

Stonewall

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is produced by Stonewall, a UK-based charity that stands for the freedom, equity and potential of all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace (LGBTQ+) people.

At Stonewall, we imagine a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere can live our lives to the full.

Founded in London in 1989, we now work in each nation of the UK and have established partnerships across the globe. Over the last three decades, we have created transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the UK, helping win equal rights around marriage, having children and inclusive education.

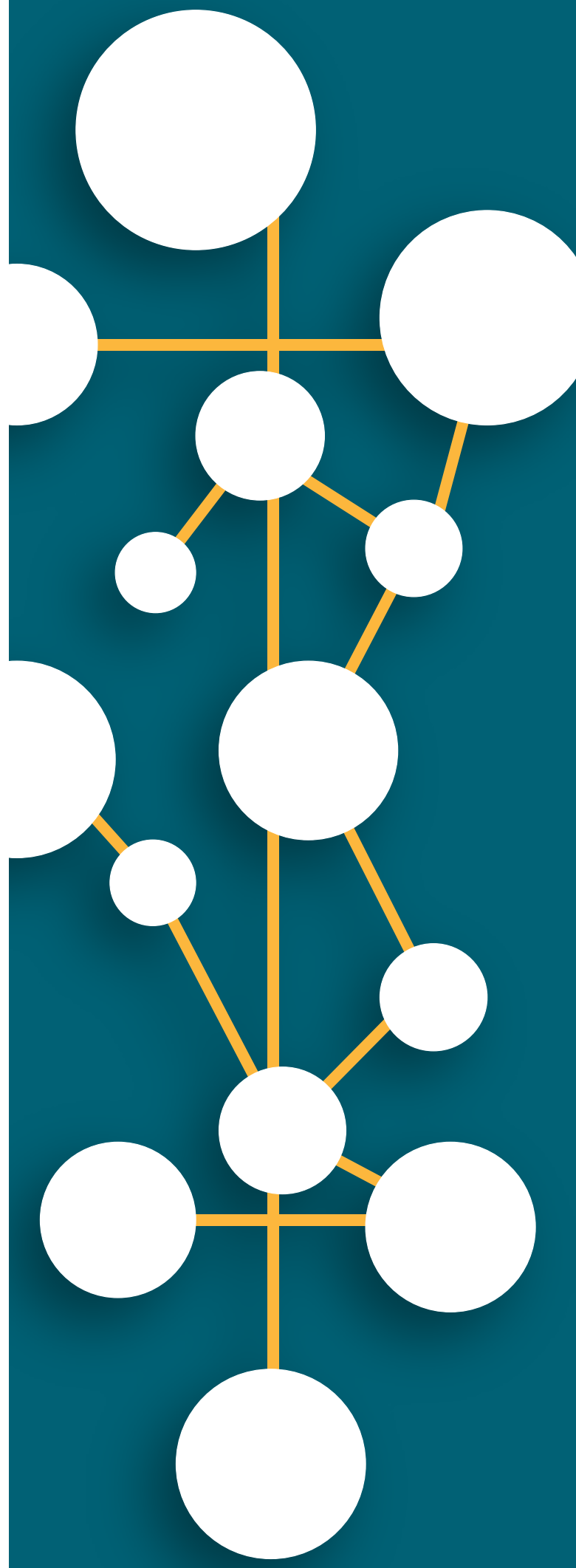
Our campaigns drive positive change for our communities, and our sustained change and empowerment programmes ensure that LGBTQ+ people can thrive throughout our lives. We make sure that the world hears and learns from our communities, and our work is grounded in evidence and expertise.

To find out more about our work, visit us at www.stonewall.org.uk

Registered Charity No 1101255 (England and Wales) and SC039681 (Scotland)

Stonewall is proud to provide information, support and guidance on LGBTQ+ inclusion; working towards a world where we're all free to be. This does not constitute legal advice, and is not intended to be a substitute for legal counsel on any subject matter.

