



AMERICA'S LGBT ECONOMY

The Premiere Report on the Impact of LGBT-Owned Businesses



**Contributing
Over \$1.7 Trillion
to the
U.S. Economy**

**Creating
Good Jobs &
Innovating
Industries**

**Building Wealth &
Expanding Diversity in
the LGBT Community**

**Read the Report.
Get Certified.
Get Connected.**



Presented by the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce

PREFACE

The National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) came to life in November 2002, when we recognized the direct impact that America's economy has on the LGBT equality movement, as well as the significant contributions that LGBT businesses inject into our economy, and the more than 33,000 jobs that NGLCC-certified businesses support each year.

From inception, our mission is to showcase America's estimated 1.4 million LGBT business owners as innovators, job creators, taxpayers, and providers of essential services that benefit our entire society. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender business owners are a vibrant, essential part of the small business engine that makes the U.S. economy run. They truly deserve a place at the equality table.

Why? Former Congressman Barney Frank often said, "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu."

Every year, America's corporations, state and local governments, and all federal agencies spend billions of dollars in procurement contracts for everything from office supplies to jet engine parts. To help give an equal and level playing field to the minority entrepreneurs who have redefined America's small businesses, government and businesses agencies have

set a larger table in the form of supplier diversity programs. Without such programs, small businesses and start-ups, many of them owned by LGBT Americans, might never be noticed in the dust of competition.

In early 2004, NGLCC created a best-in-class diversity certification program, making us the exclusive national third-party certifying body for LGBT Business Enterprises (LGBTBEs).

If you are an LGBT business owner and not yet certified, that means you're leaving opportunities on the table to help your business grow. For the LGBT community, that also means missing out on one of our role models, job creators, and future success stories. By being certified, you also help us and other leaders to capture the most accurate snapshot possible of the economic progress made by the LGBT community - and remind us of the work yet to be done.

As this report is published, our pace is accelerating. Today, over a third of the Fortune 500, many top federal agencies (including the Small Business Administration, Department of Transportation, and the Department of Housing & Urban Development), major urban municipalities (including King County, WA; Essex County, NJ; and San Francisco, CA), the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Public Utilities Commission of California actively seek out and welcome our innovative and certified LGBT business leaders. Every day, our policy team persuades legislators to

help open doors and possibilities for LGBT business owners to contract with local governments just like every other diverse-owned small business.

Our progress is breathtaking, especially in light of last year's historic Supreme Court decision in support of marriage equality, along with favorable rulings by the businesses Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and federal courts that add to our civil rights victories. However, only federal legislation or Presidential action will fully ensure that every LGBT business owner has an equal chance to seek every opportunity as everyone else in America.

Inspiration comes also from America's corporate leaders who are champions of diversity and inclusion for LGBT citizens and business owners — here at home and around the globe. Business will continue to be a catalyst for positive change for America's minorities, including the LGBT community.

The great work for economic equality continues, one small business at a time.

Sincerely,



Justin Nelson
Co-Founder & President



Chance Mitchell
Co-Founder & CEO

"If you happen to be an LGBT business owner and not yet certified, that means you're leaving opportunities on the table to help your business grow."

BY THE NUMBERS

Who are America's leading LGBT business owners and entrepreneurs?

What kinds of LGBT-owned businesses are certified by the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce?

How many jobs do they create? Where are they based?

What products and services do they offer?

How do they contribute to America's economy?

The aggregate data made available in this report are the exclusive property of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. The information published here is available for public use and media attention, provided that proper attribution is given to the NGLCC.

The findings were made possible by an expert analysis conducted for the NGLCC by Witeck Communications, relying on the certification documentation provided first-hand by NGLCC member companies in good standing.

In 2015, note that the combined buying power for America's LGBT community was estimated to be \$917 billion, according to Witeck Communications.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Number of Certified LGBTBEs

It is impossible to know precisely how many American businesses today are owned and operated by LGBT individuals. What we do know, of course, is that these individuals work in every field and are found today in almost every significant workforce.

What we do know, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration, is that there are nearly 28 million small businesses in the U.S., and over 22 million include individuals who are self-employed. Significantly, since 1995, small businesses have generated over 65% of the net new jobs in the U.S., and 99.7% of all America's employers are considered small businesses.

As of October 2016, 909 businesses are officially certified as LGBT Business Enterprises® (LGBTBEs) by the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. The NGLCC is the exclusive, third-party cer-

tifying body which verifies that eligible businesses are majority-owned by LGBT individuals.

Each of these NGLCC certified businesses must fulfill these criteria:

- Majority (at least 51%) owned, operated, managed, and controlled by an LGBT person or persons who are either U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents;
- Exercises independence from any non-LGBT business enterprise;
- Has its principal place of business (headquarters) in the United States; and
- Has been formed as a legal entity in the United States.

By becoming a certified LGBTBE, businesses can create and sustain relationships with America's leading corporations, generate prospective business and clients, and collectively team with each other for contracting opportunities.

As corporate America becomes more inclusive and further diversifies its supply chain, certification offers the opportunity for LGBT-owned businesses to differentiate themselves from their competitors.



Icons created by Freepik from flaticon.com

YEARS IN BUSINESS

Lifetime of LGBTBEs

LGBT individuals are often considered strongly entrepreneurial. For many, it may be challenging to be open and honest in a large corporation or enterprise. It's not surprising that some, therefore, choose to start their own businesses and map their own futures. Some also gravitate to smaller businesses that allow more freedom of expression and a more diverse culture.

Experience also tells us that over half of business start-ups fail in the first five years. According to the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, however, the average lifetime for the 909 certified LGBTBEs is 12 years. Remarkably, 135 LGBTBEs report that they were founded over two decades ago, and one long-established LGBTBE today has a pedigree beginning nearly a century ago in 1919.



AGE OF LGBTBEs BY YEAR

Age of Business	Number of Certified LGBTBEs
0-1 year	81
2-5 years	242
6-10 years	210
11-20 years	229
21 years or over	135

Note: These categories do not add up to 909 total since a number of companies have not yet disclosed the year of their founding.

