

## PERSPECTIVE

# Queer- and trans-inclusive faculty hiring—A call for change

J. L. Weissman<sup>1,2,3\*</sup>, Callie R. Chappell<sup>4</sup>, Bruno Francesco Rodrigues de Oliveira<sup>5</sup>,  
 Natalya Evans<sup>6</sup>, Anna C. Fagre<sup>7</sup>, Desiree Forsythe<sup>8</sup>, Steven A. Frese<sup>9,10</sup>,  
 Rachel Gregor<sup>11</sup>, Suzanne L. Ishaq<sup>12</sup>, Juliet Johnston<sup>13</sup>, Bittu K. R.<sup>14,15</sup>, Shayle  
 B. Matsuda<sup>16</sup>, Sam McCarron<sup>17,18</sup>, Melanie Ortiz Alvarez de la Campa<sup>19</sup>, Troy A. Roepke<sup>20</sup>,  
 Nasa. Sinnott-Armstrong<sup>21</sup>, Cora S. Stobie<sup>22,23</sup>, Lauren Talluto<sup>24</sup>, José M. Vargas-  
 Muñiz<sup>25</sup>, The Advancing Queer and Trans Equity in Science (AQTES) Consortium<sup>1</sup>

**1** Department of Ecology & Evolution, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York State, United States of America, **2** Institute for Advanced Computational Science, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York State, United States of America, **3** Department of Biology, The City College of New York, New York, New York State, United States of America, **4** Department of Biology, Stanford University, Stanford, California, United States of America, **5** Department of Microbiology and Parasitology, Biomedical Institute, Fluminense Federal University, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, **6** Marine Science Institute, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, United States of America, **7** Center for Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, United States of America, **8** Department of Biology, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California, United States of America, **9** Department of Nutrition, University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada, United States of America, **10** University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine, Reno, Nevada, United States of America, **11** Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States of America, **12** School of Food and Agriculture, University of Maine, Orono, Maine, United States of America, **13** Natural Science, Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, United States of America, **14** Department of Biology, Trivedi School of Biosciences, Ashoka University, Sonipat, Haryana, India, **15** Department of Psychology, Ashoka University, Sonipat, Haryana, India, **16** Conservation Research Department, John G. Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, Illinois, United States of America, **17** Department of Molecular and Cell Biology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, **18** Department of Botany and Zoology, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, **19** Department of Molecular Microbiology and Immunology, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States of America, **20** Department of Animal Sciences, School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, United States of America, **21** Herbold Computational Biology Program, Public Health Sciences Division, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, Seattle, Washington, United States of America, **22** Division of Herpetology, Department of Animal and Plant Systematics, National Museum Bloemfontein, Bloemfontein, South Africa, **23** Department of Zoology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa, **24** Department of Ecology, University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria, **25** Department of Biological Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, United States of America

• These authors contributed equally to this work.

¶ See Acknowledgements for complete list of consortium members.

\* [jackie.weissman@stonybrook.edu](mailto:jackie.weissman@stonybrook.edu)

*As queer and trans scientists, we face varied and systemic barriers to our professional success, resulting in our relative absence from faculty ranks at many institutions. In this Perspective, we call for a change in faculty hiring practices and present concrete guidance to make it a more inclusive process.*

Queer and transgender (trans) scientists face documented systemic challenges across the sciences. We are more likely to experience harassment, burnout, social exclusion, unsupportive working environments, the absence of role models, and biased stereotypes [1–3]. At the same



## OPEN ACCESS

**Citation:** Weissman JL, Chappell CR, Francesco Rodrigues de Oliveira B, Evans N, Fagre AC, Forsythe D, et al. (2024) Queer- and trans-inclusive faculty hiring—A call for change. PLoS Biol 22(11): e3002919. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3002919>

**Published:** November 22, 2024

**Copyright:** © 2024 Weissman et al. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**Funding:** JLW would like to acknowledge comprehensive team-science training provided by the The National Science Foundation-funded EMergent Ecosystem Responses to ChANGE (EMERGE) Biology Integration Institute as part of their summer program, which helped make this collaborative effort possible (2022070). CRC was supported by an NSF Postdoctoral Research Fellowships in Biology Program (2305961). ACF was supported by NSF BII 2213854. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

**Competing interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

time, we work against a global political and legal backdrop where anti-queer and anti-trans legislation is being passed at a record rate [4,5]. Unsurprisingly, queer and trans trainees have a higher attrition rate from the sciences than our peers.

