
PART III

ENGAGING LGBTI
COMMUNITIES

Engaging LGBTI Communities

1. LGBTI Communities Around the World

Like LGBTI people themselves, LGBTI community organizations can be found in any country where there is an active civil society, including countries that are in armed conflict, located remotely, and where LGBTI people face possible criminal prosecution. The members of ILGA World – the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association – include more than 1,500 organizations in more than 166 countries, including regional organizations whose work includes multiple countries (International Lesbian, Gay 2018). The most recent report of global funding for LGBTI organizations shows that institutional donors made roughly 3,200 grants to groups in the global south and east, the majority coming from governments and multilateral agencies (Global Philanthropy Project and Funders for LGBTQ Issues 2020).

2. Benefits of Engagement

Understanding the potential benefits of engagement with local communities will help set goals and expectations for interactions with LGBTI CSOs. What follows are a few potential benefits of engagement with LGBTI CSOs.

EXPERTISE ABOUT LGBTI POPULATIONS. LGBTI people are themselves the best experts in their own lives. This is particularly true given the general lack of data about LGBTI populations. Because LGBTI people have faced attempts by others to define and characterize them, LGBTI communities have become primary sources of information about their own lived experience. Communities should be consulted regarding questions of how to describe, refer to, define, and classify LGBTI individuals.

PROGRAM/RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION. LGBTI people can help identify needs and priorities of LGBTI people and assess what interventions might meet those needs.

DEVELOP LGBTI SPECIFIC MATERIALS. LGBTI people can assist in the creation or review of materials targeting the LGBTI community.

OUTREACH AND VISIBILITY. After LGBTI organizations become familiar with your programs, they can provide referrals and enhance outreach efforts.

ADVOCACY. Local LGBTI organizations are familiar with the issues relevant to advocacy priorities related to LGBTI people, and have often formulated their own strategy for achieving advocacy goals. LGBTI organizations can help guide others who want to support these goals.

JOINT PROGRAMMING. Engaging in workshops, panels, sign-on letters, joint publications, and other joint programming can provide excellent opportunities to establish working relationships with LGBTI communities.

SAFE SPACE. LGBTI people are often in need of safe spaces for meetings, programs, and organizational sponsorships.

3. Accessing the LGBTI Community

In some countries, identifying and reaching out to local LGBTI groups involves little more than an internet search and a few emails. In other places, social and structural stigma requires LGBTI groups to be more cautious about limiting access from the general public. In either case, LGBTI groups are often well connected to other sectors of civil society in countries in which they operate, especially other civil society groups that focus on human rights. Thus, accessing the LGBTI community often begins with accessing the knowledge and relationships of allied organizations in a particular country.

A recent survey of CanWaCH members shows that CanWaCH partner organizations have already acquired such knowledge and relationships on a local level. Half of the partner organizations responding to the survey either consider themselves part of the LGBTI community and its allies or are in regular communication with members of the LGBTI community. Another thirteen percent said that they would know who to reach out to if they needed additional contact with the LGBTI community.

CanWaCH members seeking to establish new ties to LGBTI groups have a number of opportunities:

CANADIAN EMBASSIES. Because of the Canadian government's global support for LGBTI issues, the staff of Canadian embassies are a source of information about the local community. Many embassies make small grants to local LGBTI organizations, monitor the human rights situation of LGBTI people, and seek to support and protect LGBTI communities through public diplomacy as well as targeted diplomatic actions.

OTHER EMBASSIES. The embassies of the largest bilateral funders of LGBTI issues are also engaging in local activities with LGBTI communities. These include Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Denmark, and the United States.

GLOBAL LGBTI ORGANIZATIONS. ILGA World (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), the global umbrella group for LGBTI organizations, has its headquarters office in Geneva, as well as six regional offices covering all parts of the world. Each regional office has extensive knowledge of local organizations. Each region also has a regular conference addressing issues relevant to that region. Additionally, several LGBTI Canadian organizations engage in international work, and many global human rights organizations have LGBTI programs. You can find more detailed information about these groups in the section entitled "Mapping of the LGBTI community/CSOs" of [Appendix III. Resources](#).

UN OFFICES. A number of UN agencies have ongoing relationships with local LGBTI communities. Many local LGBTI advocates have sought to use international human rights mechanisms, particularly in countries where local laws do not provide protection for LGBTI people. Globally, LGBTI advocates have sought to have LGBTI issues mainstreamed among the activities of UN agencies. Consequently, there is no central agency that addresses LGBTI issues nor is there a standardized approach to LGBTI issues among UN agencies. Some of the most active UN agencies include the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Development Programme, and UNAIDS. Staff in country and mission offices of UN agencies can be a productive source of information.