WHERE WE WORK

Geography of LGBTBEs

Certified LGBTBEs are found throughout the U.S.

Not surprisingly however, there are 5 states today that appear to have a disproportionate concentration of LGBTBEs, these states represent more than a third of the nation's total population:

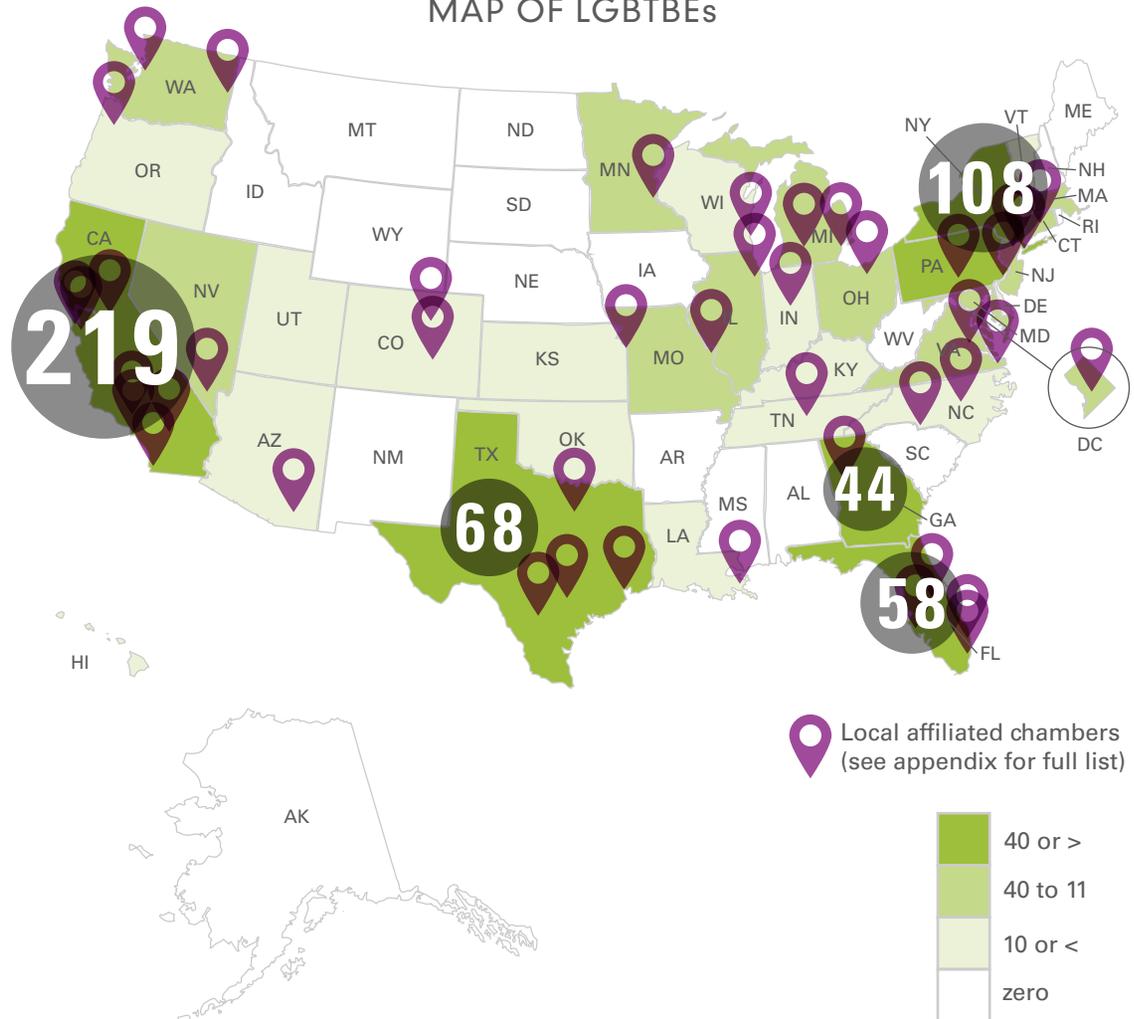
State	Number of Certified LGBTBEs
California	219
New York	108
Texas	68
Florida	58
Georgia	44

In 2016, 909 certified LGBTBEs are found in 37 U.S. states and Washington, D.C.



While the NGLCC grows throughout the United States, this representation does not include 11 Global Affiliates. See appendix for more details.

MAP OF LGBTBEs



WHAT WE DO

Varieties of LGBTBEs

LGBTBEs follow their customers, their inspirations and their ambitions by creating businesses in every industry from architecture and apparel to real estate and technology. Other industries include legal affairs, manufacturing, insurance and human resources.

By concentration, we find the largest industries for LGBTBEs include:

Type of Business	Number of Certified LGBTBEs
Consulting (general)	99
Marketing	90
Professional Services (general)	81
Events	48
Media	43
Legal	40

The most common North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Codes for the 909 LGBTBEs are for Management Consulting Services, Marketing Consulting Services, Graphic Design Services, and Motion Picture & Video Production. Note that 110 LGBTBEs did not report any NAICS Codes.

IF YOU CAN BUY IT, AN LGBTBE CAN SUPPLY IT.

In addition to the major sectors identified here, LGBTBEs are also found in Construction, Waste Management, Bus and Transportation Fleet Management, Government-level IT, Defense Contracting and Food & Beverage. This includes Equator Coffee & Teas, the first ever LGBT owned company to be named SBA Small Business of the Year.



OUR BUSINESS STRUCTURES

How LGBTBEs are Formed and Number of Employees

The Small Business Administration reports that America's average business generates over \$1.1 million in sales annually and has more than 4 employees.

