

VANGST 2022 REPORT

LGBTQIA+

REPRESENTATION

IN CANNABIS

*BENCHMARKING THE CANNABIS WORKFORCE*



# INTRODUCTION

Today's increasingly professionalized cannabis industry has a higher percentage of workers who identify as LGBTQIA+ than many traditional corporate entities, according to Vangst survey responses and other studies.

In fact, the cannabis industry as we know it today would not exist were it not for the work of LGBTQ+ compassionate care advocates

Trailblazers like Mary "Brownie Mary" Rathbun, Dennis Peron, Michael Koehn and Anna Boyce saw that cannabis could effectively treat AIDS-related symptoms when little else could.

A weak federal response to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s forced activists to turn to alternative treatments. They defied federal drug laws and successfully advocated for reform — first at the municipal level in San Francisco, and then statewide in 1996 when California voters approved the nation's first medical marijuana law.

But today, the fledgling cannabis sector — like most industries — still has a lot of work ahead of it if it hopes to build a truly inclusive culture.

In this report we take a look at the statistics and provide insights on how companies in the emerging cannabis industry can make their workplace and benefits more inclusive.



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER & CEO

The cannabis industry today is as small as it's ever going to be: 100,000 new cannabis jobs are being created this year alone. People from all walks of life are discovering the cannabis industry as an employer for the first time right now.

It's more important than ever that we as an industry promote and work toward a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive culture. Our own research shows that about 14% of cannabis workers identify as being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and nearly 2% are non-binary or non-conforming. It's time we take a serious look at our workplaces with everybody in mind.

I hope that these insights derived from our 2021 Salary Guide survey can act as a resource for every cannabis company.

Karson Humiston  
Founder and CEO, Vangst



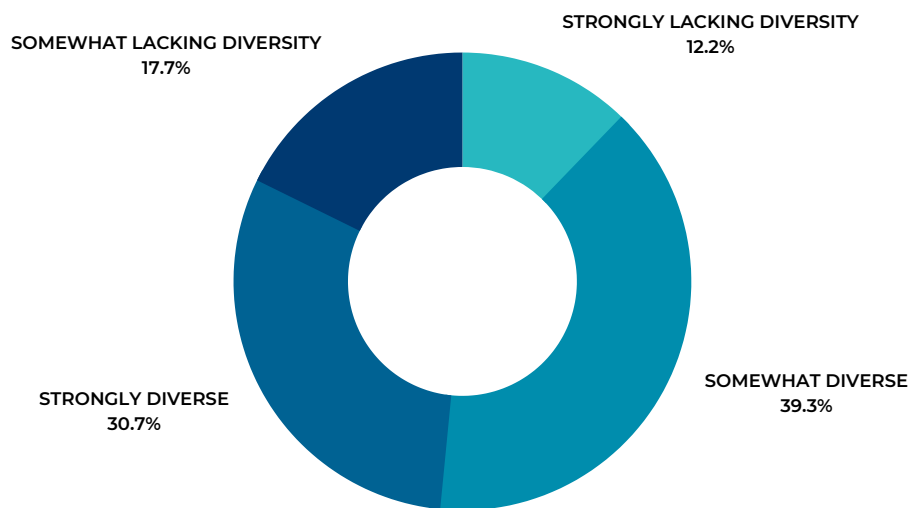
It's more important than ever that we as an industry work toward a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive culture.



# OVERALL DIVERSITY

The cannabis industry wrestles more publicly than most with its lack of diversity, especially at the ownership level. Many states that have legalized adult-use cannabis have also implemented social-equity programs to boost diversity within the sector.

## How would you characterize the makeup of your company's employees overall?



Source: [Vangst 2021 Salary Guide](#)

These programs are a step in the right direction to diversifying cannabis, ranging from "color-blind" policies focusing primarily on those most harmed by the U.S. War on Drugs (Colorado) to those that take it a step further and specifically include racial and ethnic minorities (New York).

