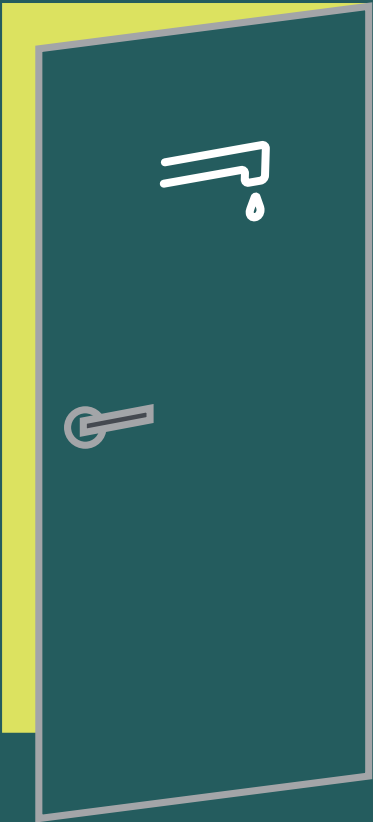
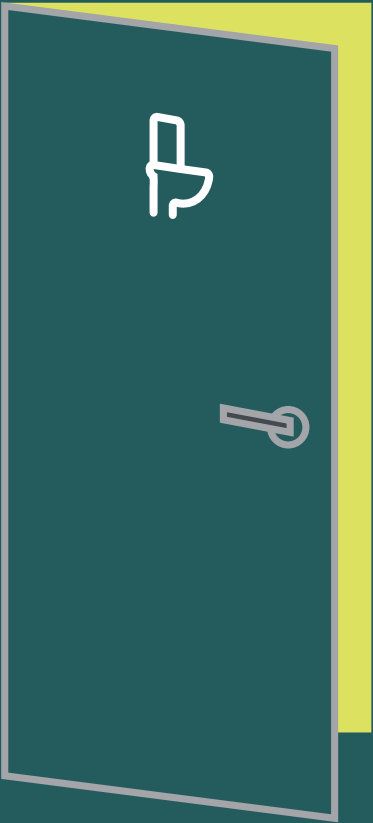
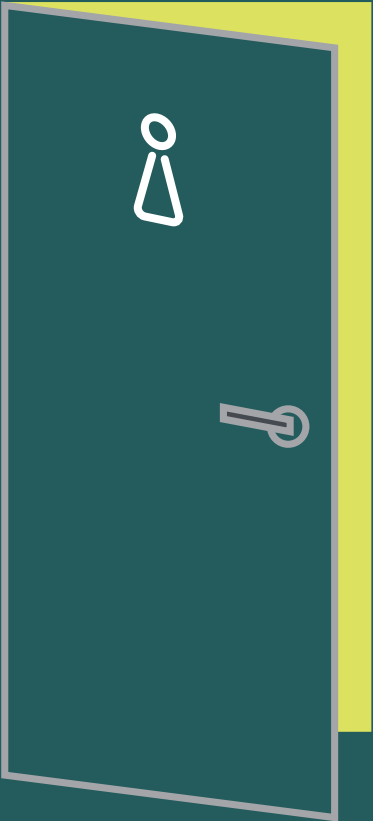
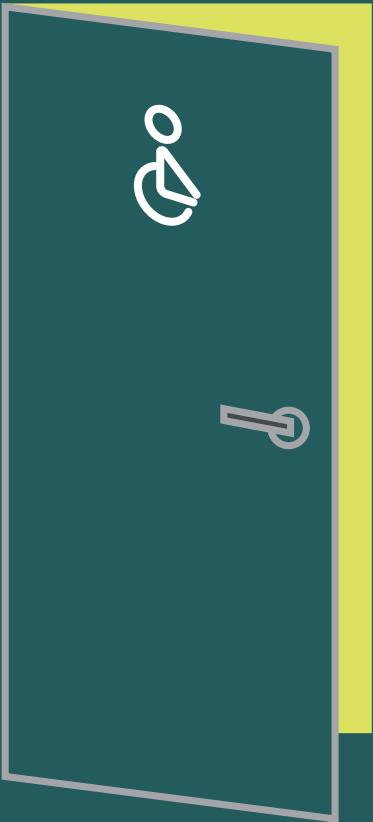
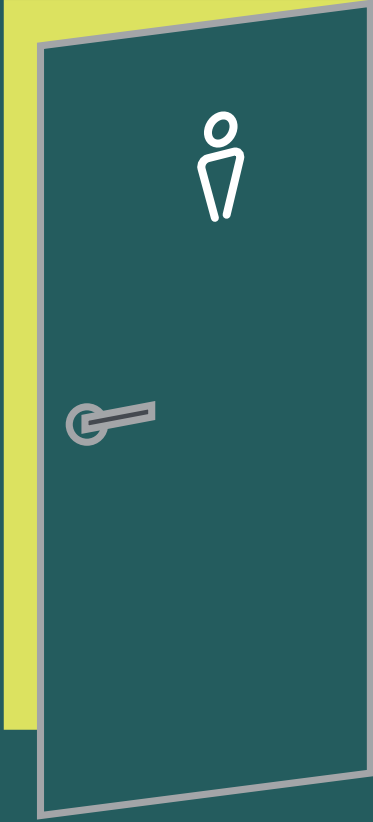