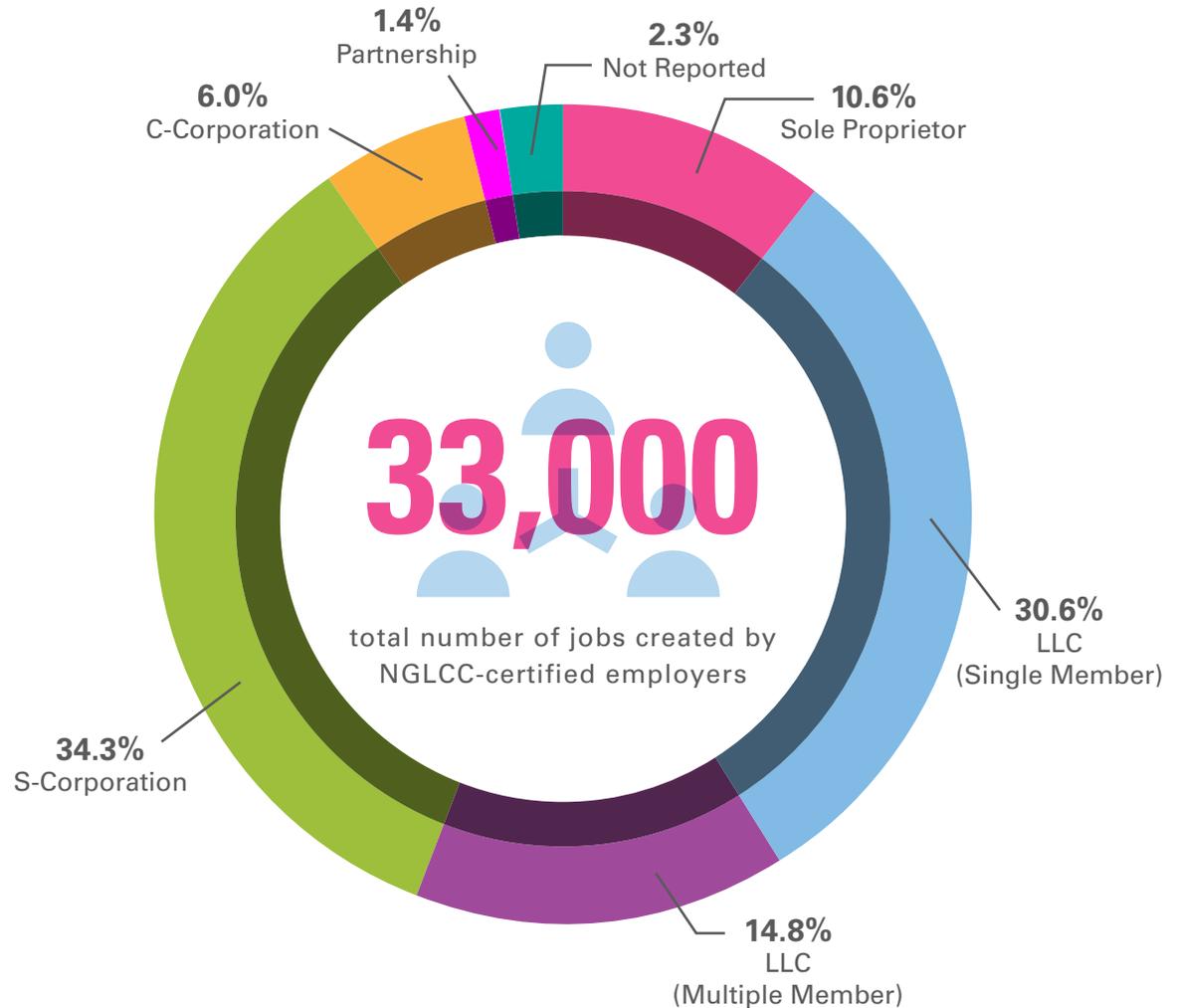
For certified LGBTBEs, today we know that our 909 companies — specifically those reporting employees — have a range of **1** to **24,311** employees. [Note that not all 909 companies reported their actual number of employees.]

Significantly, the total number for all jobs created by NGLCC-certified employers is more than 33,000 — and growing.

Businesses, of course, can take several different legal structures depending on the owners' needs, preferences, circumstances and ambitions. The nation's certified LGBTBEs are structured as follows:

Legal Structure	Number of Certified LGBTBEs
Sole Proprietor	97
LLC (Single Member)	279
LLC (Multiple Members)	135
S-Corporation	312
C-Corporation	55
Partnership	13

STRUCTURE OF THE 909 LGBTBEs

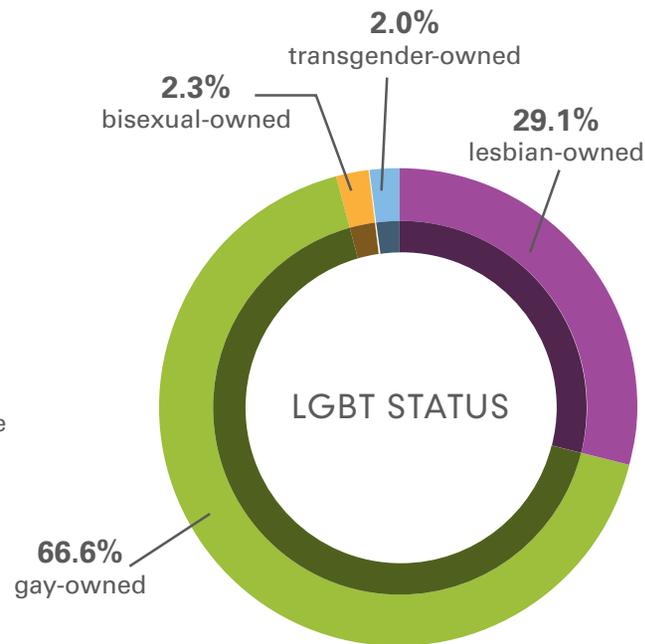


WHO WE ARE

Demographics of LGBT Business Owners

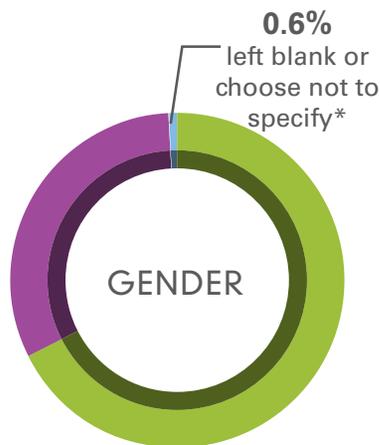
Business owners and entrepreneurs come from all walks of life, and in many ways mirror American life — and our economy. We see, however, that there is still a majority of gay and bisexual white male-owned businesses, but there are growing numbers of diverse business owners across race, ethnicity, and gender.

