What is an All-Gender Bathroom? Which plumbing fixtures and accessories are required? How many AGBs should we plan for? Do we have to apply for a building code equivalency* or variance*? What other approvals will we need to renovate existing bathrooms? How much will this cost? How do we plan for the cultural change required in a traditional workplace setting?

Over the last five years, LLOPEN has partnered with Laboratory leadership to implement better bathroom access at MIT LL. We have standardized the practice of labeling all single-occupant restrooms as All-Gender Bathrooms. Additionally, two major bathroom renovations were executed, converting existing multi-stall gendered bathrooms with new multi-stall All-Gender Bathrooms. Looking forward, two new Laboratory buildings are being designed and constructed that will contain single-occupant and multi-stall All-Gender Bathrooms.

While the process was far from easy—we often found ourselves wishing that someone had already studied AGB construction at FFRCs and written a white paper on the process—we discovered a solution that was not only highly successful, but also community driven. This paper aims to share information with other organizations, which includes the process MIT LL went through, best practices and standards we have set as an organization, and the successes we've had working toward a more equitable workplace for all employees.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i
Why All-Gender Bathrooms Should Be an Integral Part of an Organization	1
Cultural and Organizational Change Management	1
Engage Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). If You Don't Have ERGs, Assess Your Readiness to Start One.	2
Start Simple	2
Starting the Design Process	3
Community-Based Design	5
Designing the Prototype	6
Constructing the MIT LL Main Campus AGB	8
Programming AGBs in New Buildings	9
Future Projects.....	11
Lessons Learned	11
Conclusion	12
Glossary	13

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WHY ALL-GENDER BATHROOMS SHOULD BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF AN ORGANIZATION

When considering the need for All-Gender Bathrooms, people generally assume the population that will benefit most are those who identify as transgender* and gender nonconforming*. However, these restrooms may benefit many other demographics, including parents with differently-gendered children and people with disabilities who, due to injury or other circumstances, may permanently or temporarily require the use of a more private bathroom space or the accompaniment of an attendant of a different gender.

ADA legislation mandates that public bathrooms be accessible; they must contain specific features, such as larger stalls or lower sinks, to accommodate those whose needs aren't met by non-compliant bathrooms, such as people who use wheelchairs. The ADA clearly addresses physical disability, but does not consider people who have less visible disabilities, such as Paruresis. Paruresis, often called "shy bladder" syndrome, is when someone has trouble urinating when other people are around. Depending on how serious the paruresis is, some people are not able to toilet without some or total privacy. In some ways, paruresis is like urinary retention, where you "cannot go." The key difference is that shy bladder syndrome is not caused by a physical blockage. Shy bladder can change a person's quality of life in many ways, causing problems with everyday social issues. While there is no way to know how many people have problems toileting in public, surveys in the last few decades show that between 1 and 25 of every 100 Americans could have shy bladder.

This leads to an important topic: Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Belonging, a more recent concept for Lincoln Laboratory, suggests employers shouldn't just focus on the number of diverse people in their organization or behaviors that make people feel included. In an [article](#) for the Washington Post, Christianne Garofalo, the diversity and inclusion recruiting leader at Heidrick & Struggles, said, "Diversity is a fact, inclusion is a behavior, but belonging is the emotional outcome that people want in their organization." Organizations need to focus on whether workers sense that they can be themselves and feel like part of a community. In making the case for an All-Gender Bathroom, simply ask these questions: Is there a place for everyone to toilet? Do we have groups of people who must plan their workdays around strategic opportunities to access restrooms that meet their needs? If the answer is no to the first question or yes to the second question, those impacted will both suffer due to the physical challenges of not having an accessible bathroom and due to a lost sense of "belonging." The presence or creation of onsite AGBs may have a positive impact on your organization's employee retention.

CULTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Convincing your organization to embark on a suite of multi-stall All-Gender Bathrooms may initially prove difficult, especially if your intent is to retrofit existing multi-stall bathrooms. *Multi-stall* refers to two

or more stalls in the same room with a shared area for sinks, as opposed to *single-use* bathrooms, which can only accommodate one user at a time. These types of bathrooms typically require a complete gut-renovation. The positive impact of constructing multi-stall All-Gender Bathrooms may not be immediately obvious to your organization's leadership, because leadership may identify as gender-conforming and fully-abled. In other words, they may not be aware of or have overlooked thinking about these facility access issues. However, there are several steps you can engage in at the micro level to start the change management process within your organization.

ENGAGE EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGS). IF YOU DON'T HAVE ERGS, ASSESS YOUR READINESS TO START ONE.

LLOPEN is an ERG sponsored by Lincoln Laboratory's Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Office, which supports the LGBTQ+ identified staff and their allies*. ERGs are employee-led groups whose mission is to enhance the professional growth, development, and engagement of employees and to support an organization's mission, goals, and values. ERGs also function as change agents and D&I advocates strengthening talent pipelines and connection to the organizational bottom line.

There are nine ERGs at MIT LL, including LLOPEN. Does your organization have ERGs? If not, talk to your D&I Office about starting one. The lifecycle of an ERG commences with creating a simple mailing list for interested employees, then it becomes an affinity group, before ultimately becoming a formal ERG. Being part of an ERG community is extremely helpful because they offer a core support network and direct access to the leadership structure of your organization through the D&I Office and the executive sponsors.

An ERG will typically have an executive sponsor—a senior leader who will mentor, advocate for, and learn from the ERG. Executive sponsors help bridge the gap, drive the group's efficacy, and connect its mission to the organization's goals. If your organization has other ERGs, you can garner even greater support by connecting them and their executive sponsors around a common theme as you build support for All-Gender Bathrooms.

START SIMPLE

The first step MIT LL took to begin addressing our need for All-Gender Bathroom facilities was to convert all single-occupant bathrooms. These were typically designed and labeled as wheelchair-accessible toilet rooms. This required no construction or permitting, just an update to existing signage and perhaps some additional toilet room accessories. During this process, we made sure each of our existing single-

occupant bathrooms had menstrual product dispensers and disposal receptacles. The last change was to ensure the door handles had occupancy indicators on them. To make these changes, LLOPEN simply had to contact our Facilities Services Department to place a work order—a standard process enabling the Facilities Services Department to execute small-scale installations and maintenance actions. No additional approvals were required.

STARTING THE DESIGN PROCESS

While converting all our single-occupant bathrooms to All-Gender Bathrooms was an incredible first step, we knew that was not the end of our journey. There were still not enough AGB locations, they were not well-dispersed around the campus, and they did not solve the problem of having to wait in a public corridor to use them. We knew we needed multi-stall AGBs—but what would these spaces look like?

Before embarking on designs, we started by reviewing precedent studies*. Since we could not find information on any other FFRDCs or National Labs that have built multi-stall All-Gender Bathrooms, this meant investigating non-office-based workplaces first. We found that many restaurants in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville, Massachusetts have converted their bathrooms to multi-stall All-Gender Bathrooms. MIT Campus had started to pilot some multi-stall All-Gender Bathrooms as well. Members of LLOPEN visited a variety of these workplaces for examples of strategies that seemed to be successful, and also those which were not as successful. LLOPEN found that beneficial design strategies included clear and inclusively-worded signage and hard wall toilet rooms. Aspects of AGBs we found problematic for an office setting included visible urinals in the shared area of the bathroom and confusing signage, such as inconsistent imagery or lack of imagery, leaving a user unsure if the bathroom was designed to support the needs of their gender identity*.

MIT LL reached out to MIT Campus, which had begun a process to convert some of their gendered bathrooms to AGBs. We met with the MIT Campus Capital Projects Office, toured several of their new spaces, and talked about the reasons they made certain choices, the feedback from staff and students, and the permitting process.