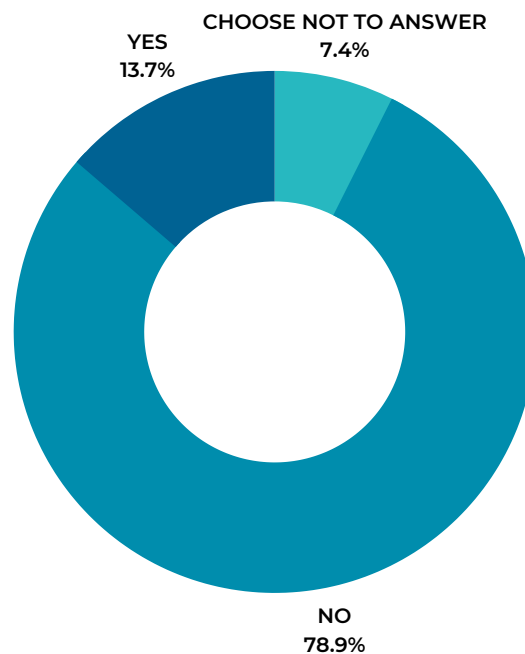
LGBTQIA+ status, however, is rarely — if ever — considered in these programs.



# NATIONAL REPRESENTATION

Nearly 14% of respondents to [Vangst's 2021 Salary Guide Survey](#) reported that they identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/agender/ally) community. That's double the national percentage of Americans who identify as "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or something other than heterosexual" [according to a February 2022 Gallup poll](#).

**Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community?  
(cannabis industry)**



Source: [Vangst 2021 Salary Guide](#)

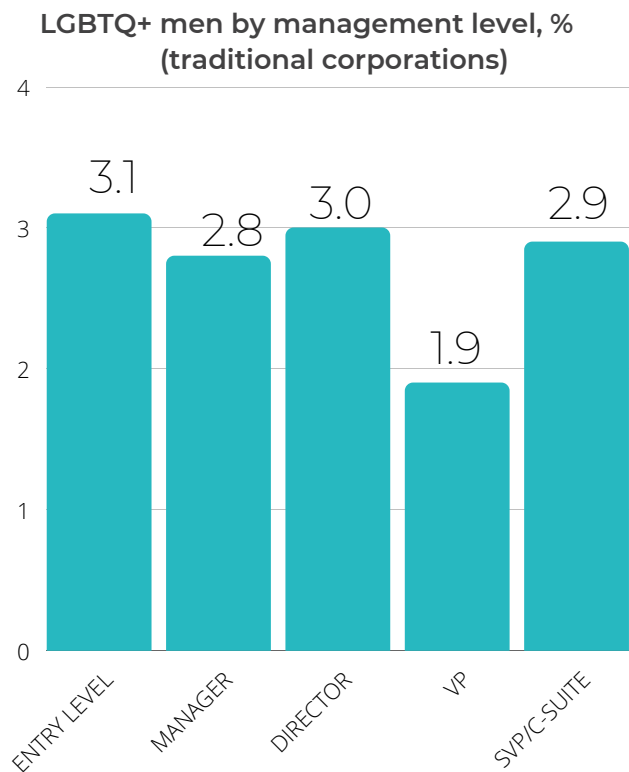
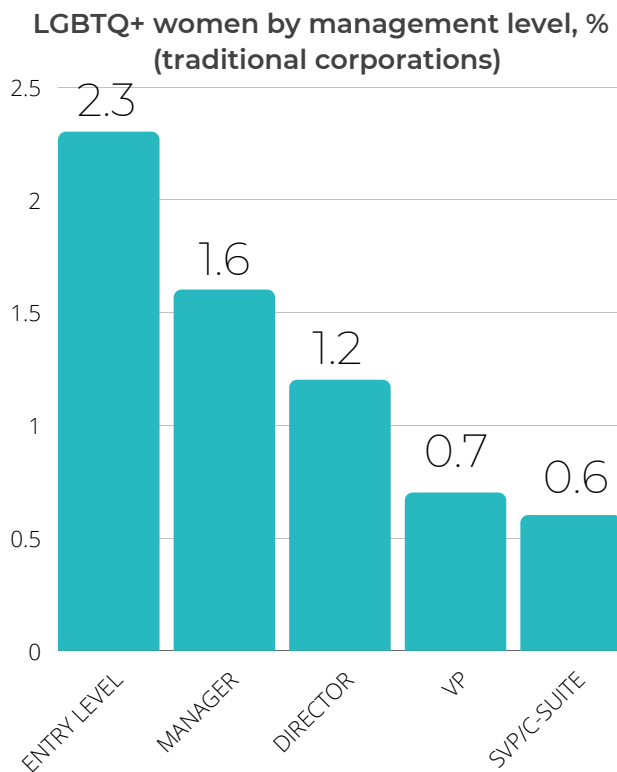
But the 7.1% Gallup LGBTQ+ average is distorted on both ends by the fact that only 2.6% of baby boomers self-identify as such compared to 20.8% of Generation Z. As more Gen Z talent joins their millennial colleagues (10.5% identify per Gallup) in the cannabis workforce, it's likely the total number who self identify as LGBTQ+ will increase.