# Inclusive Design



## Rethinking the Binary Restroom

How can we design restrooms to be safe, comfortable, and inclusive?

### WHAT WE DID

Restroom access for transgender people has recently entered national conversations and debate. To contribute to this discourse, we explored the long history of research and historical precedents related to segregated restrooms. We followed this research with a survey of Gensler staff, designed to provide aggregated information on our experiences with restroom design. Our firmwide survey included 966 respondents from 35 offices in seven different countries. We quickly realized that restroom access goes far beyond the transgender community, affecting nearly everyone: parents, caregivers, private people, people with disabilities, and people living with special medical needs, among others.

Our next step was outreach. We held roundtable events in Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, and New York. We wanted to understand a diversity of perspectives on experiences with restroom design, so we invited participants beyond just design and real estate professionals. Roundtables included members of the LGBTQ community to represent their experiences and concerns directly, alongside other community members, educators, industry leaders, and clients.

### THE CONTEXT

Our modern conception of public restrooms dates back to antiquity—in Ancient Rome, the city installed multi-seat restrooms without partitions. Archeological digs in ancient civilizations demonstrate class distinctions in the restrooms used by upper and lower social strata. Looking to the present, it is impossible to dissociate social influences on restroom design from more

practical concerns; our current conception and design of a restroom reflects a long history of building codes, policy, and law.

Throughout the 20th century, restroom access became politicized in the United States through equal rights movements: the repeal of Jim Crow laws, the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and most recently, transgender rights. Today, very few gender-segregated spaces remain in our American landscape—restrooms are one of them. Regulatory codes set by the US Department of Labor and the US Department of Health and Human Services mandate not only separate facilities by gender, but also male to female restroom ratios. Alongside the political and institutional mandates, there are many intangible variables that mediate restroom design. Social and behavioral norms are highly influential forces on any concrete code, law, or design practice.

Many transgender people either face harassment and violence when seeking to use public restrooms, or are excluded entirely from their restroom of choice by policies or staff. Lack of safe restroom access has been linked to medical problems such as kidney infections, urinary tract infections, and other stress-related conditions.

As we face the challenge of restroom access and equity domestically, we should also recognize the broader challenges of restroom access and sanitation that continue to be pervasive globally. According to a World Health Organization study, over 30 percent of the global population does not have an adequate restroom as of 2015. Further, 2.4 billion people still do not have basic sanitation needs such as toilets.

**Safe, dignified access to public restrooms is a human right—it is essential for an individual's participation in civic life, the workplace, and school.**



**>30%**

of the global population does not have an adequate restroom.