MIT Campus Capital Projects Office had submitted a variance through the Board of State Examiners of Plumbers and Gas Fitters to convert four existing multi-fixture bathrooms to AGBs as a pilot project. The Board granted approval for a one-year trial period. After the trial period, MIT Campus could apply to make the arrangement permanent. The stipulation was that MIT could not reduce the number of fixtures required by code. We will detail how these code requirements affected MIT LL main campus's own fixture count and design solutions in the section of this white paper titled Constructing the MIT LL Main Campus AGB.

The MIT Campus pilot AGB projects focused mainly on making signage changes at bathroom entrances to denote the bathrooms as all-gender, and adding signage to existing stalls to identify the type of fixture inside (toilet or urinal). In some cases, stall partitions were added around urinals, and existing partitions were extended to the floor and ceiling for added privacy. In other cases, the partitions were not changed at all. Ultimately, MIT Campus was able to get the projects approved with a permanent exemption.

Since the building code for bathrooms is gendered, MIT LL needed to investigate how to permit All-Gender Bathrooms through our Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ*). An AHJ is responsible for reviewing and approving design documents and construction for compliance with applicable codes and standards. MIT LL is located on federal property, and as such, Hanscom Air Force Base Civil Engineering is the Authority Having Jurisdiction. This means that rather than following International and Local Building Codes, MIT LL is bound to comply with the Unified Facilities Criteria (UFCs), which is the Air Force's amendment to national building codes. Armed with a process, we reached out to their office for approval to execute these projects. They gave us their full support, provided that all federal building codes and fixture counts were met. This was a huge win for LLOPEN.

After receiving initial approval from MIT LL's AHJ, the project became far more challenging. LLOPEN needed to come up with standards for the design of the bathrooms. We knew that given the cultural dynamics of a work environment and the natural conditions of hierarchy that exist in all professional organizations, we needed to be extremely deliberate with a design response. This next phase is where we turned to community-based design and took to the hallways of MIT LL to engage people across the organization regarding what they needed to feel comfortable in a degendered bathroom.

COMMUNITY-BASED DESIGN

Equipped with support from our AHJ and shareable examples of multi-stall AGBs, we were ready to start having conversations about design with the Lincoln Laboratory community. We began our conversations with people from other employee resource groups, including members of LED (Lincoln Employees with Disabilities), LLWN (Lincoln Laboratory Women’s Network), and LLOPEN. We held both targeted outreach meetings as well as cross-functional meetings. By providing both types of engagement opportunities, we created safer spaces for employees to highlight their concerns or provide suggestions, allowed those with diverse identities to be involved in outcomes, and informed employees about the concerns and ideas of others. LLOPEN began hosting discussions to introduce the idea of AGBs, sharing precedents and lessons learned from MIT Campus projects and gathering employee feedback. Through these conversations, we began to refine the standards of these spaces. Specifically, we learned that:

1. Building toilet rooms with full-height hard walls and full doors for maximum privacy was a major priority. Many people commented on the discomfort of sharing a bathroom space in which sounds, odors, or even seeing another person’s feet could make them feel embarrassed or uncomfortable to use existing toilet rooms. When discussing this topic, office hierarchy and politics were brought up frequently. For example, what if a colleague overheard the unwrapping of a menstrual care product and then attributed any disagreement they had with the product’s user to their fluctuating hormone levels? Due to the construction of full height walls, code required the use of individual ventilation at each toilet room, adding to the level of privacy achieved.
2. Placing menstrual care dispensers in every toilet stall was important for users’ privacy, rather than having just one dispenser installed in the sink area for everyone to use. Many Laboratory personnel did not feel comfortable accessing menstrual care dispensers in front of their colleagues. For example, some employees who were in the process of transitioning* or had not shared their gender identity with colleagues needed access to menstrual care products, but would not have felt comfortable accessing products in a public space.
3. Mirrors inside toilet stalls rooms were important. Many Laboratory personnel shared discomfort with performing clothing adjustments in the public sink area, preferring to do that in a more private space.