PRIVATE LGBTI FUNDERS. Foundations, philanthropic trusts, and charities have extensive knowledge of local organizations. For example, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, which supports a number of projects with CanWach partners, provides direct funding to more LGBTI organizations in the global south than any other funding entity. The American Jewish World Service, COC Netherlands, the Fund for Global Human Rights, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, the Open Society Foundations, the Urgent Action Fund, the Global Women’s fund and most regional Women’s Funds all maintain a large number of funding relationships with LGBTI groups (Global Philanthropy Project and Funders for LGBTQ Issues 2020). Program officers at these funders may be able to provide quick information about local LGBTI communities. You can find more detailed information about these groups in the section entitled “Mapping of the LGBTI community/CSOs” in [Appendix III. Resources](#).

4. Safety, Security, and Do No Harm

The principle of do no harm affirms that development activities must not put those living in fragile contexts at greater risk than they would otherwise face without intervention. Development practitioners need to understand the vulnerabilities faced by LGBTI people and constantly assess whether their activities accentuate these vulnerabilities.

A. Understand Risks Faced by LGBTI Communities

In many countries, LGBTI people are particularly vulnerable to violence and discrimination because of social and structural stigma. In addition, LGBTI people are constructive participants in useful social change efforts that challenge social and legal norms. Such efforts often trigger pushback from those seeking to maintain heteronormative and cisnormative standards. LGBTI people are often the focus of cultural, legal and geopolitical battles where they are scapegoats for unrelated social and economic anxieties. Because LGBTI issues can be sensationalized and distorted in the media, it is often challenging to assess the real magnitude of potential threats to the safety and health of LGBTI people.

Development activities may pose risks to individual LGBTI people as well as LGBTI communities. Raising the public visibility of LGBTI people, the spaces they occupy, and the issues that concern them may result in elevated risks. In some contexts, legal standards may constrain attempts to publicize, communicate or have meetings regarding LGBTI issues. On the other hand, many LGBTI communities have found that avoiding visibility results in isolation and vulnerability. For these communities, higher levels of visibility can help ward off attempts to target them. Establishing visible relationships with other sectors of society, domestically and internationally, has been a source of protection and accountability. Accordingly, one cannot assume that visibility is risky and discretion is more safe.

B. Rely on Local Communities to Assess Risks and Select Responses

The best method to accurately assess the vulnerabilities of LGBTI people and the risks associated with particular activities is to consult with local LGBTI communities and organizations. LGBTI people live with risks of violence and harassment every day, and quickly assessing and responding to threats becomes a habit. The LGBTI movement has prioritized issues of security threat assessment and security planning. Most LGBTI communities have become accustomed to analyzing security issues associated with maintaining safe organizational office space, transportation, hosting meetings and public activities, methods of communication, engaging in public awareness activities, presenting staff and similar issues. Many LGBTI advocates have already developed security plans, strategies and contingency plans. LGBTI advocates also recognize the need to work in coalition with allied individuals and organizations. As part of this, LGBTI communities have experience in advising others about potential risks and recommending strategies.

C. Observe Already-Existing Ethical Principles and Development Practices

Development practitioners should not lose sight of already-existing principles that may help guide the assessment of risks and benefits. Well-developed research ethical standards regarding human subject research provide guidance about the privacy, confidentiality and security of human subject data. In addition, organizational policies regarding diversity, professional conduct, and organizational mission can often serve as guiding principles when assessing risks and benefits. UN agencies, Canadian Embassies, and larger multinational organizations, as well as research ethics boards, may also have existing standards regarding do no harm.

5. Providing Inclusive Services

The following are suggested measures that organizations might consider when seeking to include LGBTI populations in their activities. These suggestions assume a certain degree of latitude in addressing LGBTI populations. In some settings, social hostility or legal restrictions may render certain activities inadvisable. Consulting with the local LGBTI community will help formulate an appropriate approach.

A. Point of Entry

- The entrance to the organization's facility portrays a safe and welcoming environment. Visible indications such as magazines, posters, stickers or other objects communicate that the organization welcomes LGBTI people.
- Organizational materials include a statement that LGBTI people & families are eligible for services & programs.
- The organization does not use unnecessary surveillance equipment to monitor clients.
- The reception area is configured to best ensure client privacy in completing documents or providing personal information to a staff members. In some contexts LGBTI people may fear discovery by non-LGBTI people in their own community. For example, LGBTI refugees may be receiving services in the same facilities that serve non-LGBTI people from their home country from which they are fleeing. Some organizations designate time outside of regular hours when LGBTI people can come for intake, interviews and services.
- All gender restrooms are available for staff & clients in all agency buildings and at off-site events.
- Intake forms should use inclusive and locally-based terms, use gender neutral language, allow people to self-identify their gender, gender options include (at a minimum) an "other" category, and forms recognize households other than husband and wife.
- Intake staff are trained to let the person guide them if they are unsure about how to address an individual. Intake staff feel comfortable asking "Am I using the term or pronoun you use for yourself?" or "How do you self-identify?"
- The organization has a policy related to confidentiality for clients which specifically includes confidentiality of information relating to sexual orientation and gender identity of LGBTI clients
- Programs that serve by gender (e.g. women-only, gay/bi men only, mom's group, etc.), affirm the client's self-reported gender identity, sexuality, and familial relationships
- Staff understand that LGBTI people may not initially be willing to disclose or discuss their sexuality or gender.
- Co-advocacy relationships have been developed with LGBTI-specific providers for purposes of referrals.

