



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Living up to our value of inclusion: Why we should use pronouns

December 14, 2021

As an agency that's been long prepared to work in the most remote and rugged of locations, we've spent the last 100 years refining the art of telework and long-distance communication.

We're proud of our efforts to use every communication channel available to us: In the 1980s, we were early adopters of email and, today, many of us use Teams for instant communication. Yet our primary method of long-distance direct communication remains email, and we continue to refine its use.

We're constantly looking for ways to make things better, for the greatest good, so in that regard we're pleased to announce the release of updated guidance for the [USDA email signature block](#).

Using your proper pronouns in your Forest Service email is much more than just a couple of words. It's an investment in relationships. Remember that a person's name alone may not help you to know whom you are addressing and how they would like to be properly addressed. It expresses a meaningful exchange to others and makes it easier for people to be respectful in how they address each other.

Some of you might think that it's about being "politically correct." I just think it's the right thing to do, but consider other examples: There are plenty of gender-neutral names out there, or names from other cultures that might not give you enough information to know their gender. What gender is Chris? How about Angel?

There are other reasons to use pronouns as well. We strive to be an agency of choice, and that means including all our employees. We know that mental health issues have been found among our first responders, but they are not alone. For transgender Americans, we know that 81.7% have seriously thought about suicide in their lifetimes, and we know that 40.4% have followed through with at least one attempt. Our transgender employees and the people that we serve are facing rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts that are four times and six times higher than the entire U.S. population, and those numbers only go up for those who are younger, for people of color, and for those who work in an unsupportive workplace.

Your Civil Rights staff remains committed to leading by example and doing all that we can to ensure that all employees are supported. I fully support you in this step toward showing us who you are and who the Forest Service really is as we demonstrate our stance of support and value for each person. The Forest Service is a place that strives to make it safe to be who you are and to treat each human being with professionalism, dignity and respect.

My hope is that each of you will strongly consider taking this small but important step toward supporting inclusiveness in the workplace. The use of pronouns in our email signatures and getting into the habit of including pronouns in our introductions doesn't really cost us anything. It doesn't involve a lot of work; however, there's a real benefit in doing so and I'd like to think that Gifford Pinchot would agree.

Like a uniform for our digital thoughts and messages, our email signatures have all been purposefully and thoughtfully designed...

Because we're proud of who we are, and we want everyone we communicate with to know that.



Michael Watts, director, Civil Rights

Suicide Thoughts and Attempts Among Transgender Adults; UCLA School of Law Williams Institute; Jody Herman, Taylor N.T. Brown, Ann P. Hass; September 2019 (<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/suicidality-transgender-adults>)

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