Single-use stall with mirror and menstrual product dispenser.

4. Occupancy indicator locks on stall doors were necessary to reduce toilet users' anxiety that somebody might jostle the door handle or try to enter. Occupancy indicators can help reduce these uncomfortable moments.
5. Clear and welcoming signage outside the bathroom entrance would help people know they were entering an inclusive space.
6. Posting a map to our internal webpage was helpful because it allowed people to identify where they wanted to toilet. Creating the map has also been useful in helping us address "AGB deserts" and plan for future AGB locations.



Stall door with occupancy indicator.



Inclusive signage outside bathroom entrance.

DESIGNING THE PROTOTYPE

Like many institutions, MIT LL has satellite locations. Our ideal goal was to identify a bathroom at our main campus complex that needed to be upgraded and had the appropriate spatial requirements to convert to an AGB. Unfortunately, a space was not identified at the main complex first, but at a satellite building site. At the satellite building site, existing gendered bathrooms had never been renovated, did not meet current code, and would have to be completely gutted and replumbed in order to renovate. This presented a prime opportunity to fully renovate a space that already needed it, test our design requirements, and develop a prototype that could be used in future locations at the main campus complex. Through community feedback, this prototype could help us tweak future designs if needed and provide data to help justify additional AGBs in the main complex. The bathroom renovation is pictured below:



Bathroom before renovation.



Bathroom after renovation.

Through the design process, we ensured that community feedback was incorporated. We held many informal design reviews and developed several iterations of the design. We eventually landed on a design for a bathroom that we were confident most people would feel comfortable using. We say “most” because, while we strove to meet everyone’s needs, we know there are people who will never feel comfortable using a shared space. Even as we were given approval to move forward into construction, we hoped that sharing sinks would not be such a big culture change for employees that the pilot would fail. Thankfully, it did not.

The pilot was a huge success, in fact. This is evidenced through community feedback. The building manager wrote:

“The all-gender bathroom has been a great improvement for the Autonomous Systems Development Facility and all its users. The update from two binary bathrooms to one non-binary

bathroom was an efficient use of space and resources. The all-gender bathroom renovation has enabled a better bathroom experience for all.”

Another facility occupant wrote:

“The AGB design contains thoughtful elements, both functional and aesthetic. I was pleasantly surprised by the oversized gray tiles and trendy hardware used. I appreciate the gap-free full doors that completely enclose roomy stalls. This is the nicest bathroom I have seen so far at MIT LL.”

While some employees were excited to use the new bathroom straight away, others took longer to test it out. Ultimately, the community responded positively to the design standards we implemented, leading LLOPEN to seek a second AGB location, this time more central to the main MIT LL community.

CONSTRUCTING THE MIT LL MAIN CAMPUS AGB

As MIT LL continued reviewing existing buildings and planning for multi-stall AGBs, we discovered there were two additional benefits to adding AGB facilities. The first benefit was that installing AGBs helped us to solve existing code issues in buildings designed prior to modern-day building codes. The second benefit was that AGBs are more spatially efficient than separate, gendered bathrooms.

One of the benefits of an ERG is that membership can pull from a wide cross section of an organization—and with that comes a variety of skill sets. For example, LLOPEN had an architect and engineer as part of their committee, and were able to lean into their expertise to help identify smart opportunities for AGB locations. Thanks to their knowledge, LLOPEN discovered that one of MIT LL’s existing facilities did not meet modern plumbing codes. Ultimately, we partnered with our Facility Services Department to validate the code issue and proposed design solution by hiring a design consulting firm. It was this partnership that secured the funding to implement this AGB, and has continued to be a valuable partnership as we plan for future projects.