**2.4 billion**

people still do not have basic sanitation needs such as toilets.

### Ancient Rome

Multi-stall restrooms without partitions are introduced.

### Victorian Era

Male-only public restrooms dominate public access.

### 1870-1960s

In the US, Jim Crow laws required restrooms to be segregated by race.

### 1964

Title VII of Civil Rights Act passed. Many courts have interpreted Title VII to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity or transgender status.

### 2009

Kyle Giard-Chase spoke to the Vermont Human Rights, launching a new campaign on the importance of gender-neutral restrooms in public schools.

### 2013

Portland approves law that requires gender-neutral signage on single-occupancy restrooms.

### 2015

First gender-neutral restroom in the White House is introduced. Justice Department agrees with high school student Gavin Grimm, who is transgender and argued for right to use restrooms that match his gender identity.

### 2017

President Trump issues *Dear Colleague* letter rescinding rules on restrooms for transgender students, deferring to state governments.

SCOTUS defers pending Gavin Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board to lower courts.

Newly elected governor Roy Cooper, working with lawmakers, repeals HB2 after public outcry.

### 1739

First gender-segregated public restroom exhibited at a ball in Paris. People thought it was eccentric and fun.

### 1887

Massachusetts passed a law requiring workplaces that employed women to have separate restrooms for them.

### 1990

Americans with Disabilities Act passed, transforming restrooms.

### 2012-2013

150 university campuses installed gender-neutral restrooms, along with a number of high schools.

### 2014

Executive Order 13672 extends protection against discrimination in hiring on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation.

### 2016

President Obama issues *Dear Colleague* letter directing public schools to allow students to use facilities consistent with their gender identity.

North Carolina passes HB2, which requires people use the restroom of the sex indicated on their birth certificate.

### 2018

International Building and Plumbing Codes will include "gender-neutral" restrooms as proposed by the AIA (403.1.2; IBC 2902.1.2).

Hygienic sanitation facilities are crucial for public health. Since 1990, the number of people gaining access to improved sanitation has risen from 54% to 68% but some 2.3 billion people still do not have toilets or improved latrines.



62%

of respondents would use a gender-inclusive restroom if it is closer than a gender specific restroom.

#### THE RESULTS

Our survey and subsequent roundtable discussions found many prevalent, universal themes. In particular, proximity and privacy emerge as key concerns when designing any restroom for inclusivity.

Despite expressed trepidation for use of a gender-inclusive restroom, most survey respondents noted they would choose an inclusive option if it's the most expedient.

Privacy was probably the most noted consideration across our data and discussions. Universally, people want to feel safe and comfortable—particularly in the restroom. In this regard, single occupancy stalls are ideal, but not always feasible. More than half of survey respondents stated openness to using a gender-inclusive restroom that is not single occupancy. However, lighting, ventilation, and maintenance pose constraints to universal, single-stall solutions. Floor-to-ceiling stalls require additional lighting, ventilation, and potentially structural support. Considerations for additional security with single-stall solutions also cannot be overlooked.

When single-occupancy stalls aren't possible, privacy can be achieved in more nuanced ways. Respondents noted that ambient noise and floor-to-ceiling doors, with amenities such as full-length mirrors, towels, and hygiene products, are quick and effective means of creating a sense of comfort and privacy. Outside a restroom unit, signage should be gender-inclusive, and policies that allow usage based on gender identity should be clearly communicated and multilingual when appropriate. For added security, each stall should have a visual lock that displays occupancy.

#### DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

##### Design for privacy, proximity, and cleanliness.

Many people of all backgrounds plan their days around using the restroom, often having to research restroom availability. But what they're looking for is universal—privacy, proximity, and cleanliness matter to everyone choosing a restroom. Features like floor-to-ceiling stalls that maximize privacy are ideal, but maintenance is also a consideration—will the cleaning equipment be able to reach the corners?