Stonewall BUILDING A
SUPPORTIVE
LGBTQ+
NETWORK
GROUP



Stonewall

Stonewall, 192 St John Street, London EC1V 4JY

info@stonewall.org.uk

www.stonewall.org.uk

Registered Charity number 1101255

PUBLISHED BY STONEWALL, 2025

BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE LGBTQ+ NETWORK GROUP

CONTENTS

About this resource **p4**

Setting the foundations **p5**

Connecting your members **p8**

Enabling access to support **p10**

Enabling professional
development **p12**

Thank you **p14**

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

LGBTQ+ network groups play a range of roles in organisations. One of their most crucial is to support LGBTQ+ employees across the organisation to thrive.

This resource shares ways that your network group can provide peer support to enable your members to thrive at work. The guidance shared is intended for a UK audience but may be adapted, in line with local laws, to suit organisational needs in other geographies

In this resource we'll explore three key ways we see excellent network groups providing support:

1. **Connecting your members**
2. **Enabling access to support**
3. **Enabling professional development**

We'll also look at some of the key foundations for a supportive network group, including setting boundaries, maintaining confidentiality and ensuring diversity. We'll then explore the three key areas outlined above to share ideas and case studies to help your network group.

Who is it for?

The content of this resource is designed to support those leading network groups. It will also be of use if you are looking to set up a network group. Those working in HR and EDI will find content that helps you to support your LGBTQ+ network group.

This resource is part of a two-part series. The second part of the series is our '[Using your influence as a Network Group](#)' resource.

How was it developed?

Stonewall works with hundreds of employers and the guidance we share is a blend of good practice generated by our workplace inclusion experts and what we see working well in the organisations we work with. However, every organisation is unique, some of what we share here will translate well into your workplace, other ideas might not. We invite you to take what feels useful from this resource and tailor it to your needs.

SETTING THE FOUNDATIONS

To learn more about establishing an LGBTQ+ network group you can consult our [introductory guide](#).

In order to provide effective support to members, networks need to have strong foundations. As outlined in the guide linked above, this could include a terms of reference, committee structure, senior sponsor and a strategy.

To provide the kind of support we'll talk about in this resource it will help to have thought about three key things; setting boundaries, maintaining confidentiality and ensuring that your network is representative of the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community. To help you ensure you've got strong foundations in place we'll introduce each of these topics here and provide some prompts to help you embed good practice.

Setting boundaries

Being clear about the support that you offer as a network and where to go for other kinds of support ensures your members can feel confident coming to you when they need it. Without this in place, network groups can sometimes fall into acting as informal HR teams or mental health support which, without proper safeguards in place can put everyone in a challenging position.

Ways that you can ensure you strike the right balance could include:

Clearly setting out your role in your terms of reference.

Setting out a working agreement with your HR or EDI team that outlines roles and responsibilities.

Writing robust job descriptions for network group committee members that reflect your ways of working.

Providing a signposting resource to network group members that outlines where they can access LGBTQ+ inclusive or LGBTQ+ specific mental health support (you might want to include organisations like Spectra, Rainbow Mind, Mind Out or Switchboard in this document).

Collaborating with your union if you have a recognition agreement in place in your organisation to ensure your members understand the support they can provide.

Ensuring that messaging about the support you do and do not offer forms part of information given to new staff at induction, is shared with new members and is visible on the platform you use to communicate as a network.

Ensuring confidentiality

When we're working specifically with the LGBTQ+ community it's important to remember that being open about our identities isn't always safe or possible. It's crucial that your network is providing support mechanisms that enable people to receive support without having to share things about themselves with others at work. When talking about providing support, members knowing that their confidentiality will be respected can be an important factor in whether someone chooses to seek help.

We suggest that the strongest starting point is to ensure that there are different options open to your members, in order to support people in different situations. Some ideas that we've seen work well include:

Having a confidentiality policy for the network group that all members sign up to.

Opening your network up to non-LGBTQ+ allies, which serves the dual purpose of being a great way to get them involved but also means that people don't have to share their LGBTQ+ identity to be a part of the network.