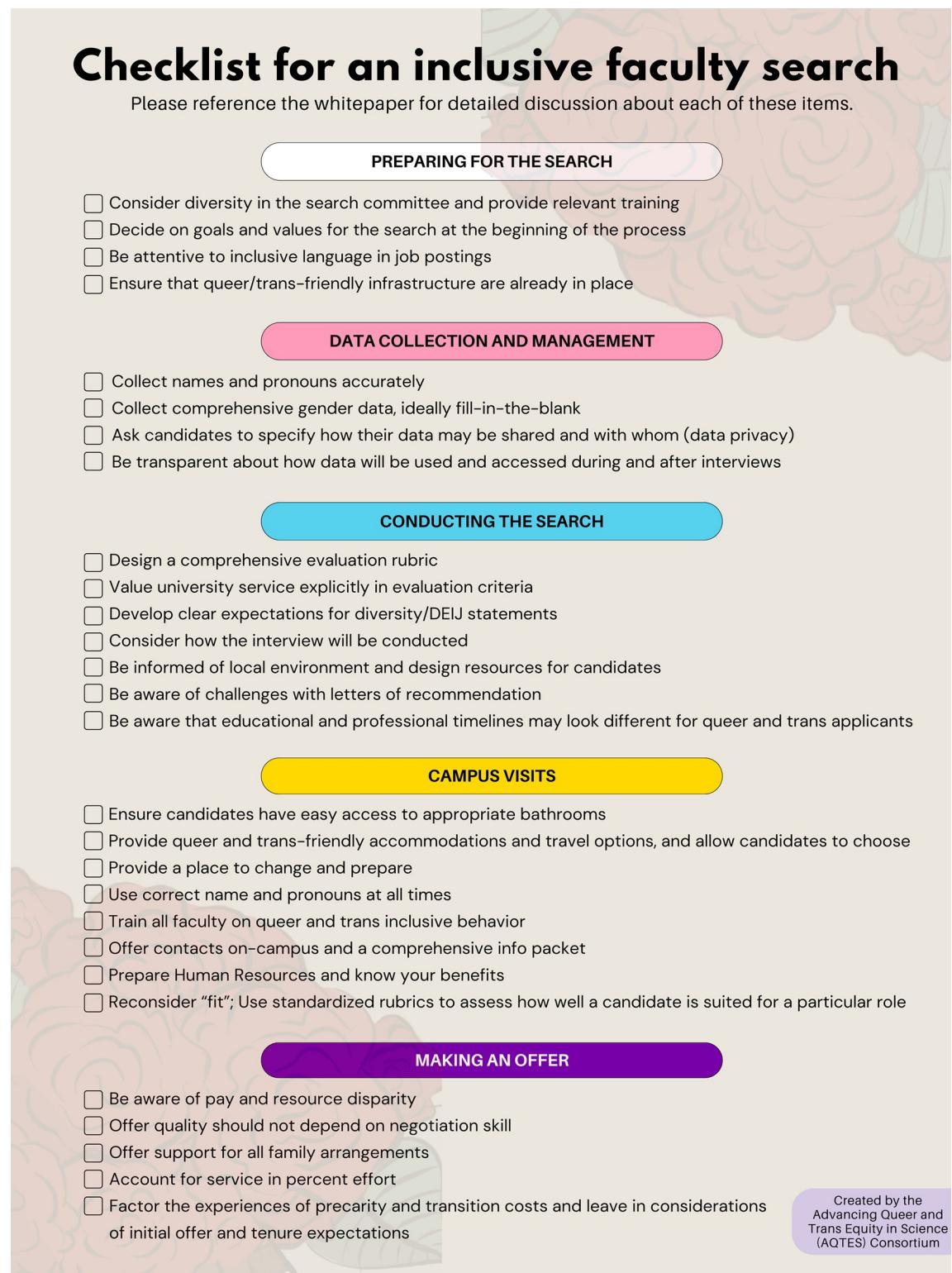
As a result, relatively few queer and trans scientists have passed through the gauntlet of the faculty job search to become faculty, a step that is key to our long-term persistence in academia. Our lack of representation creates a self-reinforcing cycle wherein early-career queer and trans scientists do not see our needs considered in established processes and power structures. This lack of institutional power disproportionately impacts those of us who have multiple intersecting marginalized identities. Yet, we do not accept this status quo quietly. Early-career scientists have called for the establishment of professional support and advocacy networks for queer and trans researchers, as well as the implementation of institutional policies to protect us [6–9].