##### Don't assume; accommodate.

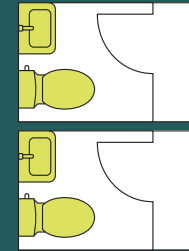
Designing for inclusivity from the beginning (instead of waiting for issues to arise) not only reinforces cultural tolerance and organizational values, but also saves money by avoiding the need to redesign or add new facilities in the future. Inclusive policies also attract the best talent and promote diverse points of view.

##### Language is powerful.

"Gender inclusive," or "all gender" is preferred. "Gender neutral," is considered problematic by some in the transgender community—the term erases gender identity. Signage and pictograms should also be considered carefully, and within the cultural context. What works for a North American workplace may not for an international airport or highly trafficked museum.

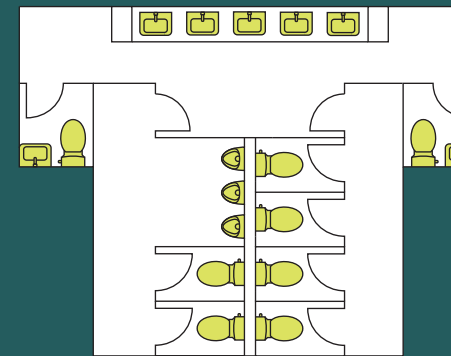
##### Provide options for all users.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Single-user, hybrid, and multi-stall options should all be considered. If providing amenities, such as hygiene products, they should be provided equally in all environments.



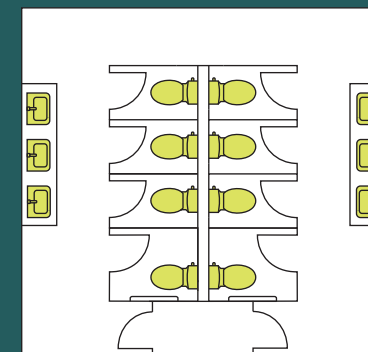
### Single User

Only single-occupancy stalls are provided, maximizing privacy and flexibility and coupled with policy allowing usage based on gender identity. Appropriate for small work environments or low-traffic areas.



### Hybrid

Single user options are provided alongside gender-segregated facilities and shared sinks. Appropriate for work environments, public institutions, and high-traffic areas.



### Multi-Stall

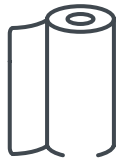
Floor-to-ceiling stalls with visible locks are available to people of all genders. Appropriate for highly trafficked, well-secured public spaces and with additional single user, or gender-segregated spaces. Signage should clearly communicate usage policy and locations of nearby restrooms with alternative layouts.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

Restroom access continues to be ingrained in controversy; near-term solutions are marred by both practical considerations and social issues. As designers and architects, we have an opportunity to pave the way for open communication—informing clients of the both requirements by law, but also proposing creative options for inclusive design solutions. Although many states have pending restrictive measures to limit individuals to using facilities that correspond to the sex indicated on their birth certificates, such legislation is increasingly unpopular.

But ultimately, laws alone aren't going to change design. Forward-thinking corporations and institutions must be at the forefront of change. A movement toward inclusive restroom design will require change management, and designers need to help facilitate productive discussions with clients and building users.

Broadly, restrooms should not be viewed as an inconvenience, or a place to cut costs, but rather as an opportunity to forge a cohesive building aesthetic, and a place to signify inclusion. There is an enormous landscape of laws and policies, but also solutions whose only bounds are creativity. Because of this, we are not limited to one prescriptive solution. With careful consideration, we can continue to evolve in the right direction to provide better experiences for all.



### Ideal Amenities

- Stalls
- Full-length mirrors
- Towels



### Amenities to Avoid

- Attendant
- Urinal
- Seating

## The Gensler Research Institute

The Gensler Research Institute is a collaborative network of researchers focused on a common goal: to generate new knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of the connection between design, business, and the human experience. Through a combination of global and local research grants, and external partnerships, we seek insights focused on solving the world's most pressing challenges. We are committed to unlocking new solutions and strategies that will define the future of design.

## Research Team

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