Among today's 909 certified LGBT business owners, here is the composition we find:



“The NGLCC created and spearheads the National Business Inclusion Consortium (NBIC) to foster business opportunities among all major diverse communities, including women, people of color, and business owners with disabilities. All diverse communities have LGBT people within them, and our work has proven that an equal seat at the table for LGBT business owners is helping draw in entrepreneurs at the intersection of LGBT and other diversities. We expect to see the number of diverse, LGBT-owned businesses continue to rise as business owners seek multiple certifications that allow them to maximize the power of their diversity.”

JUSTIN NELSON
Co-Founder & President

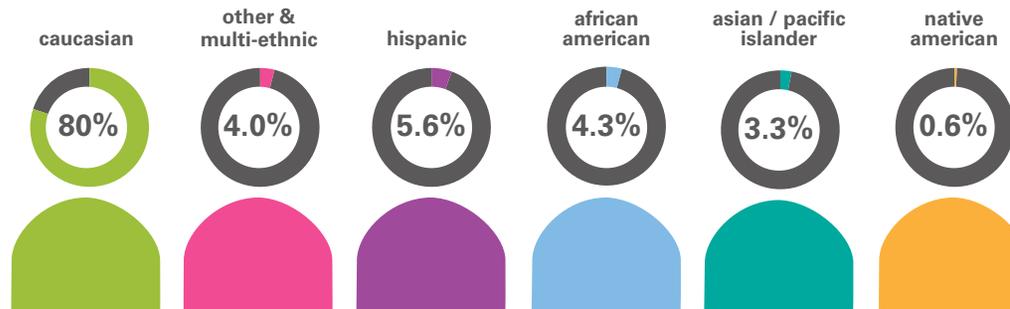



31.8%
female*


67.6%
male*

*Of the owners, 1.8% identified as transgender.

RACE AND ETHNICITY



Note: Of the owners, 1.5 % left the question blank.

Note that many diverse suppliers today also participate in other programs specifically serving women, people with disabilities, people of color and ethnically diverse business owners. That is why the NGLCC has spearheaded the formation of the National Business Inclusion Consortium (NBIC) to bring together these diverse communities.

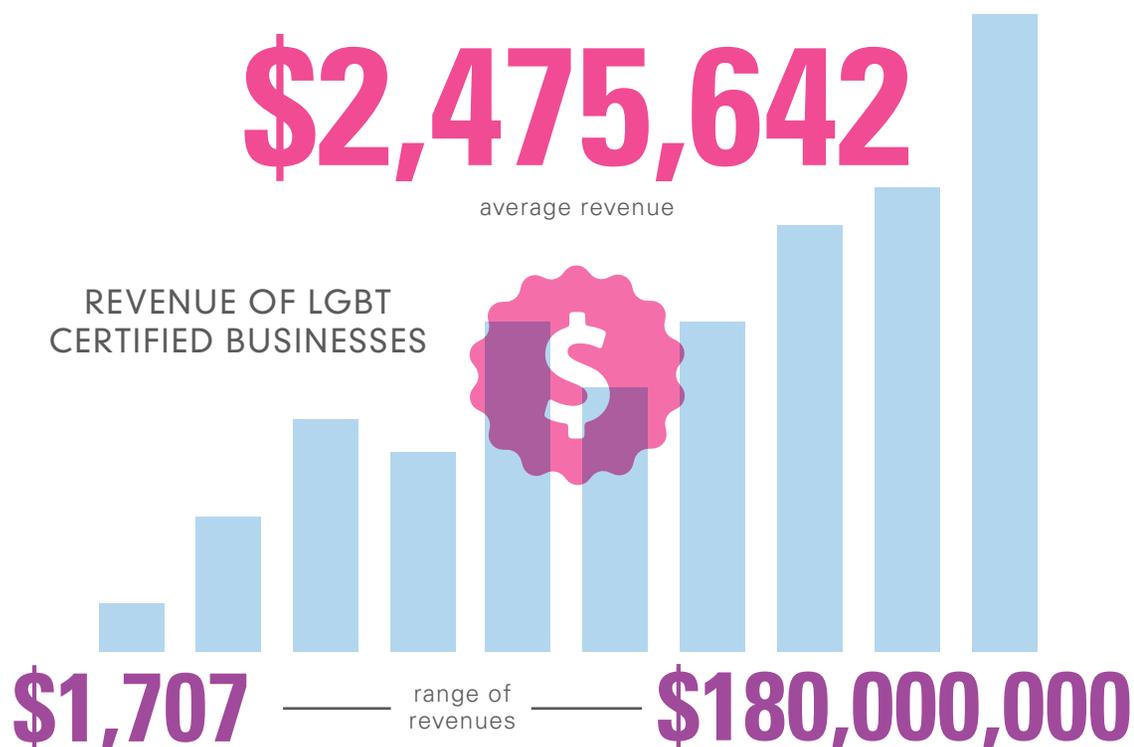
WHAT WE EARN

Revenue for LGBTBEs

Roughly half of the 909 certified LGBTBEs confidentially shared annual revenue estimates with the NGLCC. Based on this financial snapshot, we estimate today that on average certified LGBTBEs report annual revenue of \$2,475,642.

With a broad range starting at \$1,707 in revenue and rising to a high of \$180 million, LGBTBEs with reported earnings show a remarkable gamut. Therefore, if we presume an average of \$2,475,642 in annual revenues across all certified LGBTBEs – the total annual earnings of America's LGBT certified business owners is conservatively estimated at more than \$1.15 billion.

Keep in mind that America's estimated LGBT buying power in 2015 was **\$917 BILLION** – magnifying the contributions of thousands of LGBT entrepreneurs and the millions of American households and families they serve.