We urge departments and institutions to take these demands seriously and to take concrete steps to support queer and trans scientists at all levels. Too often, we have seen a lack of expertise in issues facing queer and trans scientists used as an excuse for administrative inaction. As a way forward, we have developed comprehensive guidance for institutions hoping to recruit queer and trans faculty members, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that queer and trans voices are given a platform in the academy [10].

We are Advancing Queer and Trans Equity in Science (AQTES), an international working group of nearly 50 queer and trans biologists and environmental scientists, currently based in at least 12 different countries on 5 continents, who have expertise and deep personal experience in this topic. Many of us are early-career and are currently on, or have recently been on, the faculty job market. Our recommendations to search committees on the development of inclusive and equitable faculty selection policies are based on our personal experiences on the job market and our shared expertise in building queer and trans inclusive spaces and processes [6,7,10].

Our guidelines for running a queer- and trans-inclusive faculty hiring process were developed through an iterative process of collaborative community engagement. Successive drafts were posted publicly on social media platforms and distributed through personal and professional networks and academic society listservs alongside a call for feedback and an opportunity for community members to join our team. Through this process, our set of named contributors quadrupled in size and a diversity of voices brought nuance to a variety of complex issues facing queer and trans scientists around the world. We have chosen to publish our guidelines as a whitepaper [10], a format that allows the work to exist as a living document, with version-controlled revisions to be posted after planned quinquennial (5 year) public comment and review to ensure that our guidance tracks a constantly changing scientific and social landscape. We provide a concise overview below and encourage academics and hiring committees to read the full whitepaper ([doi.org/10.32942/X2J310](https://doi.org/10.32942/X2J310)) [10].

Running an inclusive faculty search begins long before a job is posted and includes carefully selecting committee members, deciding on the values and goals of the search committee, training the committee, crafting the language of the job advertisement, and ensuring best practices for inclusive data collection and storage, among other considerations. As the search progresses, special attention should be paid to how candidates are evaluated, including through the use of standardized rubrics. Providing accessible infrastructure for candidates during visits is a must, especially on stressful interview days. For example, the stress of campus visits can be partially mitigated through practical accommodations, such as scheduling frequent breaks and providing private spaces to prepare for talks. Finally, considerations around inclusivity extend beyond selection to the offer process, and it is in the best interest of both candidates and institutions to be transparent about on-campus resources and the terms of negotiation. We provide an abbreviated list of important factors to consider in **Fig 1**, which are discussed in detail in the associated whitepaper [10].



**Checklist for an inclusive faculty search**

Please reference the whitepaper for detailed discussion about each of these items.

**PREPARING FOR THE SEARCH**

- Consider diversity in the search committee and provide relevant training
- Decide on goals and values for the search at the beginning of the process
- Be attentive to inclusive language in job postings
- Ensure that queer/trans-friendly infrastructure are already in place

**DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT**

- Collect names and pronouns accurately
- Collect comprehensive gender data, ideally fill-in-the-blank
- Ask candidates to specify how their data may be shared and with whom (data privacy)
- Be transparent about how data will be used and accessed during and after interviews

**CONDUCTING THE SEARCH**

- Design a comprehensive evaluation rubric
- Value university service explicitly in evaluation criteria
- Develop clear expectations for diversity/DEIJ statements
- Consider how the interview will be conducted
- Be informed of local environment and design resources for candidates
- Be aware of challenges with letters of recommendation
- Be aware that educational and professional timelines may look different for queer and trans applicants

**CAMPUS VISITS**

- Ensure candidates have easy access to appropriate bathrooms
- Provide queer and trans-friendly accommodations and travel options, and allow candidates to choose
- Provide a place to change and prepare
- Use correct name and pronouns at all times
- Train all faculty on queer and trans inclusive behavior
- Offer contacts on-campus and a comprehensive info packet
- Prepare Human Resources and know your benefits
- Reconsider "fit"; Use standardized rubrics to assess how well a candidate is suited for a particular role