Like many institutions with large campuses, MIT LL has grown over time. One of our existing 1960s-era buildings houses our Engineering Division. This building was designed without restrooms in the basement. While all floors were originally constructed with a central core that had gendered male and female restrooms, the first-floor women’s room space was converted to a café. In the 1960s, the majority of MIT LL’s engineers and technicians were male, and the technicians had unionized. In order to keep the technicians’ union schedules, it was determined that having a café close to their labs was necessary to support their work.

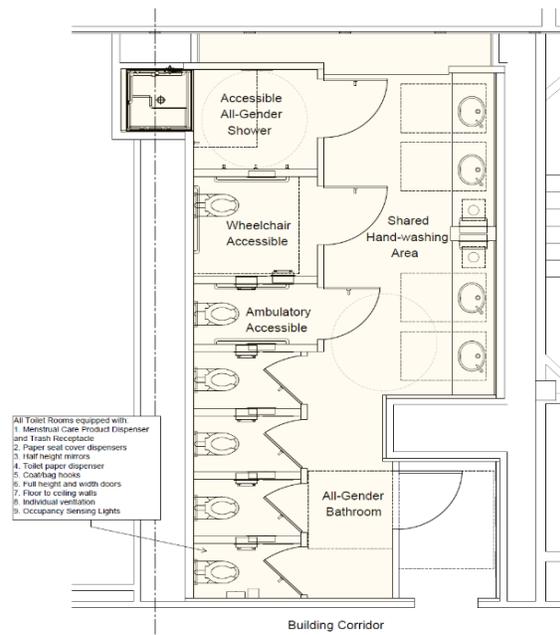
Over time, the gender dynamic changed as the Laboratory and STEM field in general built a more diverse workforce. Meanwhile, as the MIT LL community grew larger and space grew scarcer, additional laboratory space and workspaces were constructed in the basement. As codes changed, this building became code non-conforming for two reasons. First, there was not a sufficient number of women’s toilet fixtures. Second, with the addition of occupied spaces in the basement, the OSHA and code travel distances became an issue. This was because women and gender non-conforming employees had to traverse more than one floor to access a bathroom. The table below shows the building code violations and how the proposed AGB would fix them.

Description	Gender	Water Closet (toilet)	Urinal	Sink
International Plumbing Code Requirements	Men	2	1	2
	Women	3	0	2
Existing Bathroom Facility Fixture Count	Men	5	2	6
	Women	0	0	0
Solution	All-Gender	7	0	4

Notes:

1. Existing men's bathroom fixture count exceeded code requirements
2. No women's bathroom within code determined travel distance: **Code Violation**
3. All-Gender Bathrooms resolved all code violations

In 2019 and 2020, MIT LL designed and constructed one multi-stall AGB to replace the existing men’s room on the first floor of the Engineering Division building. This new all-gender facility remedied both code issues by correcting the number of toilet fixtures and lavatories available to employees identifying as women, as well as resolving the travel distance requirement. As there was already an existing shower in the room, it was modified to have full-height walls and a lock so anyone could use the shower. Ultimately, the renovation of this bathroom remedied both code violations mentioned above that stemmed from the modifications that were made to the facility over the years, prior to today’s plumbing code requirements.



AGB renovation remedies code violations.