If all estimated LGBT-owned businesses in America are projected, their contribution to the economy exceeds

\$1.7 TRILLION

UP CLOSE

Now that you've seen the national profile of America's LGBTBEs, who are a few of the individuals who lead these companies and who create these jobs?

Take a glimpse at the 6 brief stories that follow.

These are merely a handful of the hundreds of unique individuals who are out, proud, and dedicated to a job well done. Each one reminds us of the strengths and differences that define our diverse LGBT community. Each one represents the appetite for success and the rewards that come from America's natural competitiveness.

Most of all, each one represents a different certified LGBTBE, and all are proud members of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.



CONNIE ENGLERT

Principal & Managing Director
TrueNorth Transit Group

First, tell us a little about you.

I've been in transportation for over 25 years, mostly public transportation with MTA New York City Transit, MBTA Boston, Amtrak and some work with United Airlines and JetBlue Airways. I'm a complete transportation geek.

I'm also a very open and proud transgender person – later in life. I love advocating for the broad spectrum of identities and mentoring younger folks getting started in both business and life.

I am now a fabulously ordinary woman living on a mountain top hanging out with my dog – and I hope to start roller derby.

Now, tell us about your business.

We operate regional public transportation services for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (MassDOT). Think big buses, the kind that we operate on long distance routes that link rural and small urban centers with our larger regional cities. Every facet of operations – from scheduling, to marketing, to feasibility studies, we are there. We are unique in the business as we both plan service and operate it.

How did you get started?

I started when I was fifteen in rural central California

when I worked at a feed store which was also the Greyhound bus station. I used to sell tickets, pull freight, and do the accounting. In our small town, I could not be my queer self. I took the bus and train to Los Angeles to visit my grandparents and I traveled extensively on the LA RTD buses.

During my Vassar College years, I worked the sleeping cars on Amtrak long distance trains out of New York to New Orleans, Chicago and Atlanta. I then interned with MTA New York, where I ended up with the bus division.

Who are your customers?

MassDOT contracts with us to operate routes on behalf of their riders. These are the most important customers we serve, who come from some of the poorest and most at risk areas and populations of the state. We serve as a lifeline and transportation link between remote areas of our state and major cities, welcoming veterans, the elderly, college students and the transient homeless.

What inspired you to be an entrepreneur?

My earliest inspiration was simply to have a job and keep some decent health insurance. Transgender health benefits continue to be challenging. When serving at my last bus company, it became clear that transitioning would have been an absolute disaster.

Having worked in both the public and private sector, I have worked with organizations that function very well, and others that always struggle. My inspiration is building a professional team proud of our work, our dedication to invest back into the LGBT community, and our commitment to make pathways for growth for every team member.

What excites you and makes you proud?

We are a social entrepreneurship serving our public. At the same time, we advocate vigorously our gender and sexual diversities while forever staying true to our goals of equality, expressive freedom and access

“We serve as a lifeline and transportation link between remote areas of our state and major cities, welcoming veterans, the elderly, college students and the transient homeless.”



Photo Credit: TrueNorth Transit Group

to care. Who wouldn't be excited about an organization that brings out the best in our people, and shares success with everyone?

We served as a major sponsor in our Northampton Pride celebrations. Instead of remaining silent on the sidelines, I was overwhelmed to march in front of our bus. As one of the few openly trans* owned businesses, it was a major milestone for our transgender movement.

What keeps you awake at night?

Access to capital. As a new start-up, we have no access to grow our business today. We face a three year wait for SBA eligible loans. While our financials are good, our assets are few, which makes it tough.

What does being a certified LGBTBE mean to you?

As one of the only and perhaps largest openly transgender owned and certified firms, I am immensely proud to represent our community and to encourage others to reach for their own dreams, especially our emerging leaders. Being NGLCC certified is an amazing testament to so much hard work that went into getting this enterprise off the ground. Our certification is a powerful tool for us to work with national private sector diverse supplier programs for the very first time, and to open doors that have been locked to us.



NIKKI BARUA

Chief Executive Officer
BeyondCurious

First, tell us a little about you.

I grew up in Mumbai, India where both of my parents are teachers who raised me to be bold and independent in my thoughts and actions. I believed that America is where my big dreams could come true. So in 1997, I came to the United States to study and attend business school, and to launch a consulting career. I was very fortunate to build my career at the height of the tech boom and jumped in with both feet into the world of digital, which has the power to democratize access to information and opportunity.

Now, tell us about your business.

Businesses today face constant change – whether it's the competitive landscape, technology or customer needs. Yet most big enterprises struggle to be agile and adaptive and, instead are at risk of getting disrupted. BeyondCurious helps large enterprises innovate like startups and rapidly transform with digital. We craft the strategies and build the digital products that help them gain marketplace momentum. Simply put, we are in the business of making elephants run!

My journey as an entrepreneur has reinforced for me what I learned as a young child – dream big and never give up.

How did you get started?

I founded our company in October 2011 with no clients, no case studies and barely any capital. Every day I reached out to 20-30 contacts introducing my company and sharing my vision. And, every day I faced rejection from the majority, if not all, of those 20 to 30 contacts. Until finally, the breakthrough that I knew would surface through sheer persistence presented itself from a company based in Boston. Finally, the company earned revenue and it became a real business! Every win since then has been based on the same fundamentals – being relentless, doing great work, and earning the advocacy of satisfied clients.

Who are your customers?

Our customers are Fortune 1000 companies across industries such as manufacturing, automotive, consumer electronics, healthcare, financial services, travel & hospitality, and high tech. We help large enterprises transform with digital strategies.

What inspired you to be an entrepreneur?

I found my purpose! After tremendous personal setbacks, I finally discovered what drives me – being the catalyst that unlocks the limitless potential of people. I needed a platform that would enable me to have massive impact. That's why I founded BeyondCurious – to be the change agent that helps transform people and organizations. Through my role as an entrepreneur, I have been able to touch the lives of people within my company and far beyond it. I feel lucky that I wake up every morning and do what I love – and end each day knowing that I was able to live my purpose.