Providing one or more trusted points of contact within the committee that people can bring challenges to, this could be a wellbeing officer, mental health first aider or workplace support lead.

Ensuring that your network group resources are available to the whole organisation not just to members.

Actively share and promote your approach to confidentiality to reassure people that you understand and respect the importance of respecting people's privacy.

Be clear about the limitations of confidentiality up front and in line with your workplace policies there might be times when you do have to share what's been said.

Building an inclusive and representative network group

Ensuring that your network reflects and represents the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community is crucial in making sure that all LGBTQ+ people in your organisation are able to seek and access support. People experiencing multiple forms of marginalisation in the workplace can often find it harder to access appropriate support so building inclusion into your network is one, among many, reasons why this is so important.

Every network is different but some effective practices we've seen include:

Committee member positions specifically to support groups of people who you've noticed are underrepresented in your network or who have specific needs; this could include a bi rep, trans rep or a rep for LGBTQ+ People of Colour. If you don't have members who share these identities that wish to take on the roles you could consider asking allies as a way to encourage a more diverse membership and committee in future.

Formalised collaboration between network groups means you'll be better at representing a range of experiences and ensures people feel less pressure to 'choose' between networks that represent them. Ways of doing this could include a shared events calendar, co-running events, holding quarterly meetings between chairs or an annual network group conference.

Regularly surveying your members and if possible breaking down responses by identity to understand if there are different experiences within your membership. When doing this it's important to ensure that your samples aren't too small to retain anonymity.

Case Study: Linklaters

The Linklaters With Pride Network has worked hard to ensure it is inclusive to all members of the LGBTQIA+ community since it was first launched over ten years ago.

Recognising the challenge that its' members are often navigating multiple identities, such as race and religion, as well as different gender identities and sexual identities, in recent years the network has prioritised ensuring that members from marginalised groups feel included. They have done this through raising awareness of the issues through educational events and panel discussions, sharing the stories of network members from those groups and hosting 'safe space' networking events for members from those marginalised groups.

The network has also worked to effectively ensure peer support, through a structured mentoring programme that guides mentees on managing their LGBTQIA+ life both inside and outside of work, with regular mentorship skill training sessions. The steering committee has also appointed "Reps" for those marginalised groups, ensuring that people have a point of contact for support and to share any feedback with.

SECTION ONE:

CONNECTING YOUR MEMBERS

One of the most important roles of networks is to help people connect with other LGBTQ+ people in your organisation. This can help people feel a sense of community, share experiences and challenges and expand their network.

Building a community within your network can be challenging, especially if you have a dispersed workforce, for example those in retail stores or without regular access to IT, remote workers, or if you operate across multiple sites or countries. The approach you take needs to be rooted in the way that your organisation works. We often kindly challenge organisations to sense check their ways of working and ensure that they work for all staff, especially those working outside of office-based roles. In this section we'll explore three ways we've seen network groups effectively build community; creating chapters, engaging dispersed workforces and building connections.

Chapters

In larger organisations organising your network into chapters might help to ensure that everyone is provided with opportunities to connect. Sometimes chapters are organised geographically by region or by working location. Chapters remain part of the overarching network but are empowered to work in ways that are well suited to their specific context.

Below are some practical tips for organising chapters:

Recruit and support chapter leads with training and clear job descriptions.

Provide guidance on how to set up a new chapter of the network that includes the flexibility needed to respond to local circumstances.

Find ways to bring chapter leads together regularly to share learnings with one another.

Offer opportunities for chapters to begin organically if a group of staff would like to set one up themselves and have a process in place to support them to do so.

Celebrate the work of different chapters with the whole organisation.

Within your terms of reference clearly define the role of chapters and how accountability is shared between the central network and different chapters.

Case Study: National Trust

We have established country/regional leads who organise local meetings, creating a more personalised experience and encouraging local engagement.