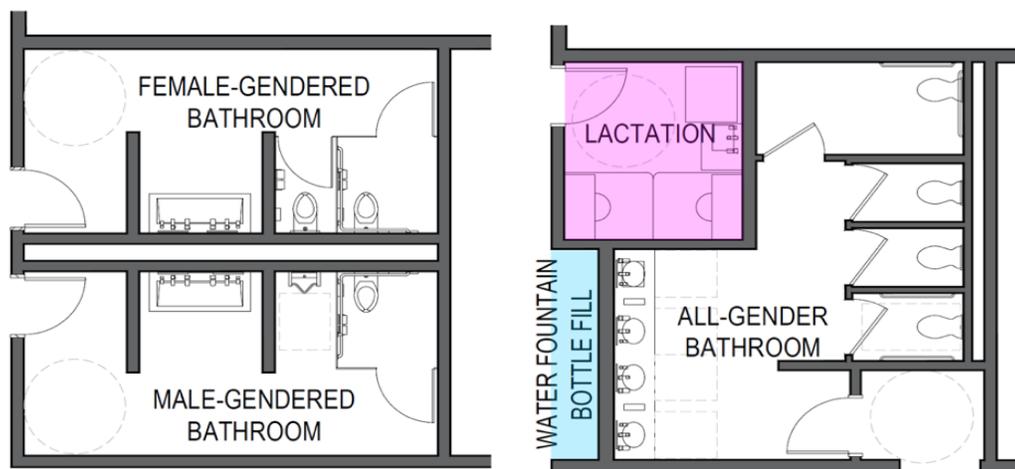
*Reference Glossary for definition

PROGRAMMING AGBS IN NEW BUILDINGS

Programming AGBs into future construction is far easier and more cost effective than retrofitting them into existing facilities. Additional costs like demolition and disposal of existing materials, rerouting mechanical and plumbing systems, and increased costs of labor due to the complexity of the construction process in existing facilities make retrofitting existing bathrooms more expensive and complex.

As is the case with many long-established institutions, MIT LL has experienced significant growth since its founding, and is in the process of constructing new facilities to replace our aging buildings. These new buildings will not only set a modern precedent for how we plan for and design our offices and laboratories, but the construction process will raise questions about how buildings play a part in creating, attracting, and retaining diverse talent. How do we design for equity?

While addressing the need for multi-stall AGBs in these new facilities, we discovered a secondary benefit of AGB spaces: All-Gender Bathrooms are significantly more spatially efficient than separate, gendered bathrooms. During the early design process for one of our new buildings, MIT LL identified a centralized bathroom core as an ideal location for one AGB to replace two gendered bathroom facilities. While the hard walls of the toilet stalls in an AGB are thicker than standard toilet partitions, the removal of the double-sided plumbing chase between the gendered bathrooms creates a more efficient layout. Additionally, having a single accessible entry point as opposed to two separate entry points gives back space to other facilities that are important to an equitable and healthy workplace. In this case, MIT LL was able to reclaim 95 square feet for lactation rooms and 25 square feet for a water station on both floors while maintaining IPC and ABA code compliance.



The gendered bathroom floorplan (left) is a less economical use of space. The all-gender bathroom floorplan (right) makes room for construction of a lactation room and water bottle refill station.

FUTURE PROJECTS

The LLOPEN and MIT LL journey to creating All-Gender Bathrooms is not over yet. We are working to have AGBs in every building. LLOPEN continues to work with our Facilities Services Department to plan and execute one new AGB per year in our existing facilities. This has to be closely coordinated with Master Planning efforts, as MIT LL has plans to replace existing aging buildings with new modern buildings. It is important to consider future building planning as we work to modernize existing facilities.

All-Gender Bathrooms are easy to justify and plan for in new buildings if you engage in building design early. LLOPEN works closely with our Capital Projects Office to ensure All-Gender Bathrooms are programmed into new buildings early in the design process.

LESSONS LEARNED

Of course, we have learned many things along the way. We would like to share these lessons with anyone interested in All-Gender Bathroom design and construction.

Building a coalition across our organization at every level has ensured the success of All-Gender Bathrooms at MIT LL. Without the initiative of employees, the support of executive leadership, the Diversity and Inclusion Office, and technical division and departmental support, the All-Gender Bathrooms project would never have made it off the ground. The initiative was truly an organization-wide effort.

There is so much power in changing vocabulary to inclusive language. For example, “feminine care products” should be called “menstrual care products,” and “mothers’ rooms” should be called “lactation rooms.” As we think about the gendering of our language, it’s important to think about who we may be excluding as we speak about the spaces we design. It is a learning process that we must be open to.