What excites you and makes you proud?

BeyondCurious was founded with almost no resources – just a big vision to be a change agent. Today, it has become renowned as an innovation agency, earned the trust of leading brands, and won awards. None of this would be possible without my incredible team. We feel lucky that no matter what comes our



Photo Credit: Nikki Barua / BeyondCurious

way; we persevere and overcome the hurdles. That, and our diversity is what fuels our innovation.

What keeps you awake at night?

I am lucky to have extremely high risk tolerance so there isn't much about the business or market uncertainty that keeps me up at night. It's all part of running a business. We all need to recognize that failure is just a stepping stone to get to the next level. The most important thing is never giving up. What really scares me though is the thought of building a business without purpose or soul. I believe that businesses exist to create social impact not just generate profits. BeyondCurious is built on this belief and it's what drives us every single day in what we do and the choices we make.

What does being a certified LGBTBE mean to you?

BeyondCurious is in the business of innovation fueled by diversity which also needs visible role models and success stories. The NGLCC certification creates visibility for LGBT businesses. Visibility creates awareness. Awareness leads to acceptance. And widespread acceptance ends discrimination. You can't change hearts, minds and attitudes, if you are invisible.

This certification is also another avenue for large enterprises to find talent and innovative business partners such as BeyondCurious. This gives LGBT entrepreneurs the same economic opportunities available to other minority-owned Business Enterprises.



THOMAS SANCHEZ

Founder & CEO
Social Driver

ANTHONY SHOP

Co-Founder & CSO
Social Driver

First, tell us a little about you.

We co-founded Social Driver six years ago when we first moved from the Midwest to the Nation’s Capital, not knowing a single person. Neither of us came from families with access to capital or to any meaningful professional connections. It’s no surprise that when we first went to bankers to seek a loan, we were told point-blank that we were not eligible. After six years, however, and with a team of 40 and zero debt, we know today that hard work can achieve unimaginable results.

Now, tell us about your business.

Social Driver is a digital marketing agency that helps companies connect with people through social media campaigns, websites and video, uses social-fueled strategies to drive next-generation results. In the 21st century, people are writing real-time biographies online. Social Driver helps companies understand their audiences and find valuable ways to become part of the stories they are already telling. We love connecting audiences online through social media campaigns, websites and data visualizations.

How did you get started?

It began with Thomas’ background and expertise in technology, as well as his decision to leave the security of a global firm. Together with Anthony’s communications and PR background, we realized the marketing landscape was changing quickly, and traditional approaches did not effectively leverage technology to keep up.

Who are your customers?

Social Driver works with major brands such as Honda North America, Accenture, ACT and American Hospital Association, as well as campaigns in partnership with NASA, AT&T, Google and Intel, as well as from education and healthcare sectors.

What inspired you to be an entrepreneur?

Anthony draws his spirit of entrepreneurship from his grandfather, who owned and operated a filling station in the 1940s. We know his grandfather’s success was built on strong, personal relationships – the very same interconnectedness that fueled the drive to start our own business.

Thanksgiving dinner actually sparked Thomas’ passion. When Thomas realized he was to host our family’s dinner for the first time, he turned to the new website, YouTube, to teach him how to prepare our Butterball turkey to perfection. He was hooked, not on cooking, but on the power of digital innovation and the expanding Internet to achieve remarkable outcomes in business and throughout communities.

What excites you and makes you proud?

Our values excite us: we believe the “future is bright,” that “all progress is social,” and it is the “drivers that make history.” It’s hard to express our excitement knowing one of our clients was first in their industry to incorporate social media into their government affairs strategy, or that another was first to use interactive data visualizations to allow students, teachers, families and community leaders to compare schools in their districts side-by-side.



“We are optimists, and we believe in the power of social technology to make people’s lives better.”

Photo Credit: Social Driver

What keeps you awake at night?

We are born optimists, and we believe in the power of social technology to make people’s lives better. Social media is a powerful tool for connection, of course, but it also can lead to some people, especially the most vulnerable, feeling isolated. We want to help combat anxiety and isolation among young people, and found we can do that by supporting the Trevor Project, the leading national group providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ young people, and LearnServe International locally.

What does being a certified LGBTBE mean to you?

The LGBT community has contributed immeasurably to our success. From mentorships to NGLCC business networking opportunities, our work depends on our community and our relationships. Our LGBTBE certification is our declaration that we are proud to be a part of this vital business community, value the contributions it’s given us, and are dedicated to giving back to causes we care about and the LGBT community.



DAVE IMRE
Partner & CEO
IMRE

First, tell us a little about you.

I feel I am a lucky guy, and married to my partner of 31 years. We live on a small “farmette” north of Baltimore, Maryland that we share with goats, chickens and two dogs.

Now, tell us about your business.

I began a full service marketing agency 24 years ago in my basement.

Through years of hard work and a certain amount of luck, we’ve grown to 85 people and a \$14.5 million enterprise that is proud to serve customers such as John Deere, Pepsi, Toyota, Wells Fargo, AstraZenica and other top brands.

How did you get started?

I simply thought I could create a “better agency” by really listening to our customers, as well as recruiting and retaining top talent and delivering results. That model continues today and continues to resonate.

Who are your customers?

We are very fortunate to work with top brands in consumer products, financial services and healthcare.

What inspired you to be an entrepreneur?

To be honest, it was not so much a desire to be an entrepreneur, but a desire not to work for someone else and follow a path that I saw as flawed. I thought I could create a better agency, and of course, wanted to do it my way.

What excites you and makes you proud?

I get excited the minute the elevator door opens every morning, especially when I come face to face with 84 smart, talented, and passionate individuals. I’m most inspired by the people I work with and the clients who trust us.



Photo Credit: Dave Imre / IMRE

“I get excited the minute the elevator door opens every morning, especially when I come face to face with 84 smart, talented, and passionate individuals. I’m most inspired by the people I work with and the clients who trust us.”

What keeps you awake at night?

I am constantly thinking of the next new thing. Where should we place our “bets” for the future? How will we keep the enterprise expanding? Where are things going and how can we get there before anyone else? And, always, how do we keep the best talent?

