

## MEMO

To: Nathan Guequierre, Chair, ERC Inclusive Restroom Working Group  
Fr: Shelley Gregory, FORGE (Inclusive Restroom Working Group member)  
Date: 20 July 2020  
Re: Signage Recommendations for Single-User and Multi-User Restrooms

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As requested, as part of the Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission's inclusive restroom initiative, I am offering recommendations for restroom signage.

I have provided a brief list of best practices along with recommendations and alternative recommendations both for single-user inclusive restrooms and multi-user gender-designated restrooms.

The recommendations are followed by a list of selected resources that include (1) policies and practices by selected public entities, (2) research data, and (3) guiding design principles from experienced design and architectural entities.

### **Best Practices & Recommendations**

#### **1. Identified best practices and/or recommendations for inclusive restroom signage adhere to several common principles:**

A. Less is more. Signage – particularly text elements – should use commonly understood and quickly recognizable symbols and/or language and should be as brief as possible.

B. Signage that is similar to traditional signage is preferred for its familiarity (e.g., a graphic of a toilet is a commonly recognizable; a graphic of the symbol for “transgender” is less commonly recognizable).

C. Signage should include easily recognizable graphics; signage may include, but does not require, accompanying text.

D. Graphics and language should neither reference nor depict gender (e.g., “man” graphic with pants; “woman” graphic with dress; “half-man, half-woman” graphic with half-pants and half-dress).

E. Any use of text should be evaluated for likelihood of recognition by speakers/readers of languages other than English.

F. If language will be used to describe a restroom, the phrase, “All-Gender Restroom,” is widely considered preferable compared to “Gender-Neutral” and “Unisex.” (The former is less preferable because of its suggestion of “no gender” or the “absence” of gender. The latter is particularly disfavored for its minimization of and removal from the concept of gender.)

G. Signs including longer statements of policy may be presented alongside restroom signage, though focus group research data suggest that such statements are not preferred by transgender users.

H. All signage should comply with ADA requirements, including size, placement, and inclusion of Braille.

I. The “new” international symbol for accessibility is preferred.

J. Signage should be consistent throughout a facility, including directional signage.

## 2. Recommended Signage

### A. Recommendations: Single-User Inclusive Restroom

Text: None or “Restroom”

Graphics: Contents of room, limited to toilet, sink, and changing table, if present, and accessibility signage, where appropriate

Optional: “This Restroom is for Everyone”

Optional: Additional directional signage providing location of multi-user gender-designated restrooms

Comments: A minimal approach is recommended, both for text and graphic elements. There is no need to label a “restroom,” as the absence of the designation of “Men” or “Women” provides the cue that the restroom is to be used by any user, regardless of gender, and the graphic elements will provide the information about the contents of the room.

The word “Restroom” may be used to aid in identification. In the absence of a gender designation and/or in the absence of the word “Restroom,” descriptive text is sometimes used underneath the sign, stating, “This restroom is for everyone,” as a cue about the lack of gender designation, though it is not required.

Users prefer graphics that depict the contents of the room, though they should be (1) commonly recognizable and (2) limited in number. “Gendered” depictions of individuals should never be used, as they reinforce stereotypes about how users of gender-designated restrooms “should” appear.

Additional signage may be used to identify locations of multi-user gender-designated restrooms, for the comfort of the user experiencing either confusion or discomfort about the absence of gender designation.

“Restroom” Example:



Graphics & Additional Text Example (Note: “Gender Neutral” is NOT recommended):



“New” International Accessibility Graphic Example:



B. Alternative Recommendations: Single-User Inclusive Restroom

- Text: "All-Gender Restroom" or "All Gender"
- Graphics: Contents of room, limited to toilet, sink, and changing table, if present, and accessibility signage, where appropriate
- Optional: "This Restroom is for Everyone"
- Optional: Additional directional signage providing location of multi-user gender-designated restrooms
- Comments: "All-Gender Restroom" or "All Gender" is preferred compared to "Gender-Neutral" or "Unisex," which, in addition to the reasons above, may result in confusion by users. The graphic elements will provide the information about the contents of the room.

Descriptive text is sometimes used underneath the sign, stating, "This restroom is for everyone," as a cue about the lack of gender designation, though it is not required.

Users prefer graphics that depict the contents of the room, though they should be (1) commonly recognizable and (2) limited in number. "Gendered" depictions of individuals should never be used, as they reinforce stereotypes about how users of gender-designated restrooms "should" appear.