# WORKPLACE REPRESENTATION

When compared to the overall corporate workforce, LGBTQ+ employees have a bigger presence in the cannabis space, according to Vangst's survey data. A recent McKinsey & Company analysis showed that LGBTQ+ men and women are dramatically underrepresented across the entire professional pipeline, from entry level to the C-suite.

As is the case with the talent pipeline in general, women are more underrepresented here too.



Source: McKinsey & Company



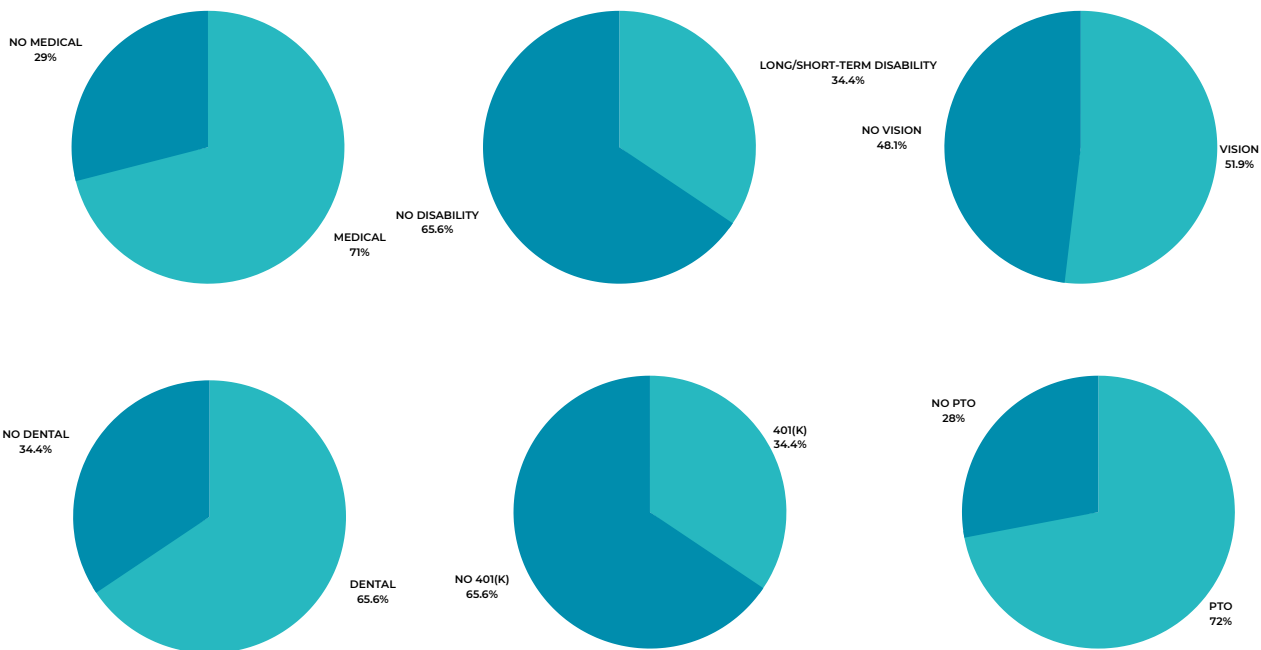
# INCLUSIVE BENEFITS

Cannabis is an emerging industry made up primarily of companies that can fairly be called startups. It's also an industry with an unusually high tax burden due to federal prohibition and U.S. tax law.

Still, 100% of the companies surveyed by Vangst now offer some form of benefits to their full-time workforce for the first time since we began surveying.

A lot of work remains to be done. Healthcare benefits especially are critical for the LGBTQ+ community due to decades of discrimination and disparities.

## Some of the benefits offered by cannabis companies



Source: [Vangst 2021 Salary Guide](#)



# WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

Here's what cannabis companies can do to make their workplaces and benefits packages more inclusive for their LGBTQ+ employees.

## 01 EQUAL BENEFITS

Partner with health insurance companies that provide:

- Benefits for domestic partners
- Benefits which allow employees to take family and medical leave to care for domestic partners as well as the children of a domestic partner
- Bereavement leave which includes the death of a domestic partner or partner's immediate family
- At least one health plan to all employees that affirmatively and explicitly covers medically necessary health services for transgender people, including gender transition-related treatment

## 02 LGBTQIA+ SUPPORT

Build resources within an organization that create an inclusive workspace.

- Publish written gender transition guidelines documenting supportive policies/practices on issues pertinent to workplace gender transition.
- Ensure your DEI initiative, diversity council or working group specifically includes LGBTQ+ diversity in its mission.
