

LGBTQ Inclusivity

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ)¹ youth may face discrimination in their communities, whether urban, suburban or rural. In addition to the struggles that some rural communities face overall, LGBTQ young people living in rural communities potentially also face multiple barriers accessing services and supports. In fact, according to a 2011 study, 65% of LGBT young people living in rural communities reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers, while 81% of the same young people felt unsafe in their schools.²

Organizations in rural communities that work with LGBTQ youth can enhance their effectiveness by creating safe(r), more welcoming and accessible programming. This can be done in multiple ways, from collaborating with LGBTQ organizations to speaking with members of these communities, or even something more basic like doing online research if in-person support is not an option. Below are some considerations to serve as a starting point:

Be Intentional With Your Outreach

- Program materials should include images of young people across the entirety of gender, racial and ethnic, ability and sexuality identity spectrums. Young people will be looking for indicators of support in outreach and promotional materials.
- Young people use technology to communicate, and online media is essential. Spread the word in person *and* online. LGBTQ youth may experience almost three times as much bullying and harassment online as non-LGBTQ youth, but they also spend more time, seek out medical and health information, and find greater peer support, online.³

Promote Respect and Inclusion

- Inclusion begins with respecting others' self-determination. Always use a person's self-identified gender pronouns⁴ (they, ze, she, he, etc.). Not sure about someone's pronoun(s)? Asking shows you care enough to respect their identity, and remember that some young people may still be in a place of self-discovery.
- Offer name tags at events with a space for writing pronoun(s): "I use ____" or "Please use ____," or have premade "He/His," "She/Hers," "They/Theirs," and blank stickers for people to wear. Lead by example and start programs off by discussing your own pronouns when introducing yourself. Discussing these options can be an easy way to open this door for additional conversations.

¹ As a measure of inclusivity, the authors use the acronym LGBTQ to include all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. We understand that identities are not limited to the terms represented by the letters in this acronym and aim to be representative of the entirety of identities across the queer spectrum. Select studies utilize the acronyms LGBT or LGB to denote the specific populations represented in those studies and are marked as such throughout this tip sheet.

² Palmer, N. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Bartkiewicz, M. J. (2012). *Strengths and Silences: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students in Rural and Small Town Schools*. New York: GLSEN. Retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/ruralreport>.

³ GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC (2013). *Out online: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth on the Internet*. New York: GLSEN. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from <http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Out Online FINAL.pdf>.

⁴ *The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students*. (2013). New York, New York: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. Retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/safespace>.

- Provide non-gendered restroom access. In one study, 44% of rural LGBTQ young people stated they avoided using restrooms in their schools because they felt unsafe.⁵ Before planning an event, ask the host site if they provide non-gendered, or private restrooms. If not, discuss options with them for making the space less gendered so that all attendees can use the restroom of their choosing.
- In rural communities, where location options may be limited, being open and creative with a host site is imperative to creating a space where all people can use the restroom they identify with. Learn more about what public accommodations protections exist in your area [here](#). Experiencing resistance? Try getting to the root cause of your host's concerns. Is it safety? Perception? Recognizing the source of hesitation will allow you to better break down why restroom access can be both a cause of anxiety for some and a statement of identity for others.

Listen and Respond

- Incorporate representatives from diverse communities throughout your planning process - especially young LGBTQ people of color, when possible. Construct these requests for input based not on ensuring you have a representative from every possible community across the LGBTQ spectrums, but rather, in a way that recognizes the diversity, differing experiences and strengths within LGBTQ communities. When provided, listen openly to experiences, suggestions and perspectives. If something is not clear, ask questions.⁶ What makes them comfortable? What can you do better?
- Be transparent. Confidentiality and support for LGBTQ young people can be vital. In rural communities where there may be very few events or organizations, it is imperative to create a space where LGBTQ people feel welcome. If you are providing sign-in sheets, make them optional and inform all young people of any permission slips or forms that need to be signed by an adult.

Reduce Barriers

- Many rural communities lack public transportation,⁷ creating a barrier to accessing events, services or programs. Budget for transportation costs, if necessary, to make sure all LGBTQ youth feel as safe as possible when attending and leaving your event.
- No public transportation nearby? Arrange for ride shares, shuttles, or central meeting places for people planning to attend the event.⁸ Events need to be as accessible as possible as LGBTQ young people in particular may travel significant distances to access programs they believe to be welcoming. Help create this opportunity.

⁵ Palmer, N. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Bartkiewicz, M. J., 2012.

⁶ Gay-Straight Alliance Network. (2009). *Planning Events*. Retrieved from <https://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/gsa-actions-events/planning-events>.

⁷ Cason, K. (2001). Poverty in Rural America. *The Hidden America: Social Problems in Rural America for the Twenty-First Century*, 27-41.

⁸ Gay-Straight Alliance Network, 2009.



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- Consider young people's age, access to transportation and comfort arriving at a location that may make them uneasy or potentially out them. Connect with building security, if applicable, beforehand to discuss LGBTQ-sensitive security procedures and stay up to date on [identity document laws and policies](#) if an ID is necessary to enter your building. Strive to hold events that do not require screenings in order to access the premises.

Set Strong Standards

- Do not take or post photos, or share online posts, without a young person's consent. You never know whom you may be outing in the process.
- At all events, make it known that discrimination will not be tolerated by attendees or staff, and explain the values guiding this. Provide space for attendees and facilitators to provide anonymous feedback when they experience discrimination.

Always Be Learning

- Learning LGBTQ inclusivity is not a box to be checked off, it is a lifelong process. Be on the lookout for [learning opportunities](#), and share best practices and [resources](#) with your colleagues, hosts and local community.

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