**MAKING AN OFFER**

- Be aware of pay and resource disparity
- Offer quality should not depend on negotiation skill
- Offer support for all family arrangements
- Account for service in percent effort
- Factor the experiences of precarity and transition costs and leave in considerations of initial offer and tenure expectations

Created by the  
Advancing Queer and  
Trans Equity in Science  
(AQTES) Consortium

**Fig 1. Checklist for running a queer- and trans-inclusive faculty search.** Please reference the whitepaper [10] for detailed discussions about each of these items.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3002919.g001>

While it is not the focus of our report, efforts to hire equitably should always be followed with systems for faculty retention. Consider how your institutions can continue supporting queer and trans candidates once we become faculty, especially in the professionally vulnerable years pre-tenure. At the same time, proactive support for queer and trans trainees at all levels is needed to ensure we make it to the stage of applying for faculty positions in the first place. Queer and trans trainees and faculty may experience significant harassment in the local community, online targeting, and even threats and physical violence. We encourage institutions to use their resources and power to protect their marginalized community members from political hostility, offering us a safe place to work. We recognize that recent legal developments in certain countries make it increasingly difficult for institutions to uphold diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice as core academic principles, but we encourage those in positions of power to take bold stances in defense of marginalized researchers rather than preemptively yielding to political pressure.

When in doubt, the best solution is always to listen to your candidates. There are many societal challenges whose roots extend beyond the scope of a faculty search committee's responsibilities, but we nevertheless encourage you to work directly and transparently with your candidates to creatively problem solve. Working to build an equitable and inclusive search process helps everyone. Nearly all the recommendations we make can improve the experiences of all candidates, but will have an outsized effect on making queer and trans individuals feel welcome and equal in your institution.

## Acknowledgments

Members of The Advancing Queer and Trans Equity in Science (AQTES) consortium are listed in alphabetical order by first name:

1. Abigail Ray, Department of Internal Medicine, Microbiology Graduate Group, University of California Davis, Davis, California, United States of America
2. Alejandro Rodríguez-Gijón, Department of Ecology, Environment, and Plant Sciences, Science for Life Laboratory, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden
3. Anna C.B. Weiss, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States of America
4. Bruno Eleres Soares, Institute of Environmental Change & Society, University of Regina, Regina, Canada
5. Bruno P. Lima, Department of Diagnostic and Biological Sciences, University of Minnesota School of Dentistry, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States of America
6. Clara Qin, Society for the Protection of Underground Networks, Dover, Delaware, United States of America
7. D.M. Grijseels, Social Systems and Circuits Group, Max Planck Institute for Brain Research, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
8. Eric J. Taylor, University of Arizona, School of Middle Eastern & North African Studies, Arizona, United States of America
9. Erin (Rin) Krichilsky, Columbia University Department of Ecology, Evolution, New York, New York State, USA & Environmental Biology and American Museum of Natural History Richard Gilder Graduate School Department of Invertebrate Zoology, New York, New York State, United States of America

10. Heema Kumari Nilesh Vyas, School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, The University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
11. Hilary I. Palevsky, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, United States of America
12. Iraiz Ramírez-Sánchez, Department of Microbiology and Biotechnology for aquaculture and multi-trophic integration, Centro de Investigaciones Biológicas del Noroeste, La Paz, Baja California Sur, México
13. Jane M. Benoit, Department of Biological Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, United States of America
14. Janice M. Parks, Department of Plant Pathology, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, United States of America
15. Jay Gordon, Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
16. Jessica A. Goodheart, Division of Invertebrate Zoology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York State, United States of America
17. Kay McMonigal, College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, Alaska, United States of America
18. L.L.M. van Schijndel, Laboratory of Genetics, Wageningen University & Research, Wageningen, The Netherlands; Mathematical and Statistical Methods (Biometris), Wageningen University & Research, Wageningen, the Netherlands
19. Leslie Dietz, Department of Chemical, Biological and Environmental Engineering, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, United States of America
20. Maria Hamilton, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, United States of America
21. Megan Cattau, Human-Environment Systems, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho, United States of America
22. Mica Yang, Department of Bioengineering, Stanford University, Stanford, California, United States of America
23. Michael W. Henson, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, United States of America
24. Michel Geovanni Santiago-Martínez, The Microbial Ecophysiology Laboratory, Department of Molecular and Cell Biology, The University of Connecticut (UConn), Storrs, Connecticut, United States of America.
25. Rebekah Penrice-Randal, Department of Infection and Microbiomes, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom; Department of Biochemistry and Systems Biology, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom
26. Swetha Sridhar, Systems, Synthetic, and Physical Biology, Rice University, Houston, Texas, United States of America
27. Vincent James, School of Biological Sciences, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, United States of America