Additional signage may be used to identify locations of multi-user gender-designated restrooms, for the comfort of users experiencing either confusion or discomfort regarding the absence of gender designation, though it is not required.

"All-Gender Restroom" Examples:



“All Gender Restroom” Example (with new accessibility graphic):



“All Gender” Example (with non-gendered depiction and additional text):



### C. Recommendations: Multi-User Gender-Designated Restrooms

- Text:** “Women,” “Men,” or “[Women’s or Men’s] Restroom”
- “You are entitled [or welcome] to use the restroom that best aligns with your gender identity.”
- “Single-User [All-Gender] Restrooms can be found \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Graphics:** Contents of room, limited to toilet, sink, and changing table, if present, and accessibility signage, where appropriate
- Notes:** Until code changes allow for conversion and new builds of inclusive multi-user restrooms in Wisconsin, multi-user restrooms will remain gender-designated. Signage should be changed, however, for the purposes of achieving consistency throughout a facility and affirming the diversity of individuals who access public restrooms.
- The word “Restroom” may be used to aid in identification. However, again, there is no need to label a “restroom,” because the graphic elements will provide the information about the contents of the room, and the gender designation, in the case of multi-user restrooms, will provide further cues.
- The gender designation should be provided through text elements, and not through graphic elements. “Gendered” depictions of individuals should never be used, as they reinforce stereotypes about how users of gender-designated restrooms “should” appear.

Users prefer graphics that depict the contents of the room, though they should be (1) commonly recognizable and (2) limited in number.

The words “Women” and “Men” are considered sufficiently iconic in the context of restrooms so as not to be considered access barriers for users who speak/read languages other than English.

Signage should be included that identifies locations of single-user inclusive restrooms, to aid those users who require or prefer a single-user and/or inclusive experience.

Additional “alignment” signage regarding users’ right to self-select the gender-designated restroom that best aligns with their gender identity should be provided to affirm trans/non-binary/gender non-conforming users’ use of multi-user restrooms.

Further statements of policy sometimes accompany gender-designated multi-user signage, though inclusion of such policy statements is viewed as undesirable by some, and data suggest that transgender users tend not to prefer such statements. While inclusion of such statements may provide positive affirmation and public education, they risk inadvertently producing unintended negative effects, including drawing attention to the concept or idea of inclusion of trans/non-binary/gender non-conforming individuals in multi-user facilities generally, and piquing unwanted interest in individual users in the vicinity specifically.

Gender-Designated Example (with “alignment” statement):



Gender-Designated Example (with “alignment statement” and depiction of non-gendered person):



Gender-Designated Example (with “alignment statement”):



Gender-Designated Example (with directional text) (Note: gendered depiction of individuals is NOT recommended):



## Selected Resources

### **1. Public Entity Policies & Practices**

University of Maryland LGBTQ Equity Center. Good Practices: Inclusive Restrooms and Signage, <https://lgbt.umd.edu/good-practices-inclusive-restrooms-and-signage>

University of Wisconsin. Frequently Asked Questions – Gender Inclusive Restroom Facilities Policy (August 28, 2019), <https://news.wisc.edu/frequently-asked-questions-gender-inclusive-restroom-facilities-policy/>

Washington State Human Resources Office of Financial Management. Inclusive Bathroom Signage Recommendations (July 2019), [https://www.wrpatoday.org/assets/COVID-19\\_2020/Inclusive-Bathroom-Signage-Recommendations\\_RAIN.PDF](https://www.wrpatoday.org/assets/COVID-19_2020/Inclusive-Bathroom-Signage-Recommendations_RAIN.PDF)

## **2. Research Data**

Nick Ross. Designing an Inclusive, Effective All-Gender Restroom Symbol, <https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/blog/designing-an-inclusive-effective-all-gender-restroom-symbol>

## **3. Design Principles**

Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY. FIT Installs Restroom Signs for a Non-Binary World (July 19, 2018), <https://news.fitnyc.edu/2018/07/19/fit-installs-restroom-signs-for-a-non-binary-world/>

Ben Garbow. Inclusive Restroom Design, Part 1: Gender and Signage (Feb. 24, 2020), <https://www.payette.com/in-the-news/inclusive-restroom-design-part1-gender-and-signage/>