HOW LGBT ADVOCATES CAN SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

An estimated 2.9 to 3.8 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people live in rural communities across the United States, and they are part of the fabric of rural American life. LGBT people in rural communities often choose to live there for many of the same reasons that other people do: for the strength of community and connection to family, for the pace of life, or simply to be part of the place where they were raised and call home.

However, the structural challenges facing all rural residents, such as fewer doctors or employers, can add to the challenges facing LGBT people in rural and urban areas alike, such as discrimination or mistreatment. By addressing the overall needs and challenges of rural areas, while also directly addressing LGBT-specific experiences in rural areas, meaningful and long-lasting change is possible in rural America, for both LGBT and non-LGBT residents.

ACTIONS LGBT ADVOCATES CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- **Work to improve rural communities' familiarity with LGBT people and issues.** Outreach and communication strategies and programs need to be tailored to rural communities' unique experiences, needs, and values, rather than replicating urban-based strategies.

  - Build rural-based chapters wherever possible and actively participate in the local community, including on non-LGBT-specific issues, as relationship-building and familiarity require time to cultivate.

  - Conduct regular outreach and community building with individuals and community service organizations in rural areas, to improve the connection between rural service organizations and LGBT-competent and affirming resources.

  - Build and strengthen relationships with other organizations and providers (LGBT-specific or otherwise) in rural areas, to facilitate opportunities for collaboration and mutual education.

- **Similarly, work to improve LGBT communities' familiarity with rural people and issues.**

  - Intentionally present images of LGBT people in rural settings in advocacy materials, and ensure the use of diverse images of LGBT people in rural settings, such as Black transgender women, Latinx gender non-conforming people, LGBT people with disabilities, and more. Positive and diverse representation helps expand the image of who lives in and who belongs in rural areas—and in the LGBT community itself.

  - Ensure representation of people living in rural areas in LGBT organizational leadership positions, staff, boards, and so on.

- **Provide direct, hands-on assistance whenever possible, such as legal workshops or clinics.** These efforts can help LGBT people in rural areas navigate existing inequalities under the law, redress illegal discrimination when it happens, and be equipped with the tools or information they may need to advocate for themselves in the future.

- **Conduct both research and public education about the unique needs and experiences of rural LGBT people.** Update organizational offerings and efforts to be responsive to those needs.

- **Review events and programming to make it easier for rural residents to attend or participate** (such as phone-call town halls, live-streaming events, or other ways of virtual participation), as well as hosting events in rural areas as funding allows.

- **Support the development of tools and resources to educate service providers about LGBT people and their needs, including the unique needs of those in rural areas.** This can include supporting the development and delivery of model policies, best practices, and provider trainings to ensure that local providers are willing and able to support LGBT people, and that LGBT people feel welcome when working with rural service providers and organizations.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NEW REPORT

WHERE WE CALL HOME: LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL AMERICA

www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt

View your state's LGBT policy profile at **www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps**

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