28. William Agnew, Carnegie Mellon University, oSTEM, Queer in AI
29. Yu Wan, Department of Infectious Disease, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom; Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom

## Author Contributions

**Conceptualization:** J. L. Weissman.

**Project administration:** J. L. Weissman.

**Supervision:** J. L. Weissman.

**Visualization:** Callie R. Chappell, Melanie Ortiz Alvarez de la Campa.

**Writing – original draft:** J. L. Weissman, Callie R. Chappell, Bruno Francesco Rodrigues de Oliveira, Natalya Evans, Anna C. Fagre, Desiree Forsythe, Steven A. Frese, Rachel Gregor, Suzanne L. Ishaq, Juliet Johnston, Bittu K. R., Shayle B. Matsuda, Sam McCarren, Melanie Ortiz Alvarez de la Campa, Troy A. Roepke, Nasa. Sinnott-Armstrong, Cora S. Stobie, Lauren Talluto, José M. Vargas-Muñiz.

**Writing – review & editing:** J. L. Weissman, Callie R. Chappell, Bruno Francesco Rodrigues de Oliveira, Natalya Evans, Anna C. Fagre, Desiree Forsythe, Steven A. Frese, Rachel Gregor, Suzanne L. Ishaq, Juliet Johnston, Bittu K. R., Shayle B. Matsuda, Sam McCarren, Melanie Ortiz Alvarez de la Campa, Troy A. Roepke, Nasa. Sinnott-Armstrong, Cora S. Stobie, Lauren Talluto, José M. Vargas-Muñiz.

## References

1. Cech EA, Waidzunas TJ. Systemic inequalities for LGBTQ professionals in STEM. *Sci Adv.* 2021;7. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abe0933> PMID: 33523910
2. Siegel DP. Transgender experiences and transphobia in higher education. *Sociol Compass.* 2019; 13: e12734. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12734>
3. Cech EA, Pham MV. Queer in STEM Organizations: Workplace Disadvantages for LGBT Employees in STEM Related Federal Agencies. *Soc Sci.* 2017; 6:12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci6010012> PMID: 38550541
4. Human Rights Campaign Foundation. State Equality Index. In: Human Rights Campaign [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2024 Feb 21]. Available from: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/state-equality-index>.
5. GATE, Berianidze L, Castellanos E, Xonorika K. Anti-gender mobilizing: Global and Regional Conversations. New York City: Global Action for Trans Equality; 2022. Available from: <https://gate.ngo/anti-gender-mobilizing-global-and-regional-conversations/>.
6. Getz LJ, de Oliveira BFR, Pérez-López E. We need a Pride in Microbiology Network. *Nat Microbiol.* 2023; 8:999–1000. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41564-023-01394-y> PMID: 37268774
7. Gregor R, Johnston J, Coe LSY, Evans N, Forsythe D, Jones R, et al. Building a queer- and trans-inclusive microbiology conference. *mSystems.* 2023;e0043323. <https://doi.org/10.1128/msystems.00433-23> PMID: 37800938
8. Kinkaid E. Will we avert geography's "trans failure?" American Association of Geographers. 2024 Feb 26. Available from: <https://www.aag.org/will-we-avert-geographys-trans-failure/>. Accessed 2024 Apr 19.
9. Aghi K, Anderson BM, Castellano BM, Cunningham A, Delano M, Dickinson ES, et al. Rigorous science demands support of transgender scientists. *Cell.* 2024; 187:1327–1334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2024.02.021> PMID: 38490174
10. Weissman JL, Chappell CR, de Oliveira BFR, Evans N, Fagre AC, Forsythe D, et al. The Advancing Queer and Trans Equity in Science (AQTES) Consortium. Running a queer-and trans-inclusive faculty hiring process. *EcoEvoRxiv.* 2024. <https://doi.org/10.32942/X2J310>