What does being a certified LGBTBE mean to you?

To be honest, I was not sure that being an LGBT-certified business was important to me or my business when I first thought about it. However, I have found it to be an important differentiator and one means to propel our growth. It’s also personally rewarding to me that I can truly be myself as a LGBT business owner and show a possible ROI as well, which is a unique gift for a 59-year-old entrepreneur, since that has not always been the case for me.



JAMES NOWLIN

CEO & Managing Principal
Excel Global Partners and
The EGP Family of Companies

First, tell us a little about you.

I began as a corporate attorney in a large firm, however in 2007 I switched direction by launching Excel Global Partners (EGP). My partner is the COO and CFO and together our brains balance each other to create a great combination of skills. What an amazing journey working with my spouse day to day to map our success. We also have a daughter on the way, which thrills and reminds us of what’s really important in life.

Now, tell us about your business.

EGP performs services in more than 15 countries by providing executive-level consulting services in three areas: finance and accounting consulting; management consulting and business strategies; and finally, financial systems and data information technologies.

Over the past year, the success of Excel Global Partners led to the investment in and development of other lines of successful business to create ‘The EGP Family of Companies’, which includes EGP Private Equity, EGP Eco, EGP Real Estate, EGP Solutions.

Day to day, I lead our vision and strategy for all our businesses, and enjoy being the relationship manager for several of our corporate accounts. On any day, due

to the high speed pace of our work, I am communicating with several different clients.

How did you get started?

I have always wanted to be a business owner. That became clear to me when I left medical school and then exited the legal professional, to satisfy my hunger to work for myself. In retrospect, starting in 2007 during our nation’s worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, actually gave me the grit and experience to successfully navigate the years ahead, and to make smart, conservative choices that always put the business first.

Who are your customers?

Our clients generally are Fortune 500, mid-market companies, state and federal government agencies, or large non-profits. EGP touches many industries including telecommunications, healthcare, higher education, environmental, pharmaceutical, automotive, petrochemical, information technology, professional services, manufacturing, and more.

What inspired you to be an entrepreneur?

I am truly an “ideas” person and my mind is always churning with business opportunities and thoughts regarding how to improve and implement best practices. Even when I am out at dinner at a restaurant, my mind is in high gear just thinking of creative ways to improve the restaurant’s workflow, processes, and financial performance. In addition, business leadership and strategy came to me naturally, unlike medicine and legal work which drained me. Entrepreneurialism has always been natural and fun for me.

What excites you and makes you proud?

Our employees. I know that without our employees, and the customers that they serve and please on a daily basis, that we would not be in business. Our employees go the extra mile for our firm because they are fully empowered to make decisions that contribute to successful outcomes. We strive to achieve minimal



“From my experience, I believe that leaders succeed in business when they are honest, do not take shortcuts, and always travel the high road.”

*Photo Credit: Excel Global Partners and The EGP Family of Companies
James Nowlin with his business partner, John Sheldon.*

bureaucracy and hard work, balanced by light-heartedness and a truly supportive, fun workplace.

What keeps you awake at night?

My neighbor’s barking dog. Other than that, I am able to sleep well each night because we truly live up to our value of “always do the right thing.” From my experience, I believe that leaders succeed in business when they are honest, do not take shortcuts, and always travel the high road.

What does being a certified LGBTBE mean to you?

It says that we are not only proud of the work that we do, but that we are proud of who we are. When I am sitting at a boardroom table with a client, I offer them myself and my team without boundaries. Diversity is critical to our success and we know that a high-performing diverse workforce is a significant competitive advantage for our firm. Being proud of who we are inspires a spirit of authenticity and honesty. Our business has grown because of that authenticity, honesty, and hard work. And for that, I am very proud.



LES BURLESON

President
VersaPro Group

First, tell us a little about you.

My family is great pride for me. Along with Michael Sinicropi, my supportive partner and co-parent of 16 years, we now have the privilege of seeing our three daughters—Lacy, Cari Beth, and Katherine--grow into brilliant young women. Over the years, we have added a granddaughter and grandson to our numbers. Now we know that everything we heard about becoming grandparents is true.

Now, tell us about your business.

Our clients rely on VersaPro Group to provide guidance in financial and audit support services, business and training solutions, as well as ERP (also known as Enterprise Resource Planning) support throughout all phases of implementation.

VersaPro Group supports executive-level government comptrollers, CFOs, and financial managers in audit services, financial oversight and financial analysis. Our skill set expansion is exciting considering we started out as an ERP training company only.

How did you get started?

We all know that relationships matter and that is how VersaPro was founded. I met my business partners in 2008 while working on a Department of Defense (DoD)

ERP-training project together. They founded VersaPro Group and soon invited me on board. Since then, we have grown significantly, and today we find that training is only a small part of what we do.

Due to our business ties, VersaPro Group landed our first ERP training gig as a defense contractor. Because our customers understood the importance of solid training for the users, we made a name for ourselves across Defense Department financial systems. I think our success relies on a partnership of mutual respect.

Who are your customers?

VersaPro Group spends the majority of our time serving the United States Defense Department. We value this relationship because of the gravity of their work. In other words, we exercise the same stewardship over the tax dollars they spend and feel the deep responsibility inherent in the military missions they support.

What inspired you to be an entrepreneur?

I give credit to my business partners Patrick McGinley and Matthew Graham for lighting the spark. My father, Walter Burleson, also had entrepreneurial gifts with our family’s humble beginnings in the farming community of Portales, New Mexico. My father knew how to foster relationships that allowed him to sell goods and services to other farmers, and I grew up watching him master those talents.

What excites you and makes you proud?

To our knowledge, we are the only LGBTBE-certified company, which also happens to be a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB). I’m also proud that VersaPro people have built and sustained our defense contracting business through years of growth and uncertainty.

I feel pride knowing VersaPro allows our people to support their own families, pay their mortgages; and not surprisingly, most stay with us year after year. I couldn’t be prouder of them.