B. Human Resources

- The organization is committed to workforce diversity and equity across all levels of the organization.
- Employee training programs include workforce diversity.
- Job announcements encourage diverse applicants.
- Job candidates are screened for potential bias or training needs working with underserved communities, including LGBTI people.
- The organization's anti-discrimination policies & protocols include protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics.
- Healthcare insurance policies do not exclude transgender related healthcare.
- The organization has a standard procedure for name changes on employment-related documents.
- The organization has a written policy ensuring staff can use a preferred name at work.
- When LGBTI employees are sent on out-of-country assignments, issues relating to their safety are addressed in any pre-departure discussions, plans are in place to deal with security incidents as they arise, and local staff are trained regarding working with LGBTI people.
- Family-related workplace benefits (healthcare, funeral benefits, housing stipends) equitably include families of LGBTI people.
- All new staff receive information about the organization's commitment to workplace equity & social justice including LGBTI access. Job candidates and current employees understand that other employees may be LGBTI, are aware of organizational norms, and are trained regarding appropriate conduct.

C. Workplace Climate

- Workplace equity efforts explicitly incorporate LGBTI equity.
- Leadership participates in workplace equity efforts.
- Events and social activities (recreational, celebrations, fundraisers, etc.) engage and appeal to the diversity of staff and volunteers. Events are equitably attended by LGBTI families.
- There is an active LGBTI affinity group or network for staff, volunteers and board.

D. Services and Programs

- Develop an understanding of how LGBTI people are perceived within the community.
- The organization collects data to better understand the experiences of LGBTI individuals & communities in services and programs.
- Program materials have been made relevant to LGBTI individuals and communities. Some organizations create specific publications (information sheets, FAQ, etc.) that specifically target LGBTI clients.
- The organization routinely utilizes participant feedback to improve services and programs

- For support groups and other group programs, facilitators are equipped to respond to LGBTI bias among participants, curricula are analyzed for elements which may positively or negatively address LGBTI people.
- Programs for youth account for the possibility that youth are still exploring their sexuality and gender. Demonstrate an open attitude about gender and sexuality. Do not assume that youth are heterosexual. Similarly, do not assume that youth are distressed because of their sexuality or gender.

E. Housing/Detention

- Consider special accommodations for LGBTI people, particularly transgender people who face high levels of violence in shelters and communal housing situations. Allow transgender persons to choose the accommodations that they believe are safest for them.
- Depending on the context, LGBTI persons may need to be housed separately. Scattered-site housing may be safer than communal safe-houses.
- Place LGBTI people in an area nearer to staff to lower the risk of assault and harassment.
- Consider various options, schedules, and placement of sanitation/bathroom facilities, and use of portable sanitation equipment to lower risk of assault and harassment.

F. Development and Organizational Communications

- The organization recruits board members who are supportive of LGBTI issues, including LGBTI people themselves.
- Board training/orientation includes information about the organization's equity & social justice efforts, including the organization's commitment to LGBTI access.
- Organizational leadership can fluently communicate the organization's commitment to LGBTI access.
- Leadership will advocate on behalf of LGBTI communities in public forums.
- LGBTI content is included in the organization's communications (blogs, newsletter, etc.).
- The organization collaborates with local LGBTI-specific or LGBTI-friendly media.

G. Communication/Meetings

- The organization recruits board members who are supportive of LGBTI issues, including LGBTI people themselves.
- Be respectful when using terms related to sexual orientation and gender identity. See Appendix II. Style and Usage Guide.
- Include pronouns on name tags, meeting programs, and table cards.
- When unsure, ask people "what pronoun do you use?"
- Use gender neutral language when making remarks ("Welcome everyone." "Good morning folks.").

- ❑ If formal titles are used and you are unable to use a gender neutral title (e.g. M., Mx.), consider using function titles (“Attorney Martin.” “Commissioner Tremblay.”).
- ❑ When speaking on the phone, do not assume a person’s voice indicates their gender. Ask the person how they would like to be addressed.



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