We regularly organise virtual events accessible to staff and volunteers across locations, ensuring all members have opportunities to participate in network activities.

LGBTQ+ topics and information about the network are part of the induction for new staff and volunteers, promoting visibility from the beginning of the employee/volunteer journey.

Dispersed workforces

The many different roles that people do across organisations often mean vastly different ways of working this can present challenges when networks try to connect staff with one another.

We've worked with organisations who've taken a range of steps to build connections across dispersed workforces. Some of the things we've seen work include:

Deciding to be an 'online first' network where the network is primarily organised online to bridge a gap between those working remotely and in person.

Record your events where possible and appropriate in order to allow remote and shift workers to access them at more convenient times.

Ensuring that there are physical copies of information as well as digital versions to reach those who do not work computer-based jobs.

Working with senior sponsors to ensure that everyone is able to take time out of their working day for network group events and asking them to role model this behaviour.

Including messaging about the network group in existing regular communications can increase your reach whether this is town hall events, regular emails or bulletins as well as ensuring that network groups are introduced to all staff during inductions.

Building connections

Network groups should offer staff spaces to come together, get to know one another better and find a community in the workplace.

Building these connections can take some intentional work from a network group and below we've gathered some inspiration on how some of the organisations we work with have got people talking.

Centre joy in what you do – finding fun and interesting ways to come together as a network group that aren't always work related but chances to do something you enjoy or learn something new together.

Be intentional about what the spaces you create are for and ensure there are a blend of formal network group meetings, educational spaces and spaces for people to connect and get to know one another.

Profile network group members doing great things in your newsletter to help people connect around different topics.

Empower network group members to set up informal social spaces themselves whether that's a monthly coffee at one particular location or an online co-working session together .

Consider creating safe online or physical spaces for members of your network with specific identities, we've seen organisations effectively establish closed communications channels specifically for their bi and trans staff.

SECTION TWO:

ENABLING ACCESS TO SUPPORT

While network groups aren't responsible for HR related issues that LGBTQ+ people face at work, they are often a vital source of support for staff navigating using your HR systems. This could include experiencing bullying and harassment, using transitioning at work policies or parental leave policies or challenging exclusionary practices.

As discussed in section one, it's crucial that your role as a network in any of these processes is clearly defined and widely understood. With that understanding in place having the support of the network group can make a transformational difference to staff. In this section we'll explore the importance of inclusive policies and ways to aid your members navigate the support available.

The importance of inclusive policies

Inclusive policies are the bedrock of an inclusive organisation. They ensure that all employees are treated fairly and respectfully.

In our other resources you can find a more in depth look at how to ensure your policies are inclusive and, if you're a member of our [Diversity Champions Programme](#), you can get support to review your policies.

Network groups can have a strong influence over inclusive policies, and your chair or committee could be involved in the regular review process for policies that directly affect LGBTQ+ people. This might include bullying and harassment policies, family formation policies and trans inclusion policies. If you're able to codify your network group's role in policy reviews through your terms of reference or working agreement it will help to formalise this process and ensure you are supported to carry out the task.

It's important that policies are easily accessible and widely understood by those who need them. Network groups can play a key role in helping their members understand the policies that they might need to use.

This could include:

Hosting a drop in Q&A with a member of your HR team.

Spotlighting recently reviewed policies in a newsletter.

Running information sessions for members about key policies.

Sharing stories (where appropriate) of members who have used inclusive policies.

Navigating the support available

We often use HR support functions at work when there are big things happening in our lives. When they are explicitly inclusive and easy to understand that can go a long way in building trust and confidence. However, accessing that support can still be a daunting task.

Network groups can offer assistance to their members as they navigate support systems in a range of informal ways.

This could include:

Consensually and informally connecting people who have navigated similar systems and policies e.g. family formation or transitioning at work.

Offer accompaniment from another network group member in agreement with HR when navigating meetings such as during bullying and harassment processes or meetings around transition.

Run informal meet ups for people with similar experiences in your network group such as those starting a family.