While we worked diligently to ensure the design of spaces will make everyone feel comfortable, we have to accept that not everyone feels comfortable using AGBs, no matter how inclusive the design. That’s okay. Not all bathrooms will be converted to All-Gender Bathrooms. The goal is to provide options to toilet comfortably, so that never again will people find stress in something as mundane as a bio break.

There is so much power in community-based design. It is easy for architects and design professionals to draw accessible plans when they are informed by the experience and knowledge shared by a community. We learned so much from people who had no experience or training in design because ultimately, everyday users of spaces are experts in how to identify and address accessibility gaps. Take, for example, a design change mentioned earlier in this white paper. We decided to put menstrual care products into each toilet stall instead of by the public sinks. Initially, we had overlooked the discomfort a trans person may

experience if they had to access menstrual care products in front of colleagues they had not yet come out to. Hearing diverse perspectives from the people using the space helped us make AGBs more accessible. This example highlighted to us the importance of cross-functional meetings. Those meetings provided the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives and identify overlooked design issues.

CONCLUSION

Your organization probably has a Diversity and Inclusion Office, but does the organization provide restrooms that are available to everyone, where each and every person feels a sense of belonging? All-Gender Bathrooms are not a “nice to have” design feature, but are essential in creating an environment that supports all employees. They not only provide basic needs to transgender and gender nonconforming people, but also benefit the lives and wellbeing of other marginalized groups. Besides the human impact of these spaces, All-Gender Bathrooms are more space efficient than gendered bathrooms, while still adhering to local building codes. The building space not used by gendered bathrooms can then be used for other equity-building programs such as lactation, prayer, or wellness rooms.

While the change management process can be slow and cumbersome in both large and small organizations, change is indeed possible, as demonstrated by MIT LL. If you have a voice, use it to advocate for those who do not. Practice your active bystander skills and be a moral rebel! Coalesce with people across all organizational levels and with a variety of skill sets. Take the time to help educate those around you of the importance of inclusive spaces so that we all can enjoy safe and welcoming workplaces.

GLOSSARY

ABA: Architectural Barriers Act - The ABA stands as the first measure by Congress to ensure access to the built environment for people with disabilities. The law requires that buildings or facilities that were designed, built, or altered with federal dollars or leased by federal agencies after 12 August 1968 be accessible. Facilities that predate the law generally are not covered, but alterations or leases undertaken after the law took effect can trigger coverage. The law covers a wide range of facilities, including U.S. post offices, Veterans Affairs medical facilities, national parks, Social Security Administration offices, federal office buildings, U.S. courthouses, and federal prisons. It also applies to non-government facilities that have received federal funding, such as certain schools, public housing, and mass transit systems.

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act - The ADA is a civil rights law, established in 1990, that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.

AHJ: Authority Having Jurisdiction - An organization, office, or individual responsible for enforcing the requirements of a code or standard, or for approving equipment, materials, an installation, or a procedure.

Ally: A person who supports, both publicly and privately, the LGBTQ community and equality in its many forms. Heterosexual and cisgender people can be allies, as well as individuals from within the LGBTQ community.

Bisexual: A person who is physically/emotionally attracted to both people of the same and/or different gender identity.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity matches the sex originally identified on their birth certificate. Cisgender only describes a person's gender identity and not their emotional/physical attractions.

Code Equivalency: An alternative means or method of construction proposed by the architect/engineer of record meeting an equivalent level of protection and/or safety.

Code Variance: A "variation" from the requirements of the Zoning or Building Code for a certain type of construction or use.