- Establish inclusive hiring practices within all levels of the organization.

*Source: [The Human Rights Campaign Foundation's best practices to promote equity and inclusion for LGBTQ+ employees](#). Some may be beyond the financial means of cannabis companies, but others are simple, free cultural changes:*





# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## THE LGBTQ+ POPULATION PAVED THE WAY FOR LEGAL CANNABIS

LGBTQ compassionate care trailblazers were ostracized and even jailed during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s as they fought for access to medical marijuana. Their ultimate successes in California led to the modern, multibillion-dollar cannabis industry.

## RETHINKING SOCIAL EQUITY

Most U.S. state-created social equity programs are rightfully aimed at those most harmed by the U.S. drug war and racial minorities. Yet LGBTQ+ status is rarely if ever considered in official policy despite historical discrimination.

## REPRESENTATION MATTERS — AND DEMOGRAPHICS ARE SHIFTING

The cannabis industry's LGBTQ+ population — 13.7% — is higher than that of the general U.S. population and corporate America. But overall U.S. numbers are likely skewed by generational differences. 20.8% of the U.S. Gen Z population identifies as LGBTQ+.

## BUILD AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Building an inclusive workplace for all employees is a must in today's world. Some changes, like equal healthcare plans, may be financially out of reach for cash-strapped companies. Others, like establishing inclusive hiring efforts, are completely free.

## KNOW YOUR WORKFORCE

Vangst regularly releases insights and analyses so that you can better understand the fast-moving cannabis landscape. Our 2021 Salary Guide is widely recognized as the authority on industry pay trends. To take a deeper dive, [click here to download the guide](#).



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to our employees, partners, friends, survey participants, McKinsey & Company, Gallup, Human Rights Campaign Foundation, every brave trailblazer who paved the path for this amazing industry, and all of the professionals and companies that make us Proud to Work in Cannabis!

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