Work with HR to ensure that external providers e.g. employee assistance programmes, have inclusive policies, practices and training.

Case Study: National Trust

We have a clear central process for escalating issues, including those related to LGBTQ+ matters.

The Co-Chairs of the LGBTQ+ Network, alongside the Co-Chairs of other Networks, are invited to participate in Inclusion Council meetings held three times a year. These meetings provide a platform to raise concerns from Network members directly with the Trust's Executive team for resolution.

SECTION THREE:

ENABLING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For your LGBTQ+ staff, being part of a network can offer development opportunities that have a positive impact on their career. For the organisation, working with the network can support you to retain and develop LGBTQ+ talent.

We see network groups creating development opportunities through their own work, increasing participation from their members in development opportunities offered by the organisation and working in partnership with your learning and development teams to provide development opportunities specifically designed for LGBTQ+ staff.

Career development through network group activities

Networks deliver a wide range of work from consultations on policy and strategy to designing and running events. They present the perfect opportunity for staff to get involved with something outside of their day to day and to learn new skills. This could include learning about event management, policy development, briefing senior staff or leading a network.

As a network you could consider how you set up your ways of working to enable staff to try new things and contribute to their professional development.

This could include:

Have a shadowing, mentoring or development pathway in place for people who are interested in network group committee positions.

Provide formal training on running a network to your committee and leadership team to help them with their roles but also to develop their skills. This could include training around budgeting, project management or event planning. [Stonewall can support with this so please do reach out to the team.](#)

Make it clear that people can volunteer for many things across the network and you don't need experience to get involved.

Create small teams around your events so that more experienced people can guide less experienced network members in developing event planning skills.

Offer shadowing opportunities when members of your committee are doing strategic work such as reviewing policies or meeting with senior leaders.

Encourage the organisation to recognise network-related development goals within your performance management framework.

Collaborating on professional development

Network groups can play a vital role in promoting training to their members. This can be particularly impactful for leadership development opportunities where LGBTQ+ staff might be less likely to put themselves forward. Hearing communications from the network that encourage LGBTQ+ staff to apply for development programmes can help people feel like this programme is appropriate for them and will be inclusive of their identity. You could regularly share development opportunities both inside and outside the organisation as a feature in your newsletter or other communication to your members. In addition to this you might want to profile LGBTQ+ people who have been part of leadership development programmes in your organisation in order to demonstrate their impact.

LGBTQ+ specific staff development

Partnerships between learning and development teams and LGBTQ+ network groups can help to deliver specific training to your network group. You might consider running a learning needs assessment with your members to better understand if there are pieces of training that would be valuable to them, or you could include this question in a regular member survey.

A range of training could be beneficial for LGBTQ+ people in the workplace:

If members are regularly asked to talk about their experiences, offering public speaking training can help with confidence and ensure they are offered development in return for this work.

LGBTQ+ inclusion or allyship training will support your members to be advocates for inclusion measures that support the whole LGBTQ+ community.

Mental health first aid training might be of benefit to some of your network group members, so they are able to support others in the workplace.

LGBTQ+ people often face significant barriers from entering leadership positions. At Stonewall we've partnered with a range of organisations to deliver tailored LGBTQ+ leadership development programmes that explore how our identity shapes our approach to leadership and how we can lead authentically. If you'd like to explore how we could partner with you to support leadership development in your workplace please do reach out to the team on prospect@stonewall.org.uk.

THANK YOU

Thank you for reading this guide, we hope some of what is shared will be useful to your network group. If we can offer any further information or assistance please do reach out to us at prospect@stonewall.org.uk.

You might also be interested in our other resources for LGBTQ+ network groups:

- [Setting up your LGBTQ+ network group](#)
- [Using your influence as a network group](#)
- [Finding your collective voice](#)
- [Maximising your LGBTQ+ network group's impact](#)
- [Securing senior buy in](#)

Some of these resources are only available to our Diversity Champion Programme members, find out more about [joining the programme here](#).