Photo Credit: Les Burleson / VersaPro Group
Les Burleson with his daughter, Cari Beth Burleson.

What keeps you awake at night?

A few things cross my mind at 2am. Naturally I worry about missing opportunities, how the economy affects businesses like VersaPro, and meeting our clients’ needs. Most projects generate more to-do items on my list than I care to count. It feels like a high-wire balancing act.

What does being a certified LGBTBE mean to you?

Our first motivation, of course, was to grow our networks and land more work. We have met so many friends and role models through NGLCC, and we always are impressed by the corporations that support NGLCC’s mission and the work they do.

However, as a defense contractor, I was understandably cautious that an LGBT business enterprise certified supplier might not be well received by our Defense clients. Then, last year at the NGLCC National Dinner, I met Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning. At that time, I had the chance to shake his hand and explain to him then, as Acting Secretary of the Army, exactly how meaningful it was to us to know that an openly gay leader is at the Pentagon paving the way for the rest of us.

The National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce is proud to work with an extended network of local U.S. affiliated chambers, including these 44 leading LGBT chambers. Keep in mind that while membership is local, certification is national.

Chamber	City	State	Website
Atlanta Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Atlanta	GA	atlantagaychamber.org
Austin Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Austin	TX	aglcc.org
West Michigan LGBT Chamber of Commerce	Battle Creek	MI	wmlgbtcc.com
Charlotte LGBT Chamber of Commerce	Charlotte	NC	clgbtcc.org
LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois	Chicago	IL	lgbtcc.com
Plexus	Cleveland	OH	thinkplexus.org
Equality Chamber of Commerce of Colorado Springs	Colorado Springs	CO	springsequality.org
North Texas GLBT Chamber of Commerce	Dallas	TX	glbtchamber.com
Denver Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Denver	CO	denverglc.org
Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce	Detroit	MI	detroitlgbtchamber.com
Greater Fort Lauderdale Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Fort Lauderdale	FL	gogayfortlauderdale.com
Central Pennsylvania Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Harrisburg	PA	cpglcc.org
Connecticut Gay & Lesbian Chamber	Hartford	CT	ctglc.org
Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce	Houston	TX	houstonlgbtchamber.com
Indy Rainbow Chamber	Indianapolis	IN	gayindynow.com
Mid-America Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Kansas City	MO	maglcc.org
Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce Nevada	Las Vegas	NV	glccnv.org
Long Beach Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Long Beach	CA	lbcbn.com
Miami-Dade Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Miami	FL	gaybizmiami.com
Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce	Milwaukee	WI	wislgbtchamber.com
Twin Cities Quorum	Minneapolis	MN	twincitiesquorum.com
Nashville LGBT Chamber of Commerce	Nashville	TN	nashvillelgbtchamber.org

Chamber	City	State	Website
Gulf South Chamber	New Orleans	LA	gulfsouthchamber.com
NGLCCNY	New York	NY	nglccny.org
Hampton Roads Business OutReach	Norfolk	VA	hrbor.org
MBA Orlando	Orlando	FL	mbaorlando.org
Desert Business Association	Palm Springs	CA	desertbusinessassociation.org
Independence Business Alliance	Philadelphia	PA	thinkIBA.com
Portland Area Business Association	Portland	OR	paba.com
Raleigh Business & Professional Network	Raleigh	NC	raleighnetwork.org
Richmond Business Alliance	Richmond	VA	richmondbusinessalliance.com
Sacramento Rainbow Chamber of Commerce	Sacramento	CA	rainbowchamber.com
San Antonio LGBT Chamber of Commerce	San Antonio	TX	salgbt.org
Greater San Diego Business Association	San Diego	CA	gsdba.org
Golden Gate Business Association	San Francisco	CA	ggba.com
Greater Seattle Business Association	Seattle	WA	thegsba.org
Inland Northwest Business Alliance	Spokane	WA	inbaspokane.org
Gateway Buisness Guild	St. Louis	MO	gatewaybusinessguild.org
Tampa Bay Diversity Chamber of Commerce	St. Petersburg	FL	tbglcc.org
Rainbow Chamber of Commerce Silicon Valley	Sunnyvale	CA	rainbowchamber.org
Tucson GLBT Chamber of Commerce	Tucson	AZ	tucsonglbtchamber.org
Capital Area Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	Washington	DC	caglcc.org
New Jersey LGBT Chamber of Commerce	Wayne	NJ	njlgbtchamber.org
Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce	West Hollywood	CA	laglcc.org

The National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce proudly partners with a growing number of international LGBT affiliate chambers representing more than 11 nations and found on 5 continents.

Chamber	City	Country	Website
Cámara de Comercio Gay Lésbica Argentina (CCGLAR)	Buenos Aires	Argentina	ccglar.or
Gay and Lesbian Organization of Business and Enterprise (GLOBE)	Melbourne	Australia	globemelbourne.com.au
Canadian Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC)	Toronto	Canada	cglcc.ca
East meets West (EmW)	Vienna	Central and Eastern Europe	eastmeetswest.eu
Cámara de Comerciantes LGBT de Colombia (CCLGBTco)	Bogotá	Colombia	cclgbt.co
Cámara de Comercio Diversa Costa Rica (CCDCR)	San José	Costa Rica	ccdcr.org
Cámara de Comercio LGBT de la República Dominicana (CCLGBTRD)	Santo Domingo	Dominican Republic	facebook.com/cclgbtrd
Federación Mexicana de Empresarios LGBT (FME-LGBT)	Mexico City	Mexico	fmeigbt.mx
Cámara de Comercio GLBT Peruana (CCGLPE)	Lima	Peru	ccglpe.org
The Other Foundation	Johannesburg	South Africa	theotherfoundation.org
Cámara de Comercio y Negocios LGBT de Uruguay (CCNLGBTU)	Montevideo	Uruguay	camaralgbtuguay.com

“The NGLCC certification creates visibility for LGBT businesses. Visibility creates awareness. Awareness leads to acceptance. And widespread acceptance ends discrimination. You can’t change hearts, minds and attitudes, if you are invisible.”

NIKKI BARUA

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