

TIPS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There is no universal standard for LGBTQ-related professional training for human service professionals. As part of the LGBTQ Access Project, we found that the most effective trainings are typically well-tailored to the learning needs of the organization's staff and tied to the organizations mission and specific scope of services. The following guidelines were developed for organizations working with survivors of violence interested in instituting or improving professional development standards related to increasing LGBTQ access to services.

Baseline training must be about more than definitions and respect

Introductory trainings on gender and sexuality too often focus on teaching glossary definitions and terms to familiarize providers with language used in LGBTQ communities. Learning a list of terms and categories is wholly insufficient to creating meaningful LGBTQ access to services. While language is important, it is crucial for service providers also establish a baseline of critical thinking that examines and interrogates systemic and institutional barriers that impact LGBTQ survivors, includes information about local laws and social conditions impacting LGBTQ survivors, and connections to local or regional LGBTQ organizations. Language used to describe LGBTQ people's identities is evolving; encouraging providers to reflect the language that survivors use for themselves is a great basic rule.

Integration vs. Stand Alone

In order to meaningfully shift the culture around LGBTQ access, community-based organizations need to integrate education on gender and sexuality into various training units, as well as continuing education strategies and/or professional development plans. One-time trainings are rarely sufficient to effect change. Gender and sexual are relevant to many areas of policy and practice and need to be integrate across all areas of training. For example, trainings for youth service providers on homelessness or mandatory reporting standards should include relevant considerations about the specific vulnerabilities for LGBTQ youth; trainings on crisis line decorum should ensure that phone workers do not assume a caller's gender based on their voice; trainings on domestic violence advocacy should address the barriers for people in LGBTQ

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relationships when seeking legal remedies. Standalone trainings that do not connect to other areas of training and intersecting forms of oppression (racism, ableism, etc.) can reinforce the marginalization of LGBTQ survivors. Staff trainings that specifically focus on LGBTQ issues should build critical consciousness about how, and in which ways, norms of gender conformity and heterosexuality shape society, and organizations policies, services, and programs.

Everyone has a gender and sexuality, not just LGBTQ people

The impacts of heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are often invisible to those not directly impacted by them on a daily basis. One way this manifests in our organizational trainings is when we focus only on LGBTQ communities when talking about gender, sexuality, and family formations. Training should critically examine dominant cultural assumptions and expectations that reinforce ideas of binary gender conformity, heterosexuality, and nuclear families as the norm. All people are impacted by these expectations, which work to limit our choices, self-determination, and connections to community. In order to best serve LGBTQ survivors, it is important that providers are able to think critically about their own experiences and identities.

***“Treating everyone the same”* does NOT result in equal treatment**

While treating all individuals with dignity and respect is important, a value of treating everyone “the same” can obscure the complex needs of LGBTQ survivors who routinely experience structurally differential treatment. Organizations can advance a model of training that centers the needs and experiences of the most marginalized LGBTQ survivors and considers what kinds of differences may be needed to promote equity. This perspective not only strengthens our services, but creates more effective and holistic support for all survivors.

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Discussions about gender & sexuality belong in the workplace

Gender and sexuality impact and intersect with our daily lives and lived experiences. Some people may feel that conversations about gender and sexuality are inappropriate or extraneous in the workplace. This attitude can reinforce heterosexism and transphobia by ignoring the ways in which non-LGBTQ people often freely discuss their gender (clothing, hair, etc.) and sexuality (e.g. information about one's spouse, wedding and baby showers, etc.) in the workplace. Creating spaces where discussions of all identities, relationships, and families are welcome in the workplace requires explicit and intentional strategies. Such efforts to promote positive discussion in the workplace can directly translate into improving staff skills in discuss these issues with clients and community members.

Connect and intersect gender and sexuality to racism, ableism, ageism, and other forms of oppression

Training should explore the complexities of gender, sexuality, race, class status, generational experience, disability, and other experiences that create dynamics of power and marginalization. An intersectional analysis of gender and sexuality is not only more accurate and relevant to the lived experiences of LGBTQ survivors, it also builds opportunities for more authentic and effective work environments, programs and services, and collaborative partnerships in community. Think strategically about how gender and sexuality can be better incorporated into your organization's existing equity or anti-oppression work plan, rather than viewed as a side project. Invest in building an organizational resource library with books and films by LGBTQ people of color, LGBTQ people with disabilities, LGBTQ young people and LGBTQ elders, etc.

Building Buy In

In a context where resources are increasingly scarce and met with greater demands on organizations to meet restrictive deliverables and outcomes, it can be challenging to build buy-in for organizational capacity-building and additional professional development. In these conditions, it is helpful to position

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educational work on gender and sexuality as central to the organizational mission and effective service provision. Leadership and staff should work together to assess current capacities and develop achievable work plans that increase opportunities for workplace conversations.

Plan for pushback

Even with the most intentional efforts to build buy-in, organizations, advocates, and trainers may still face varying levels of resistance to focusing on LGBTQ access. Trainers are encouraged to establish open lines of feedback with participants and create safe opportunities to air tensions or challenges at work. At the same time, organizational leaders should set the tone for what is expected. Individuals providing training on gender and sexuality are encouraged to get support in building facilitation skills, including strategies to create inclusive and open learning environments, responding to overt and covert oppressive language in training spaces, and debriefing and self-care.

Get Creative

Make learning opportunities about gender and sexuality both serious and fun! Think creatively about ways to integrate these conversations into the daily culture of your organization. Consider hosting film screening, bringing in guest speakers, creating an LGBTQ section of the news bulletin, and promote upcoming LGBTQ events happening in the community, where appropriate.

Be in the moment

LGBTQ culture, politics, and ideas are ever-evolving. It is important to stay connected to current conversations happening locally, regionally, and nationally. Subscribe to mailing lists, twitter feeds, and use social media and current events to spark conversations and ensure relevance in your educational programs by focusing on emerging issues and experiences in diverse LGBTQ communities.

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Be in conversation!

Work to increase access for LGBTQ people in community-based service organizations cannot be done in isolation. It is imperative that organizations build meaningful relationships and collaborations with LGBTQ leaders, organizations, groups, and people. Be honest about where your organization is at in terms of providing services and program. Identify what you need to learn and demonstrate that you value the leadership of LGBTQ people in your organization and in your communities.