FFRDC: Federally Funded Research and Development Centers - A special type of government owned, contractor-operated research centers—commonly referred to as “GOCOs”—that conduct research and development (R&D) and related activities in support of a federal agency’s mission. FFRDCs operate under the framework of the Federal Acquisition Regulation. They differ from other performers of federal R&D—such as federal laboratories, universities, nonprofit organizations, and private firms—in that they are designed to meet a “special long-term research or development need which cannot be met as effectively by existing in-house or contractor resources” and that they have “access, beyond that which is common to the normal contractual relationship, to Government and supplier data, including sensitive and proprietary data, and to employees and installations equipment and real property. (Definition from Congressional Research Service Report, 3 April 2020)

Gay: A person who is attracted, emotionally and/or physically, to someone of the same gender. This term can be used by men, women, or individuals who identify as nonbinary.

Gender: A social construct used to classify a person as a man, woman, or some other identity. Fundamentally different from sex assigned at birth, gender is often closely related to the role that a person plays or is expected to play in society.

Gender Dysphoria: The extreme discomfort that a person feels because their assigned sex at birth does not match their gender identity. The sense of unease or dissatisfaction can cause depression and anxiety and negatively impact an individual’s daily life.

Gender Expression: How individuals communicate their gender to others through their clothing, speech, mannerisms, and other factors. Gender expression is not the same thing as gender identity. A person can express one gender yet identify with another.

Gender Fluid: Describes a person whose gender expression or gender identity—or both—changes over time. Not everyone whose gender identity or expression changes identifies as gender fluid.

Gender Identity: Gender identity is the personal sense of one's own gender. Gender identity can correlate with a person's assigned sex or can differ from it.

Gender Nonconforming: People who do not follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth.

Heterosexual: Describes a person who is attracted, emotionally and/or physically, to individuals of the opposite sex or opposite binary gender. Otherwise known as “straight.”

Lesbian: Describes a woman who is attracted, emotionally and/or physically, to other women.

LGBTQ+: An acronym used to describe people and/or community identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning, with a “+” sign to recognize additional sexual orientations

and gender identities. Avoid using the term “gay community,” as it does not accurately account for the community’s diversity.

Nonbinary: A gender identity that does not conform to traditional binary beliefs about gender, which indicate that all individuals are exclusively either male or female.

Precedent Study: The sourcing and contemplation of related and relative, past and present influences that aim to serve, provide inspiration for, and help with the justification of an idea. In architectural practice, the use of design precedents as a source of knowledge is often considered to be a more efficient strategy in developing designs than initiating a project.

Pronouns: Words used in everyday speech and writing to take the place of people's names (e.g., he, she, and they). We frequently use pronouns without thinking about it. Often, when speaking of someone in the third person, these pronouns have a gender implied. These associations are not always accurate, and people may choose to use a variety of pronouns. When in doubt of which pronouns a person uses, try using their name instead.

Queer: An adjective used by some people whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual. “Queer” was once used a pejorative term and has been reclaimed by some— but not all—members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Questioning: Describes a person who is still discovering and exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or some combination thereof. Using this term enables an individual to identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community while avoiding other labels and recognizing that their process of self-identification is still underway.

Sex: The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, babies are assigned a sex that typically corresponds with their external anatomy. Yet, an individual’s sex is influenced by a larger combination of factors, including their chromosomes, genes, hormones, reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

Sexual Orientation: An enduring emotional and/or physical attraction (or nonattraction) to other people. Sexual orientation is fluid and encompasses a variety of labels, including gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual. A person does not need specific sexual experience—or any sexual experience—to identify with their sexual orientation.

Transgender: Transgender people are people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be at birth. “Trans” is often used as shorthand for transgender. A transgender woman lives as a woman today, but was thought to be male when she was born. A transgender man lives as a man today, but was thought to be female when he was born. Some transgender people identify as neither male nor female, or as a combination of male and female.

Transition: A process by which transgender people align their gender expression (social transition) and anatomy (medical transition) with their gender identity. Transitioning is a multiple-step process that occurs over a long period of time. It can include such steps as using a different name, using new pronouns, dressing differently, updating legal documents, hormone therapy, and surgery. The exact steps involved in a person's transition vary.